

Hon. Jerrold Nadler, Chair
Hon. Doug Collins, Ranking Member
House Judiciary Committee
2138 Rayburn Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

June 9, 2020

Dear Chairman Nadler and Ranking Member Collins:

We write in the wake of the devastating health and economic impact of the COVID-19 virus, the recent spate of killings of several more Black people at the hands of police forces, and sustained and relentless police violence being inflicted on protestors--and our democracy. The undersigned represent a collection of grassroots community organizations, as well as national advocacy institutions, committed to dismantling our systems of mass criminalization and incarceration and redefining public safety in our nation, beginning with a targeted effort to dismantle and replace the 1994 Crime Bill.

We understand that the House Judiciary Committee is presently considering a package of bills under the Justice in Policing Act to address police violence and accountability. We find the Justice in Policing Act unacceptable, particularly in the many ways it provides additional funds and legitimacy towards policing, whether through trainings, standards, data collection, or accreditations programs. This must stop.

We write to demand that in this moment, *Congress permanently end and cease any funding to local law enforcement in any form*, whether it be money for trainings, equipment, hiring, re-hiring, overtime, etc. including all programs under the so-called Community Oriented Policing Services' ["COPS"] program, and fully fund community-led public safety efforts.

Congress allocating any resources, even with strings attached, towards policing--an institution that already receives over \$100 billion of public resources annually¹--particular in the wake of our current economic crisis and police violence epidemic, is both illogical and stands to inflame an already tense situation. Indeed, just last week, in the midst of an economic crisis and national uprising against police brutality and massive police budgets, the COPS office announced nearly \$400 million in grant funding through the COPS Hiring Program (CHP), which will fund 596 law enforcement agencies to hire 2,732 additional full-time law enforcement personnel.² In the wake of the COVID-19 disaster, the House of Representatives recently and

¹ How Much Do U.S. Cities Spend Every Year On Policing?, The Atlantic
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2017/08/07/how-much-do-u-s-cities-spend-every-year-on-policing-infographic/#3a479276e7b7>

² Department of Justice Awards Nearly \$400 Million for Law Enforcement Hiring to Advance Community Policing

bafflingly included an additional \$300 million in funding to the COPS office in the “HEROES Act.”³

The COPS Program has helped precipitate the policing crisis that we find ourselves in today. As you know, in 1994, Congress passed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act colloquially known as the 1994 Crime Bill, that established the COPS Program. After an initial appropriation of \$8.8 billion between 1995 and 2000, the COPS Program has granted over \$14 billion to state and local governments since its establishment.⁴ This is money that should have gone directly to people instead of policing. The program was designed to administer the distribution of those funds to state and local governments -- incentivizing law enforcement agencies to purchase new equipment, develop and distribute new technologies, and ultimately increase the number of officers deployed throughout the United States.

In just the first few years of its existence, the COPS Program directly contributed to the hiring of an additional 100,000 police officers nationwide.⁵ The costs of those hires were quickly, and continue to be, borne by city budgets and subsequently resulted in deep under resourcing and harm to Black communities particularly.⁶ Once COPS Program funding ended, local communities were left to fund these officers without further support from the federal government, with 75% of the salaries of newly hired officers funded through local appropriations.⁷ In addition, the program amplified the school-to-prison pipeline -- funneling more than \$1 billion to the expansion of policing and surveillance infrastructure in public schools. The COPS Program, through various school policing initiatives, has flooded schools with thousands upon thousands of police officers.

Federal funds for policing through programs such as COPS grants funded new equipment and technologies purchased by local police forces, resulting in the escalation of SWAT teams and other paramilitary units -- ultimately increasing the presence of military grade weapons and

<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/departments-justice-awards-nearly-400-million-law-enforcement-hiring-advance-community>

³ “HEROES Act”, Pg. 17 Line 19 through Pg. 18 Line 16

<https://docs.house.gov/bills/thisweek/20200511/BILLS-116hr6800ih.pdf>

⁴ “Grants,” COPS: Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice,

<https://cops.usdoj.gov/grants>

⁵ Analysis | Bill Clinton’s claim that 100,000 cops sent the crime rate ‘way down’

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2014/09/26/bill-clintons-claim-that-100000-cops-sent-the-crime-rate-way-down/>

⁶ Center for Popular Democracy, Law for Black Lives, BYP100 “Freedom to Thrive: Reimagining Safety and Security in our Communities”

<https://populardemocracy.org/news/publications/freedom-thrive-reimagining-safety-security-our-communities>

⁷ Brock, et al., School Safety Policies and Programs Administered by the U.S. Federal Government; Peter Finn, Meg Townsend, Michael Shively, and Tom Rich, A Guide to Developing, Maintaining, and Succeeding with Your School Resource Officer Program: Practices from the Field for Law Enforcement and School Administration (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, and Abt Associates Inc., 2005),

https://popcenter.asu.edu/sites/default/files/Responses/school_police/PDFs/Finn_et_al_2005.pdf

surveillance systems in our most vulnerable communities. We are seeing the dangerous and disturbing effects of militarized policing in our cities right now, with increasing unconstitutional and violent police actions towards peaceful protestors.

Overall, federal funding for law enforcement has expanded the intensity and presence of police nationwide. Because of designs to legitimize police forces through “community policing,” the COPS program led to the expansion of training programs that included new tactics for threat neutralization and combat skills techniques that have led to the horrific and unnecessary killings by police of children like Tamir Rice.⁸ As recently as FY 2020, Congress has continued appropriating upwards of \$300 million towards the program, an increase on top of the \$200 million average during the years of the Obama administration.⁹

It should also be noted that the COPS Program is currently being used to resource a disturbing program of the Attorney General entitled ‘Operation Relentless Pursuit’ -- an initiative designed to send federal law enforcement agents to U.S. cities already grappling with extraordinary, and often violent, police presence and domination---particularly in Black communities. The Bureau of Justice and the COPS office has awarded another \$61 million in grant funding to support the Attorney General’s initiative.¹⁰ Given the outrageous behavior of this President, the Attorney General, and an already militarized police force carrying out documented abuses of power, increasing the number of federal agents on our nation’s streets is an unacceptable and misguided use of public resources that Congress must reign in.

The COPS office has already absorbed billions of dollars of federal spending that may have otherwise been invested in public safety programs such as community-led alternatives or in the basic needs of under resourced communities, whether it be in the form of healthcare, education, or housing. It also resulted in local cities being forced to bear the burden of increases on already massive police budgets once federal grants were exhausted. The spread of COVID-19 and the accompanying economic devastation has compounded this dynamic, resulting in local governments struggling to balance budgets to fund schools, hospitals, and other vital human services, while policing taking up, in some cases, over 50% of cities’ general funds.

Given the COVID-19 crisis and nationwide unrest in response to policing, **it is critical that Congress move the nation’s resources away from policing and directly support the needs of people. Congress must begin pouring trillions into the needs of Black neighborhoods and other heavily policed communities.**¹¹

⁸ Stoughton, Seth, “Law Enforcement’s ‘Warrior’ Problem,” Harvard Law Review. 128, April 2015. Vitale, Alex S. 2017. The End of Policing. Verso Books.

⁹ Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Program, Congressional Research Service <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=833699>

¹⁰ Funds Released to Support Operation Relentless Pursuit, <https://bja.ojp.gov/news/funds-released-support-operation-relentless-pursuit>

¹¹ The Justice in Policing Act includes “policing innovation grants” for local commissions and task forces to develop “best practices and programs to enhance community service and accountability of law enforcement officers.” Instead of federal funds to support community based public safety efforts, this grant

Congress should immediately stop all funding to local law enforcement and condemn, restrain, and use the power of the purse to remove federally funded police and military from our cities. The COPS program has directly contributed to the increased size, scope, and role of policing across cities in our country, and subsequently the endless stream of killings and violence perpetrated by law enforcement on Black people particularly. The COVID-19 crisis and accompanying economic loss paired with the brazen and violent nature of policing has demonstrated the need for a nationwide reimagining of public safety that does not include allocating resources for policing, but one that fully funds the needs of all our communities.

Sincerely,

Center for Popular Democracy
215 People's Alliance (PA)
Action NC
Action Now Chicago
Advancement Project - National Office
Alaskans Take A Stand
Arkansas Community Organizations
Black Leaders Organizing Communities (WI)
CASA (MD, VA, PA)
Center for Coalfield Justice (PA)
Center on Policy Initiatives (CA)
Churches United for Fair Housing (NY)
Communities Creating Opportunity (KS)
Communities United (Maryland)
DeIACA (DE)
Flint Rising (MI)
JustLeadershipUSA
LUCHA (AZ)
Make the Road Connecticut
Make the Road New Jersey
Make the Road New York
New Florida Majority
New Georgia Project
New York Communities for Change
Ohio Organizing Collaborative (OH)

represents further entrenchment of both the COPS Program and more misguided resourcing towards improving or "innovating" policing.

Olé (NM)
Organize Florida
Our Future West Virginia
PolicyLink
Rights & Democracy (VT, NH)
Spaces in Action (D.C.)
Step Up Louisiana
Taller Salud (PR)
VOCAL-NY
Working Washington

cc:

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Hon. Joyce Beatty, 1st Vice-Chair
Hon. Brenda Lawrence, 2nd Vice-Chair
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