

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 2, 2017

The Honorable Jefferson B. Sessions III
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington DC, 20530-001

Dear Attorney General Sessions:

We write to you out of our deep respect for the law enforcement community, and the risks they take in order to provide our communities safety and peace of mind. We are, however, concerned about recent remarks by the President that are at odds with the traditions and values of American policing. On Friday, July 28, 2017, President Trump gave a speech in Brentwood, New York, during which he encouraged law enforcement to use excessive force. More specifically, he directed law enforcement not to be “too nice,” and described how officers should allow arrestees to have their heads banged against police car roofs. That is unacceptable. We urge you to make clear that the Department of Justice will abide by the strictest standards when it comes to law enforcement’s use of force.

This year marks the 25th Anniversary of the 1992 Los Angeles riots. The riots began after Los Angeles police officers brutally beat an African American man named Rodney King within an inch of his life, and were later acquitted for excessive force charges. Since those events, countless law enforcement excessive force incidents nationwide have highlighted the need for uniform rules of engagement when it comes to the use of force. Recent videotape footage of police encounters – in Chicago, South Carolina, and Minnesota, for example – have also underscored the need for police to adhere to the highest standards when using force.

According to a database maintained by the *Washington Post*, police fatally shot 991 people in 2015 (94 of whom were unarmed), 963 people in 2016 (48 of whom were unarmed), and 581 people so far in 2017 (29 of whom were unarmed). Simply put, we must do better. We must explore ways to improve policing in our communities to help prevent the loss of innocent lives.

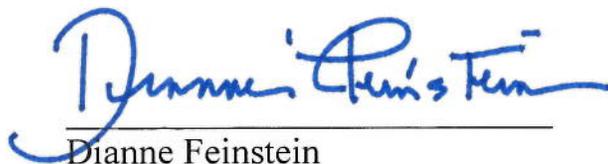
It is within this context that following the President's speech, law enforcement immediately denounced the President's comments. For example, Steve Soboroff, a civilian commissioner overseeing the Los Angeles Police Department, stated that: "What the president recommended would be out of policy in the Los Angeles Police Department." He added, "it's not what policing is about today." In the same way, Michael Harrison, chief of the New Orleans Police Department, stated that the President's comments, "stand in stark contrast to our department's commitment to constitutional policing and community engagement."

Other police departments throughout the country have echoed these sentiments. Most notably, the Suffolk Police Department in New York, which had officers at the President's speech, stated that: "As a department, we do not and will not tolerate roughing up of prisoners."

The improper use of force is misconduct that violates not only ethical and professional standards, but also possibly civil rights statutes. Your promises to the American people during your confirmation proceedings to zealously enforce such statutes – not to mention your oath of office – obligate you to condemn any violations of such standards and laws.

We strongly encourage the Department of Justice to join the chorus of law enforcement organizations in making clear that excessive use of force is unacceptable. The men and women who protect our communities on a daily basis deserve your support. Thank you for your consideration.

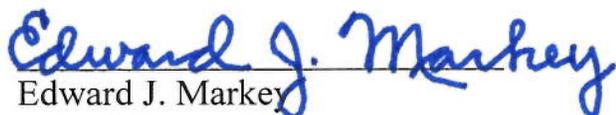
Sincerely,



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Christopher Van Hollen
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Al Franken
United States Senator



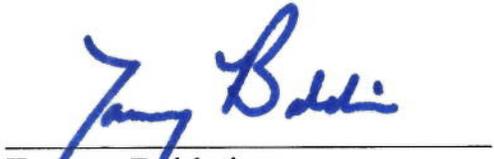
Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



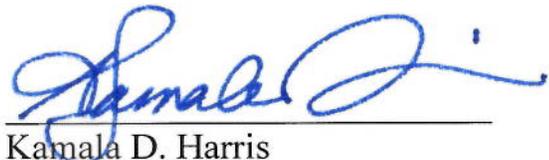
Richard J. Durbin
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United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris
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Tom Udall
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Christopher S. Murphy
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Mazie K. Hirono
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Patty Murray
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