United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 11, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Mr. Todd Blanche
Acting Attorney General
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington D.C. 20530

Dear Secretary Hegseth and Acting Attorney General Blanche,

We are writing to express concern that ammunition produced by the Lake City Army Ammunition Plant (Lake City plant), a government-owned, contractor-operated facility, is regularly used to perpetrate mass shootings across the United States and facilitate cartel violence in Mexico.[1] We are alarmed that an Army-owned, taxpayer-funded facility lacks the requisite systems and procedures to prevent its military-grade products from falling into the hands of criminals at home and abroad.

As you know, the Lake City Army Ammunition Plant is a small-caliber ammunition manufacturing plant owned by the U.S. Army. This 400-building facility in Independence, Missouri, has been operated by Olin Winchester, LLC, since 2020 and currently manufactures .223 Remington and 5.56mm NATO rounds, frequently used by AR-15 owners, and .50 caliber rounds, which are powerful enough to immobilize vehicles.[2] Since 2009, the U.S. Army Joint Munitions Command has required the facility's contractor to maintain production capacity at around 1.6 billion rounds per year to support a production surge if needed. According to reports of the current contract, this requirement is satisfied when the equipment is either stored or "being operated for this contract or [for] approved commercial and 3rd party/facility use production"—allowing the contractor to sell ammunition produced at the government-owned facility to

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[1] Ben Dooley & Emily Rhyne, *Army Ammunition Plant Is Tied to Mass Shootings Across the U.S.*, N.Y. Times (Nov. 11, 2023), https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/11/us/army-ammunition-factory-shootings.html; Ben Dooley, Isabella Cota & Emiliano Rodríguez Mega, *Mexican Cartels Overwhelm Police With Ammunition Made for the U.S. Military*, N.Y. Times (Feb. 7, 2026), https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/07/us/lake-city-army-ammunition-plant-missouri-mexico.html.

[2] Greg Lickenbrock, *How an Army Ammo Plant Armed Mass Shooters*, The Smoking Gun (Nov. 16, 2023), https://smokinggun.org/how-an-army-ammo-plant-armed-mass-shooters/.

distributors, resellers, and retail stores.[3] Despite being a government-owned facility, the Army was reportedly only responsible for the purchase of less than half of the 1 billion military-ready rounds produced in 2021.[4]

We support the need to maintain production capacity for increased use of ammunition by the military. However, it is incumbent upon the government to ensure that rounds manufactured at its facilities and not employed for the primary purposes of the U.S. military's use are not allowed to fall into the hands of those who would use them against Americans and other victims. We are concerned that the ongoing lack of accountability, oversight, and transparency over commercial sales of ammunition manufactured at this taxpayer-funded facility is directly enabling assailants and transnational gangs to use these weapons to assail our communities.

Law enforcement officials have identified bullet casings originating from the Lake City plant at the sites of some of the worst mass shootings in our country's history, from San Bernardino to Aurora to Las Vegas to Buffalo to Uvalde.[5] Eighty-four casings stamped with the plant's "LC" marking were recovered at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School after the Parkland shooting.[6] Lake City plant rounds were also used in a gang-related shooting at a Washington State apartment complex and to murder two police officers and a deputy sheriff in Louisiana.[7] In fact, the government-owned plant's product is so notorious that the Buffalo shooter described the Lake City plant's M855 5.56mm NATO rounds as "the best barrier penetration ammo I can get."[8]

A recent investigation found that nearly 30 percent of the almost 80,000 5.56mm and .223 caliber spent cartridge casings recovered by police between 2017 and 2024 from crime scenes bore the Lake City plant's distinctive markings, according to data from the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN).[9] This greatly surpasses the recovered casings from other manufacturers, and since the NIBIN system is only used by 67 percent of law enforcement agencies, it is safe to assume that the use of Lake City plant rounds in crimes across the country might be even more widespread.[10]

Ammunition made at the government-owned Lake City plant is also regularly used by powerful and dangerous Mexican cartels who smuggle in high-powered weapons and rounds from the

