

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 7, 2026

The Honorable Todd Blanche
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Blanche,

We urge the Department of Justice to immediately rescind its opinion illegally declaring that a 1968 law prohibiting the sale of handguns to 18-to-20-year-olds by federally licensed firearms dealers “may not be enforced.”

Since the passage of the Gun Control Act of 1968 some 58 years ago, the Department of Justice (DOJ) has faithfully enforced it according to clear congressional intent and defended its constitutionality. The Supreme Court has never questioned, much less invalidated, this statute. Its policy rationale—that 18-to-20-year-olds lack the cognitive judgment required to safely own and handle handguns has only grown more compelling with advancements in our understanding of brain development over the last six decades and the record of gun violence already associated with that age group.

The Gun Control Act of 1968 (GCA) passed the House of Representatives and the Senate with bipartisan support, and was signed into law by President Johnson in response to the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Robert F. Kennedy, and others, and to address a startling increase in gun crimes. For almost six decades, the GCA as a whole has saved countless lives by helping keep firearms out of the hands of high-risk groups, including not only Americans in the 18-to-20-year-old cohort but people who pose a danger to themselves or others.

DOJ’s sudden epiphany that this essential law, which has been enforced by Democratic and Republican Attorneys General continuously for more than a half-century, is unconstitutional would override the judgment of the last 29 Congresses, which have staunchly stood by the law. Your personal reinterpretation would now allow 18-to-20-year-olds to purchase easily concealable handguns, a kind disproportionately used in violent crimes.

We already have a problem with young men in the 18-20 year range obtaining a firearm from family, friends or the criminal underground and using it to conduct a mass shooting. Millions of Americans remember when a 20-year-old gunman in Newtown, Connecticut killed 27 people, overwhelmingly children, in the deadliest elementary school massacre in American history. According to a study published in the American Journal of Public Health, one in eight mass

shooters was between 18 and 20 years old.¹ Indeed, 18-to-20-year-olds have already been shown to be responsible for a disproportionate share of school shootings.² In fact, they comprise just 4 percent of the US population, but account for 17 percent of known gun homicide offenders generally.³

Teens and young adults are also already at higher risk for firearm suicide. Limiting access to firearms has been a proven and effective way of lowering rates of firearm suicide. One study demonstrated that when states restricted handgun sales to individuals under the age of 21, the firearm suicide rate declined 12 percent among 18-to-20-year-olds.⁴

Expanding access to concealable firearms like handguns creates a significant public safety risk as the majority of gun crimes involve handguns. FBI crime statistics from 2020 to 2024 show that 92 percent of firearms identified in murders were handguns, 6 percent were rifles, and 2 percent were shotguns. The lack of legal access to handguns by people under the age of 21 explains why crime guns traced to 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds remain relatively low compared to the next age cohort of 21-, 22-, and 23-year-olds. The rate at which firearms recovered in crimes are traced back to young purchasers jumps 10-fold at age 21 before peaking at age 22.⁵ This sharp increase tracks with the legal minimum age to purchase handguns and would therefore begin rising earlier after DOJ's baffling new refusal to enforce the 1968 law.

Young adults engage in crime at a higher rate than the rest of the adult population and lowering the age to purchase a handgun would make an even larger percentage of youths vulnerable to coercion or cooption by traffickers. According to the ATF, "The most frequent age of a purchaser of a crime gun was 22 years old, with purchasers between 21 and 25 years old accounting for almost as many traced crime guns as all purchasers ages 45 and older." One reason most crime guns are purchased by people in this age group is because traffickers frequently use, and often force younger individuals who don't have criminal backgrounds to straw-purchase their weapons for them.

DOJ's reckless U-turn interpretation of the 1968 law is made exceptionally more dangerous when combined with ATF's proposed rule that would allow Federal Firearms Licensees (FFLs) to engage in more "non-over-the-counter" gun sales than ever before. In other words, with this new opinion and if ATF's rule is finalized as proposed, FFLs will be able to sell handguns to purchasers between the ages of 18 and 20 without them ever setting foot in a gun store and then deliver those guns directly to their door. This would eliminate critical opportunities for responsible FFLs to observe suspicious behavior that may indicate criminal intent and to exercise their discretion to decline such sales. This would be inconsistent with congressional intent and unnecessarily endanger public safety.

