

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 23, 2020

The Honorable William P. Barr
U.S. Attorney General
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20530

Attorney General Barr,

During a time when protests are erupting throughout the nation and around the world from people of all races and socioeconomic backgrounds our attention is being called to the suffering of black and brown people here in the United States. We are forced to acknowledge the reality that racism plagues our systems and makes it more difficult for black people and other people of color to access resources and opportunities.

George Floyd was murdered by four police officers because of the color of his skin. As he begged for his life, his final words, “I can’t breathe” of Mr. Floyd echo those of Eric Garner and countless African Americans who have had their lives cut short or forever altered by the very people sworn to protect them. This tragedy is not a one-off incident. We have seen time and time again the institutional bias within our criminal justice system and the continuous increase of deaths by police.

Police brutality and violence is now a leading cause of death among young men, particularly Black men who are nearly three times more likely to be killed by police than their white peers.¹ Latino men are almost twice as likely to be killed by police use of force and Black and Latino women and girls and Native Americans are also killed by police at disproportionately higher rates.² LGBTQ+ individuals and those experiencing homelessness are also significantly more likely to be criminalized and the target of police violence.³

In the past 3½ years, the Department of Justice (DOJ) has rolled back critical policies which held abusive police departments accountable. Ending the practice of placing police departments that violate constitutional rights under court-supervised consent decrees, ending the voluntary federal-state collaborative reform program and reversing limits on a program that has provided billions of

¹ Edwards, Frank, Hedwig Lee, and Michael Esposito. “Risk of Being Killed by Police Use of Force in the United States by Age, Race–Ethnicity, and Sex.” Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 116, no. 34 (August 5, 2019): 16793–98. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1821204116>.

² Edwards, Frank, Hedwig Lee, and Michael Esposito. “Risk of Being Killed by Police Use of Force in the United States by Age, Race–Ethnicity, and Sex.” Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 116, no. 34 (August 5, 2019): 16793–98

³ New York City Anti-Violence Project, Hate Violence Against Transgender Communities Fact Sheet (May 28, 2020) https://avp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/ncavp_transhvfactsheet.pdf

dollars of military-grade vehicles and weapons—such as grenade launchers and bayonets—to local police departments has escalated police violence in this nation.⁴ The DOJ has significantly failed on maintaining its obligations to the American people.

Given the issues at stake, we immediately call for:

- Support of efforts to eliminate the use of force, conduct stringent oversight and investigations and hold individual law enforcement officers and police departments accountable for police brutality, racial profiling and violence
- The Department of Justice to reinstitute its authority to investigate individual instances of police brutality, racial profiling as well as police departments that repeatedly violate civil rights
- Development of an immersive, real-life, scenario-based training curriculum that reflects and prepares officers for unique challenges and prioritizes improving community-police relations, de-escalation and crisis intervention and alternatives to use of deadly force

It is time for our nation to take bold action and condemn police brutality. Police brutality and the use of excessive and militarized force are among the most serious ongoing human rights and civil liberties violations in the United States and have led to community destabilization, a decrease in public safety, and the exacerbation of structural inequities. We urge you to take immediate steps to rectify these problems within the DOJ as well as provide a written response on how the DOJ will proceed forward with addressing police brutality.

Sincerely,



Tim Ryan
Member of Congress



Peter Welch
Member of Congress



Hakeem Jeffries
Member of Congress



Joyce Beatty
Member of Congress

⁴Stahl, Jeremy. How the Trump Administration Undid Obama's Response to Ferguson "The Obama-era reforms could not have stopped George Floyd's death, but dismantling them sent a clear message to the police." <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2020/06/trump-doj-obama-policing-reform.html>

Eleanor Holmes Norton

Member of Congress

Sheila Jackson Lee

Member of Congress

Ann McLane Kuster

Member of Congress

Donald M. Payne Jr.

Member of Congress

Darren Soto

Member of Congress

Deb Haaland

Member of Congress

Alcee L. Hastings

Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal

Member of Congress

Nydia M. Velázquez

Member of Congress

Dean Phillips

Member of Congress

Madeleine Dean

Member of Congress

Ro Khanna

Member of Congress

Kathy Castor

Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Earl Blumenauer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Earl" being more prominent than the last name "Blumenauer".

Earl Blumenauer

Member of Congress