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[3] Dooley & Rhyne, *supra* note 1.
[4] *Id.*
[5] Lickenbrock, *supra* note 2.
[6] Dooley & Rhyne, *supra* note 1.
[7] *Id.*
[8] Lickenbrock, *supra* note 2.
[9] Ben Dooley, *AR-15 Ammunition at a Crime Scene? Good Odds This Army Plant Made It*, N.Y. Times (Nov. 6, 2025), https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/06/us/military-ammunition-crime-lake-city.html.
[10] *Id.*

United States in what is known as the "Iron River."[11] These transnational gangs pay U.S. citizens and legal residents to purchase Lake City-made .50 caliber rounds off the retail market, including powerful incendiary armor-piercing rounds that are currently available online.[12] Between 2019 and 2024, U.S. Customs and Border Patrol seized nearly 21,400 .50 caliber rounds, and the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives recovered about 12,000 rounds of Lake City-made .50 caliber ammunition in the states bordering Mexico.[13] Reports suggest that far too often these rounds are then used in a variety of violent acts to protect drug trafficking operations and kill Mexican law enforcement.[14] In fact, almost half of the .50 caliber cartridges seized by Mexican authorities from cartels have been linked to the Lake City plant.[15]

The government's failure to establish processes and procedures to ensure that ammunition produced at the Lake City plant is not smuggled across the border is effectively helping arm transnational gangs abroad. This is especially relevant as U.S. threats to deploy military personnel to Mexico have encouraged the cartels to increase their demand for military-grade firepower.[16] We firmly believe that the DOJ and DOD must immediately implement common-sense transparency and oversight measures, such as flagging retailers who make suspect sales of Lake City plant ammunition, to ensure that taxpayer dollars do not continue to enable mass shootings, subsidize deadly drug trafficking, and fuel cartel violence.

Please provide detailed responses to each of the questions below no later than June 25, 2026:

1. What strategic initiative is fulfilled through the commercial sale of ammunition manufactured at the Lake City Army Ammunition Plant to retailers, distributors, and resellers?
    a) Did any previous contracts with Lake City Army Ammunition Plant operators allow for the commercial sale of ammunition produced at the facility?
2. How much profit did the plant produce for the federal government in fiscal years 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025?
    a) For each year, please indicate what percentage of the profit was attributable to commercial sales.
3. Has DOD conducted an assessment in the past 5 years to determine ammunition production needs for the Lake City facility?

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[11] Dooley, Cota & Rodríguez Mega, *supra* note 1.
[12] *50 BMG M8 Armor-Piercing Incendiary 647gr*, Hickory Flat Boars, https://hickoryflatboars.com/products/50-bmg-m8-armor-piercing-incendiary-647gr.
[13] Dooley, Cota & Rodríguez Mega, *supra* note 1.
[14] *Id*.
[15] Emiliano Rodríguez Mega, *Cartel's Seized Ammunition Is Traced to U.S. Army Plant, Mexico Says*, N.Y. Times (Feb. 10, 2026), https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/10/world/americas/mexico-cartel-ammunition-us-army.html.
[16] Paulina Villegas, *Inside the Supply Line Delivering American Guns to Mexican Cartels*, N.Y. Times (Mar. 17, 2026), https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/17/world/americas/mexico-us-guns-trafficking-cartels.html.

4. Since 2020, in how many domestic criminal shootings was ammunition used that was produced at the Lake City Army Ammunition Plant?
5. Since 2020, in how many international criminal shootings was ammunition used that was produced at the Lake City Army Ammunition Plant?
6. Has DOD conducted a review of its contract with Olin Winchester following Congressional inquiry and media reports in recent years?
7. What specific processes have DOJ and DOD implemented to analyze how ammunition produced at a government-owned facility falls into the hands of international drug cartels?
    a) What procedures do DOJ and DOD plan to implement to prevent the U.S. government from inadvertently arming international drug cartels?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Alex Padilla
United States Senator

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

Peter Welch
United States Senator