

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 21, 2020

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

You have indicated that you may send additional federal agents to the City of Chicago to conduct policing activities that traditionally are handled by local law enforcement. We strongly urge you to refrain from taking this action, which is opposed by Governor Pritzker, Mayor Lightfoot and other local leaders. This week, we introduced legislation with other Senate Democrats to prevent you from overriding local authorities in this manner.

Any involvement by federal law enforcement in community policing activity must be conducted in coordination with, and with the approval of, local officials. In this time of heightened tension, we cannot have federal law enforcement operating at cross-purposes with local leaders.

In recent days, your Administration has deployed federal law enforcement agents in the streets of Portland, Oregon, without any visible identifying information. These federal agents have reportedly used excessive force against peaceful protestors and detained residents in unmarked vehicles. Such conduct is unacceptable anywhere in the United States and must not happen in the Chicagoland area.

On February 10, 2017, we sent you a letter suggesting a range of ways in which the federal government could play a helpful and supportive role in reducing violence in Chicago. We noted that “[p]ublic safety is primarily a local responsibility, but the federal government must be an engaged partner in public safety efforts alongside local officials, law enforcement, and community stakeholders.” We recommended that your Administration take steps to assist local violence prevention efforts, including:

- enhancing Department of Justice (DOJ) programs that improve community policing;
- directing DOJ to promote mentoring and job training programs for youth and formerly incarcerated individuals;
- improving mentoring and violence prevention initiatives and boosting funding for recidivism reduction programs;
- directing DOJ to abide by its commitment to help implement policing reforms recommended by the Department’s Civil Rights Division;
- closing gaps in the FBI gun background check system and in federal firearm laws that enable straw purchasers and gun traffickers to flood Chicago’s streets with illicit guns;

- prioritizing career and youth training programs to address lack of economic opportunity in neighborhoods hit hard by violence; and
- redirecting resources that you are devoting to construction of your border wall and committing those resources instead to the efforts discussed above.

It has been more than three years since then, and you have not replied to our letter nor followed through with our suggestions. We reiterate that these steps would be more effective in reducing violence in Chicago than replicating the destabilizing role that you have directed federal law enforcement to play in Portland.

With the right leadership, federal law enforcement can serve as valuable partners in supporting local efforts and helping reduce violence in American communities, rather than contravening local efforts and exacerbating tensions. It's not too late for you to demonstrate such leadership.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator