

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

December 30, 2020

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt:

On December 27, Darrell House, an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation, the Oneida Nation, and veteran of the U.S. Marines, was repeatedly Tasered while visiting Petroglyphs National Monument. Reports and video footage indicate Mr. House had no weapon and appeared to pose no threat to anyone.¹ The Committee has jurisdiction under House Rule X.1(m) to conduct oversight and investigations of all Department of the Interior (DOI) programs and operations, including DOI law enforcement activities.

Video footage shows a National Park Service (NPS) employee shooting Mr. House from a short distance with a Taser, followed by additional shots administered through direct contact. Mr. House was reportedly charged with walking off trail, concealing his identity, and interfering with agency functions.²

Though at least one officer appears to be wearing a body-worn camera (BWC) in the video footage, no body camera footage has been released by DOI. The available video footage raises serious questions regarding any possible justification for the level of force used by the NPS employee in this situation. Sadly, this is not an isolated incident.

On June 1, 2020, peaceful protestors assembled in Lafayette Square to protest police killings of black Americans. Well before the city's curfew was to take effect, a multitude of federal law enforcement agencies, led by the U.S. Park Police (USPP), violently attacked the protestors. In the aftermath of this attack, the USPP has misled Congress and the public regarding the facts of the event.

On March 21, 2020, Charles "Gage" Lorentz was traveling near Carlsbad Caverns, New Mexico when he was pulled over by an NPS employee. BWC footage shows a long

¹ House, Darrell, Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/tv/CJVMGdglspI/?utm_source=ig_embed and https://www.instagram.com/p/CJWH0Q2FrtQ/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

² Ramirez, Chris. "Video: Park ranger tases Native American man at Petroglyph National Monument," *KOB4 Eyewitness News*, 28 December 2020. https://www.kob.com/albuquerque-news/video-park-ranger-tases-native-american-man-at-petroglyph-national-monument/5962472/#.X-qGrpvN_QQ.twitter,

interaction that devolved into the officer deploying his taser. At that time, the BWC footage stopped. The video resumed 26 seconds later with the two in a physical altercation, during which the officer shot Lorentz twice, once in the leg and once – fatally - in the heart. Three minutes after Lorentz was shot, the BWC footage shows that the officer put his motionless body in handcuffs. Twelve minutes after the shooting, the officer began treating the victim.³

On November 17, 2017, USPP fatally shot an unarmed 25 year-old man, Bijan Ghaisar, after pursuing him in a car chase along George Washington Parkway.⁴ Although U.S. Park Police incidents are not typically investigated by the FBI, the FBI's Washington Field Office took up the investigation shortly after the incident occurred.⁵

Video evidence given to the FBI showed that Park Police tried to pull Ghaisar over two times, after which he drove away. The third time, three Park Police officers approached Ghaisar's vehicle with guns drawn. As Ghaisar tried to drive away again, at least one of the officers fired 10 shots from close range. Ghaisar's family says he received three gunshots to the head.⁶

The video evidence of the incident was obtained from the dashboard camera of Fairfax County police officers who joined the Park Police officers in the pursuit of Ghaisar. No video evidence was recorded by Park Police officers.

These violent, and in some cases deadly, incidents evidence a disturbing pattern of excessive use of force and failure of oversight by the NPS.

To assist the Committee's oversight responsibilities, please provide responses electronically to the following document and information requests no later than January 5, 2021:

1. All footage recorded by any NPS officer's body worn camera on December 27, 2020 at Petroglyphs National Monument;
2. A full explanation for any lack of footage and any gaps in footage recorded by NPS officers' body worn camera on December 27, 2020;
3. A fully unredacted version of NPS Reference Manual 9;
4. Any reports related to the December 27, 2020 incident;

³ Ramirez, Chris. "Video shows park ranger shoot and kill unarmed Carlsbad Caverns visitor." *KOB4 Eyewitness News*, 30 June 2020. <https://www.kob.com/albuquerque-news/video-shows-park-ranger-shoot-and-kill-unarmed-carlsbad-caverns-visitor/5777672/>

⁴ Lewis, Kevin. "FBI: Man who led Park Police on car chase that ended in police-involved shooting has died." *WJLA Washington, D.C.*, 28 Nov 2017. <http://wjla.com/news/local/fbi-man-shot-by-us-park-police-dead-led-police-on-car-chase-that-ended-in-crash>

⁵ Barber, Tim. "FBI investigating days after police chase, officer-involved shooting in Alexandria." *WJLA Washington, D.C.*, 21 Nov 2017. <http://wjla.com/news/local/fbi-investigating-days-after-police-chase-officer-involved-shooting-in-alexandria>

⁶ Barber, Tim. "Dash cam video released from U.S. Park Police shooting that killed Virginia man." *WJLA Washington, D.C.*, 24 Jan 2018. <http://wjla.com/news/local/police-dash-cam-video-to-be-released-from-us-park-police-shooting-that-killed-va-man>

5. The employment and duty station statuses of the officers involved in the incidents involving Darrell House, Charles “Gage” Lorentz, and Bijan Ghaisar;

Thank you for your immediate attention to this disturbing incident. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Chair
Committee on Natural Resources