¹ Joshua D. Brown and Amie J. Goodin, "Mass Casualty Shooting Venues, Types of Firearms, and Age of Perpetrators in the United States, 1982–2018," *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 10 (2018): 1385–1387.

² Paul M. Reeping et al., "State Firearm Laws, Gun Ownership, and K-12 School Shootings: Implications for School Safety," *Journal of School Violence* 21, no. 2 (2022): 132–146.

³ Eighteen to 20 year olds commit 18% of gun homicides, despite comprising just four percent of the US population. Giffords Law Center analysis of FBI Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR) data, 2016–2020.

⁴ Emma E. Fridel et al., "Examining the Impact of Minimum Handgun Purchase Age and Background Check Legislation on Young Adult Suicide in the United States, 1991–2020." *American Journal of Public Health* 0 (2024).

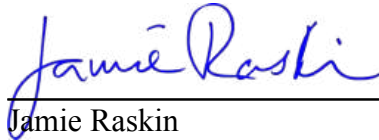
⁵ <https://www.atf.gov/media/15426/download>

The sensible restriction on FFLs from selling handguns to 18-to-20-year-olds is constitutional and is helping save lives every day. Your duty is to enforce the law as Congress writes it, not to make up new laws you prefer and substitute them for the public will as expressed through Congress. We urge you to immediately rescind your unlawful and dangerous opinion.

Sincerely,



Mike Thompson
Member of Congress



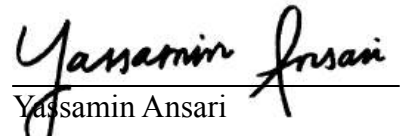
Jamie Raskin
Ranking Member
House Committee on the
Judiciary



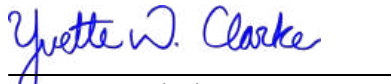
Lucy McBath
Member of Congress



Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress



Yassamin Ansari
Member of Congress



Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



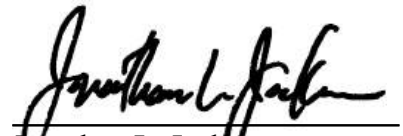
Wesley Bell
Member of Congress



Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress



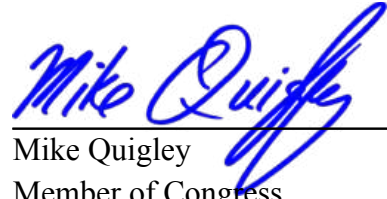
Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress



Jonathan L. Jackson
Member of Congress



Shontel M. Brown
Member of Congress



Mike Quigley
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Jasmine Crockett
Member of Congress



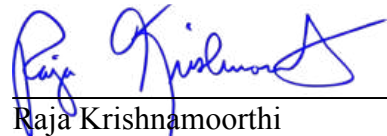
Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



Judy Chu
Member of Congress



Greg Stanton
Member of Congress



Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



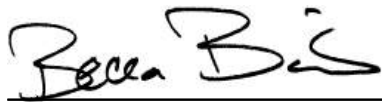
Ed Case
Member of Congress



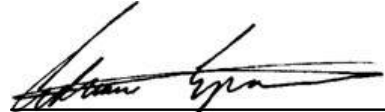
Dave Min
Member of Congress



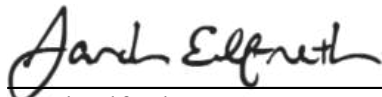
Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress



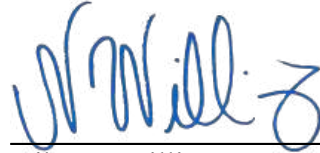
Becca Balint
Member of Congress



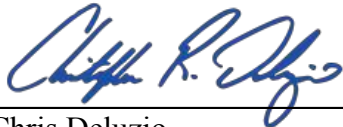
Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



Sarah Elfreth
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Nikema Williams
Member of Congress



Chris Deluzio
Member of Congress



Haley M. Stevens
Member of Congress



Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress



Dina Titus
Member of Congress



Glenn F. Ivey
Member of Congress



Dan Goldman
Member of Congress



Ritchie Torres
Member of Congress



Sharice L. Davids
Member of Congress



Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress



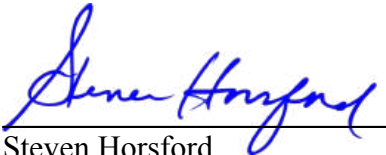
Eugene Simon Vindman
Member of Congress



Brad Sherman
Member of Congress



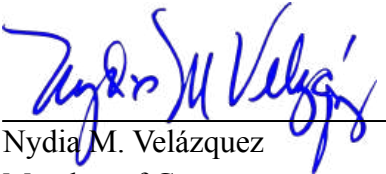
Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



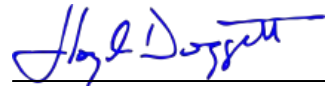
Steven Horsford
Member of Congress



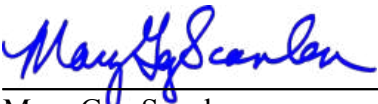
Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



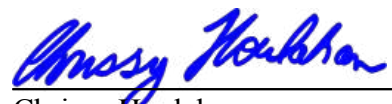
Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



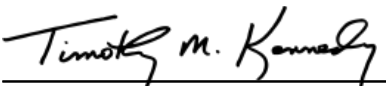
Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress



Mary Gay Scanlon
Member of Congress



Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress



Timothy M. Kennedy
Member of Congress



Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress



John Garamendi
Member of Congress



Brittany Pettersen
Member of Congress



Gwen S. Moore
Member of Congress



Lateefah Simon
Member of Congress



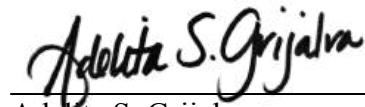
Shri Thanedar
Member of Congress



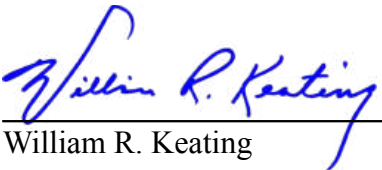
Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress



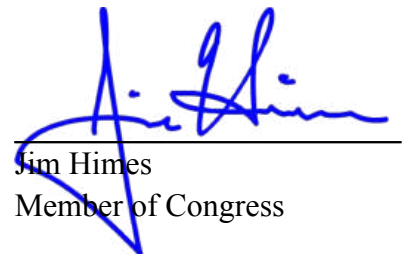
Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



Adenita S. Grijalva
Member of Congress



William R. Keating
Member of Congress



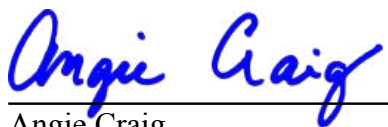
Jim Himes
Member of Congress



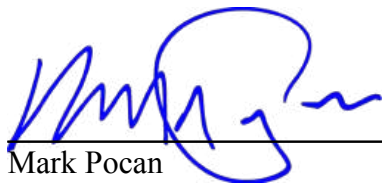
Doris Matsui
Member of Congress



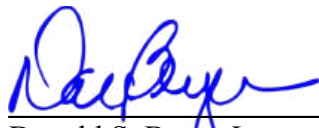
J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress



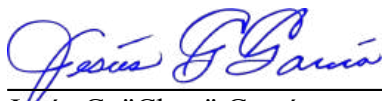
Angie Craig
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Mark Pocan
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Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



Valerie P. Foushee
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Bonnie Watson Coleman
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Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



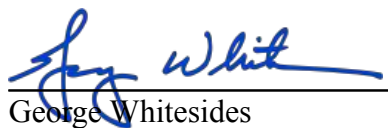
Jim Tokuda
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Gilbert Ray Cisneros, Jr.
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Jahana Hayes
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George Whitesides
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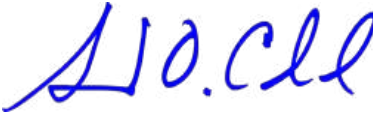
Maxwell Alejandro Frost
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Maxine Dexter, M.D.
Member of Congress



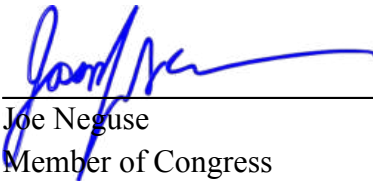
Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress



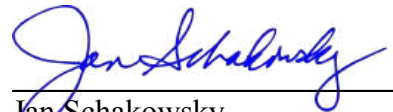
Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress



Bradley Scott Schneider
Member of Congress



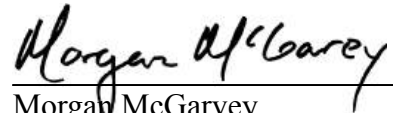
Joe Neguse
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Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Diana DeGette
Member of Congress



Morgan McGarvey
Member of Congress



Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress



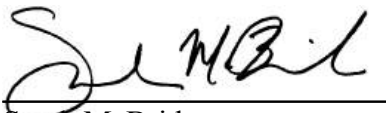
Patrick Ryan
Member of Congress



Delia C. Ramirez
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Ro Khanna
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Sarah McBride
Member of Congress



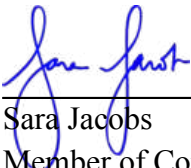
Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



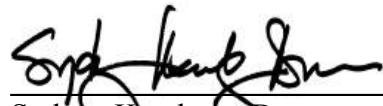
Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress



Adam Smith
Member of Congress



Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress



Sydney Kamlager-Dove
Member of Congress



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



Nancy Pelosi
Member of Congress



Andrea Salinas
Member of Congress



Bill Foster
Member of Congress



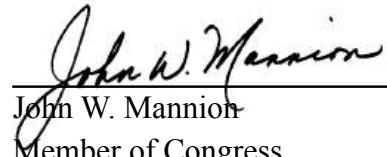
Deborah K. Ross
Member of Congress



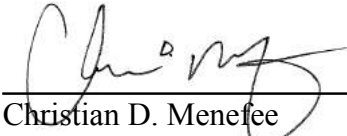
John B. Larson
Member of Congress



Joyce Beatty
Member of Congress
(OH-03)



John W. Mannion
Member of Congress



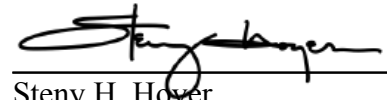
Christian D. Menefee
Member of Congress



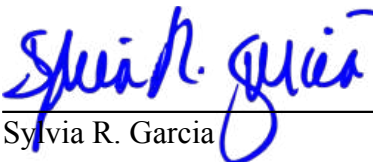
Josh Gottheimer
Member of Congress



Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress



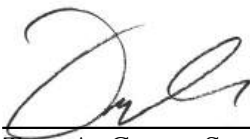
Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress



Sylvia R. Garcia
Member of Congress



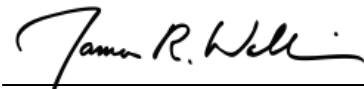
Maxine Waters
Member of Congress



Troy A. Carter, Sr.
Member of Congress



Kathy Castor
Member of Congress



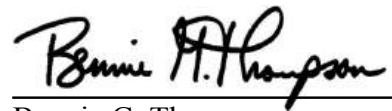
James R. Walkinshaw
Member of Congress



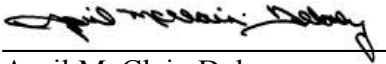
Kevin Mullin
Member of Congress



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress



Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress



April McClain Delaney
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Jared Moskowitz
Member of Congress



Robert J. Menendez
Member of Congress



Dwight Evans
Member of Congress



Al Green
Member of Congress



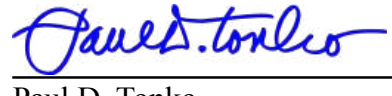
Juan Vargas
Member of Congress



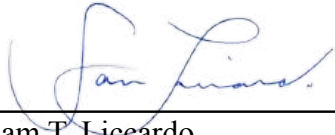
Robert Garcia
Member of Congress



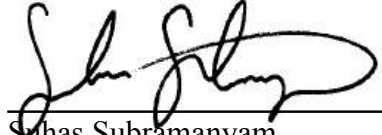
Jake Auchincloss
Member of Congress



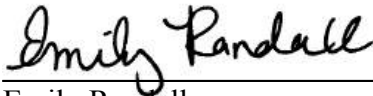
Paul D. Tonko
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Sam T. Liccardo
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Suhas Subramanyam
Member of Congress



Emily Randall
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Jared Huffman
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Chellie Pingree
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Laura Friedman
Member of Congress



Brian K. Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress



Rick Larsen
Member of Congress



Lori Trahan
Member of Congress



Teresa Leger Fernández
Member of Congress



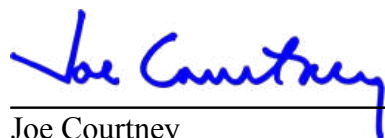
Joseph D. Morelle
Member of Congress



Gabe Amo
Member of Congress



Thomas R. Suozzi
Member of Congress



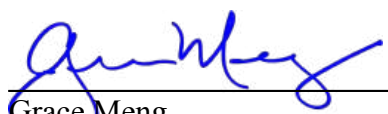
Joe Courtney
Member of Congress



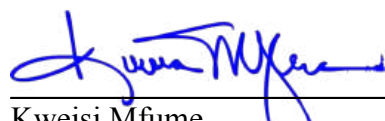
Suzan K. DelBene
Member of Congress



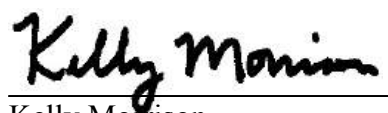
Everton Blair Jr.
Member of Congress



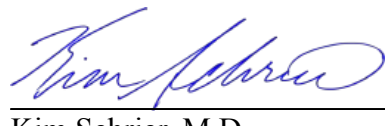
Grace Meng
Member of Congress



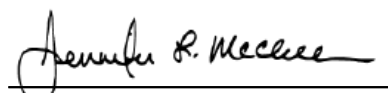
Kweisi Mfume
Member of Congress



Kelly Morrison
Member of Congress



Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress



Jennifer L. McClellan
Member of Congress



Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress



Donald Norcross
Member of Congress



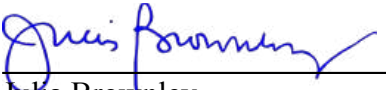
Frank J. Mrvan
Member of Congress



Sean Casten
Member of Congress



Greg Casar
Member of Congress



Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress



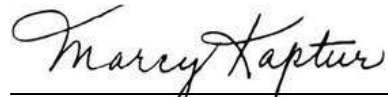
Analilia Mejia
Member of Congress



Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress



Nellie Pou
Member of Congress



Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress



Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress



Seth Magaziner
Member of Congress



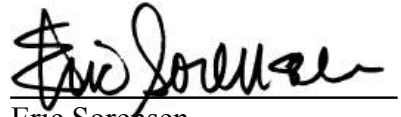
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



MARK TAKANO
Member of Congress



Scott H. Peters
Member of Congress



Eric Sorensen
Member of Congress



Chris Pappas
Member of Congress



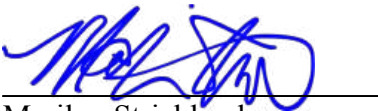
Lois Frankel
Member of Congress



Susie Lee
Member of Congress



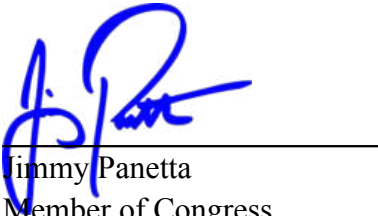
Richard E. Neal
Member of Congress



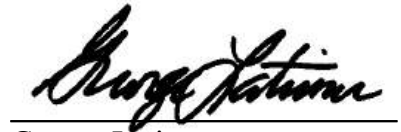
Marilyn Strickland
Member of Congress



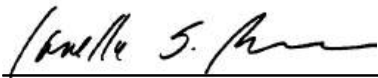
Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



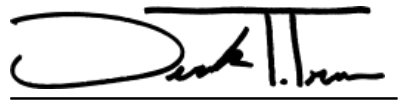
Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



George Latimer
Member of Congress



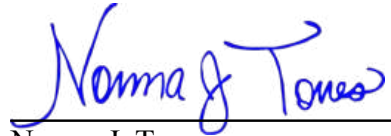
Janelle S. Bynum
Member of Congress



Derek T. Tran
Member of Congress



Mike Levin
Member of Congress



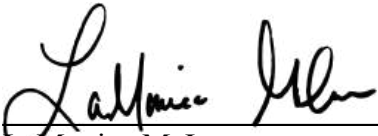
Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress



Herbert C. Conaway, Jr.
Member of Congress



Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress



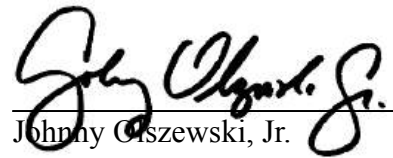
LaMonica McIver
Member of Congress



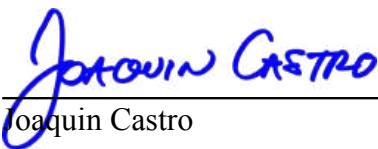
Julie Johnson
Member of Congress



Summer L. Lee
Member of Congress



Johnny Olszewski, Jr.
Member of Congress



Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress