

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

September 24, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Scott Brecht
Chief
U.S. Park Police
1849 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Burgum and Chief Brecht:

We write regarding new U.S. Park Police (USPP) policies adopted in response to a series of reckless and misguided executive orders¹ issued by President Trump, which raise serious questions about the Department of the Interior's (DOI) commitment to lawful policing, accountability, and the protection of civil rights.

On June 1, 2020, President Trump ordered a violent attack on peaceful demonstrators, including seniors and congregants from the nearby St. John's Church, even as they fled Lafayette Square in Washington, DC. Although the USPP identified 54 separate incidents of potential excessive use of force on that day,² only one incident was referred to the DOI Office of Inspector General, who found that the use of force was indeed excessive.³ Their tactics were enabled by the military, who sought to use a directed energy weapon known as a "heat ray," against protestors—a weapon that could make "anyone within range feel as if their skin was on fire."⁴ That day is forever etched into American history as emblematic of what happens when federal law enforcement is weaponized for politics instead of public safety and where professional policing is subordinated for unlawful exercises of raw executive power.

¹ Exec. Order No. 14252, *Making the District of Columbia Safe and Beautiful*, 90 Fed. Reg. 14559 (Mar. 27, 2025); Exec. Order No. 14231, *Ending Crime and Disorder in America's Streets*, 90 Fed. Reg. 35817 (Jul. 24, 2025); Exec. Order No. 14333, *Declaring a Crime Emergency in the District of Columbia*, 90 Fed. Reg. 39301 (Aug. 11, 2025).

² Government Accountability Office, GAO-22-104470, *Law Enforcement: Federal Agencies Should Improve Reporting and Review of Less-Lethal Force* (2021), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/720/718230.pdf>.

³ U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of the Inspector General, Report No. 21-0009, *Alleged Excessive Use of Force*, DC 1–2 (2023), https://www.doi.gov/sites/default/files/2021-migration/AllegedExcessiveUseofForceNPSDC_Public.pdf.

⁴ Dina Temple-Raston, *Military Confirms It Sought Information on Using 'Heat Ray' Against D.C. Protesters*, NPR (Sept. 16, 2020), <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/16/913748800/military-police-leaders-weighed-deploying-heat-ray-against-dc-protesters>; Marissa J. Lang, *Federal Officials Stockpiled Munitions, Sought 'Heat Ray' Device Before Clearing Lafayette Square, Whistleblower Says*, WASH. POST. (Sep. 17, 2020), https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-protest-lafayette-square/2020/09/16/ca0174e4-f788-11ea-89e3-4b9efa36dc64_story.html.

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Now, President Donald Trump is using USPP personnel to support the Administration's attack on homeless encampments and "criminal activity,"⁵ an expansion that raises serious questions about mission creep. Adding to the concern is DOI's engagement with U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), whose personnel may lack the specialized training necessary to manage mass protests of the kind routinely encountered by the USPP.⁶ As you know, the core mission of the USPP is to provide "quality law enforcement to safeguard lives, protect our national treasures and symbols of democracy, and preserve the natural and cultural resources entrusted to us."⁷ However, recent changes in USPP policies depart from that mission and, given longstanding concerns over excessive use of force, are especially alarming as the agency is deployed in the President's occupation of Washington, DC.

According to public reports, the Administration has directed the USPP to clear homeless encampments on federal land. White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt confirmed that those who refuse shelter or services will now face fines or arrest.⁸ Departing from standard practice, officers will apparently now destroy personal belongings on site and, in some cases, deny individuals with any opportunity to reclaim them.⁹ The unnecessary loss of these belongings, like birth certificates, ashes of loved ones, medication, government-issued identification, and means of transportation, can be devastating.¹⁰ The impact of these sweeps is worsened by yet another change by the Trump administration that eliminates coordination with nonprofit organizations ahead of sweeps and denies individuals the opportunity to vacate voluntarily and protect their possessions.¹¹

Coupled with a zero-tolerance policy for camping or panhandling, these new directives seek to transform the USPP into an instrument for implementing the Trump administration's social policy rather than keeping our public lands and parks safe. Those most at risk of being swept up under President Trump's crackdown are about 200 homeless veterans in D.C., whose service to our country is now repaid with the

⁵ Exec. Order No. 14339, Additional Measures to Address the Crime Emergency in the District of Columbia, 90 Fed. Reg. 42121 (Aug. 25, 2025).

⁶ Rachel Frazin, *Interior Deputizes Border Agents to National Park Sites Amid DC Takeover*, THE HILL (Aug. 20, 2025), <https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/5462417-border-patrol-nps-national-parks-trump-dc-takeover-burgum>; Doug Burgum (@SecretaryBurgum), X (Aug. 20, 2025, 3:22 PM), <https://x.com/SecretaryBurgum/status/1958248206489538842>.

⁷ National Park Service, *United States Park Police Mission Statement*, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/uspp/mission-statement.htm> (last visited Aug. 26, 2025).

⁸ Alexandra Koch, *Interior Department Adopts No-Tolerance Policy for Homeless Encampments in Washington, DC*, FOX NEWS (Aug. 16, 2025), <https://www.foxnews.com/us/interior-department-adopts-no-tolerance-policy-homeless-encampments-washington-dc>.

⁹ Hannah Grabenstein, *Trump Wants to Clear Homeless Encampments. Here's What Usually Happens, According to Experts*, PBS (Aug. 25, 2025), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/why-clearing-encampments-doesnt-usually-solve-problems-of-homelessness>.

¹⁰ *The Toll of Cities' Homeless Sweeps*, PROPUBLICA (Dec. 27, 2024), <https://projects.propublica.org/impact-of-homeless-sweeps-lost-belongings>.

¹¹ Kriston Capps, *In Trump's DC Crackdown, the National Park Service Leads Homeless Sweeps*, BLOOMBERG (Aug. 22, 2025), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-08-22/dc-crime-crackdown-deputizes-national-park-service-in-homeless-sweeps>.

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threat of arrest and the destruction of their last possessions.¹² This expansion is not only outside the agency's mission and operational capacity, it is a cruel misuse of federal law enforcement that strips people of their dignity, property, and constitutional protections without due process.

Secretary Burgum also announced that the Department has expanded USPP authority to conduct high-speed pursuits, in complete disregard of the 2017 unwarranted and unnecessary killing of Bijan Ghaisar, an unarmed motorist who was shot after a low-level collision following a USPP chase on the George Washington Parkway in D.C. At least one of the officers shot at him ten times within close range, including three gunshots to the head.¹³ The DOI Office of the Inspector General determined that the actions of the officers involved—including a high-speed pursuit—were consistent with USPP's permissive policies, which lack the kind of serious safeguards adopted by most professional law enforcement agencies.¹⁴ The Department of Justice's (DOJ) National Institute of Justice (NIJ) has long concluded that high-speed pursuits are among "the most dangerous of all ordinary police activities" and present a "high risk of loss of life" to motorists, bystanders, and officers alike.¹⁵ As a 2023 DOJ Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS)-funded report found, high-speed pursuits should occur only when a violent crime has been committed, and the suspect presents an imminent threat of further violence.¹⁶ The DOI's new high-speed pursuit authority appears to flout both requirements.

The experience of CBP is instructive. Between 2019 and 2021, fatalities resulting from CBP vehicle pursuits rose from two in 2019 to 22 in 2021,¹⁷ with 44 deaths recorded over just two years.¹⁸ In response, CBP conducted a comprehensive review and, in 2023, issued a revised pursuit directive requiring agents to weight conditions like road and weather and to terminate pursuits if the danger exceeds law

¹² Metro. Wash. Council of Gov'ts, *Homeless Services Planning & Coordinating Committee, Homelessness in Metropolitan Washington: Results and Analysis from the Annual Point-in-Time Count of Persons Experiencing Homelessness* (May 2025), <https://www.mwcog.org/documents/2025/05/14/homelessness-in-metropolitan-washington-results-and-analysis-from-the-annual-point-in-time-pit-count-of-persons-experiencing-homelessness-featured-publications-homelessness>.

¹³ Tim Barber, *Dash Cam Video Released From U.S. Park Police Shooting That Killed Virginia Man*, WJLA (Jan. 24, 2018), <http://wjla.com/news/local/police-dash-cam-video-to-be-released-from-us-park-police-shooting-that-killed-va-man>.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of the Interior, Off. Of Inspector Gen., Report No. 22-0785, Investigation: U.S. Park Police Officers' Use of Deadly Force Following a Pursuit on the George Washington Memorial Parkway (Nov. 12, 2024).

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Justice, Nat'l Inst. of Justice, NCJ No. 122025, *Restrictive Policies for High-Speed Police Pursuits* (May 1990), <https://nij.ojp.gov/library/publications/restrictive-policies-high-speed-police-pursuits>.

¹⁶ Police Executive Research Forum, No. 2020-CK-WX-K035, *Vehicular Pursuits: A Guide for Law Enforcement Executives on Managing the Associated Risks* (2023), <https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter/content.ashx/cops-r1134-pub.pdf>.

¹⁷ *Fact Sheet: The Deadly Trend of Border Patrol Vehicle Pursuits*, AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION (Jan. 3, 2022), https://www.aclutx.org/sites/default/files/field_documents/border_patrol_vehicle_pursuit_policy_brief_01_03_22.pdf.

¹⁸ Letter from Hon. Veronica Escobar, Member of Congress, et al., to Hon. Chris Magnus, Commissioner, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and Hon. Troy A. Miller, Deputy Commissioner, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (Sep. 13, 2022), https://escobar.house.gov/uploadedfiles/8.15.22_letter_to_cbp_on_high_speed_pursuits.pdf.

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enforcement objectives.¹⁹ This tragic record demonstrates that failure to adopt a risk-based high-speed pursuit policy results in preventable loss of life. Even so, by expanding USPP's high-speed pursuit authority without comparable safeguards, the DOI appears poised to repeat CBP's mistakes.

According to the August 14, 2025, memorandum issued by Chief Taylor, USPP personnel are authorized to initiate pursuits for any felony or threat to the public.²⁰ Rather than adhering to standards recommended by the DOJ NIJ and COPS Office, this policy invites chases based on circular reasoning. The very act of fleeing may itself be charged as a felony or considered a threat to the public, thereby becoming its own justification for pursuit. Federal guidance, as well as current DC law, which House Republicans are trying to overturn,²¹ has long cautioned against this approach and emphasized that pursuits should be limited to violent crimes presenting an imminent threat of further violence. Yet, the new USPP policy—issued at the behest of the White House—broadens initiation authority while omitting safeguards regarded as essential in federal law enforcement practice, including supervisory authorization, limitations on high-risk tactics, structured risk assessments, training and certification requirements, and systematic after-action review. By disregarding these critical safeguards, the DOI appears to have embraced an outdated and permissive model that diverges from established federal standards and, in doing so, heightens the very risks it purports to address. The consequence is an authority so expansive that pursuits themselves have become a documented threat to public safety. Although the White House emergency declaration that formed the basis for the USPP's high-speed pursuit policy expired on September 10, 2025, we have learned that USPP personnel have nevertheless continued engaging in these high-speed pursuits.²² It remains unclear what legal authority, if any, currently authorizes the USPP to conduct these dangerous chases, other than presidential fiat.

In just the last two months, the USPP initiated at least eleven high-speed pursuits for nonviolent offenses under the revised policy, seven of which ended in crashes.²³ In one case, a vehicle under pursuit from the USPP slammed into a U.S. Marshals Service vehicle with such force that it rolled over,²⁴ snapped a live electrical pole,²⁵ and required the response of seven emergency medical units.²⁶ Shockingly, Secretary Burgum described these pursuits as “so much fun,” trivializing the very crashes that put innocent lives in

¹⁹ U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Directive No. 4510-026A, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Emergency Driving and Vehicular Pursuits (May 2023), https://borderoversight.org/files/2023--cbp_directive_4510--026a_emergency_driving_including_vehicular_pursuits.pdf.

²⁰ U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Park Police, Series 2025, Memorandum from Jessica M. E. Taylor, Chief of Police, to U.S. Park Police Personnel (Aug. 14, 2025).

²¹ Olivia George, *House votes for D.C. police chases, against city's input on judges*, WASH. POST (Sep. 17, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2025/09/17/house-gop-votes-police-chases>.

²² Information on file with the Committee.

²³ This number is derived from combining reporting from the Washington Post on August 31st and from ABC 7 News on September 17th. See Emma Uber, *Ten Car Chases. Six Crashes. Park Police Have New Rules in Trump's D.C.*, WASH. POST. (Aug. 31, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2025/08/31/park-police-car-chases>; Doug Burgum (@SecretaryBurgum), X (Aug. 23, 2025, 9:22 PM), <https://x.com/SecretaryBurgum/status/1959244734502703264>.

²⁴ *Driver accused of crashing into US Marshals Service vehicle during Park Police chase in DC*, ABC 7 NEWS (Sep. 17, 2025), <https://wjla.com/news/local/washington-dc-northeast-us-marshall-service-vehicle-parked-car-crash-park-police-investigation-injury-high-speed-chase-pursuit-injury-overturned-stolen-vehicle-fake-license-plate>.

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immediate risk.²⁷ It defies reason to endanger the lives of the public, as well as the officers involved, for minor traffic violations like a broken headlight or tinted windows.²⁸ It is evident that the DOI has refused to learn from the organizational meltdown at Lafayette Square, refused to learn from the killing of Bijan Ghaisar, and now, by reinstating the officers involved in the 2017 killing and expanding high-speed pursuit authority,²⁹ again refuses to learn. This continued disregard for oversight and accountability endangers the public and invites foreseeable and preventable tragedy.

Pursuant to Rule X of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee on Natural Resources has broad jurisdiction to conduct oversight on matters related to the DOI and USPP. To inform the Committee's oversight, we request a staff-level briefing from the U.S. Park Police regarding its change in policies, including those prompted by the Administration's recent executive actions.³⁰ Please schedule the briefing as soon as possible but no later than 5:00 p.m. on October 8, 2025. Please be prepared to answer the following questions:

- 1) Under the Administration's new policies, including executive orders 14252, 14231, 14333, and 14339, what specific, new functions will USPP personnel perform and what are the legal authorities used to implement those functions?
 - a) Will USPP personnel arrest, detain, use force, seize property, or destroy personal belongings to comply with the Administration's new policies?
 - b) What specialized training, if any, has USPP personnel received regarding homelessness, mental health crises, and de-escalation?
 - c) What policy will ensure that individuals whose property has been seized or destroyed during encampment clearings are afforded due process?
 - d) What steps have the USPP taken to avoid discriminatory enforcement and irreparable harm against veterans and their property?

²⁵ DC Fire & EMS, *Main Operations Radio Transmission* (Sep. 17, 2025, 11:15:08 AM), <https://openmhz.com/events/68cd97a7eb60582234a8a81e>.

²⁶ According to DC Fire & EMS radio transmissions, Battalion Chief 5, EMS 1, Rescue 1, Medic 17, Truck 15, Engine 26, and AMR 84 were dispatched to the incident. *See Main Operations and Fire Dispatch Radio Transmission* (Sep. 17, 2025, 11:06:01 AM to 11:45:25 AM), <https://openmhz.com/events/68cd9c2deb60582234b09d15>.

²⁷ Emma Uber, *Ten Car Chases. Six Crashes. Park Police Have New Rules in Trump's D.C.*, WASH. POST (Aug. 31, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2025/08/31/park-police-car-chases>.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ Gina Cook, *Park Police Officers Who Shot and Killed Bijan Ghaisar Return to Work*, NBC WASHINGTON (Jan. 14, 2025), <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/northern-virginia/park-police-officers-who-shot-and-killed-bijan-ghaisar-return-to-work/3813617>.

³⁰ *Supra* note 1.

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- e) What are the parameters of interagency coordination that is taking place between the USPP and Metropolitan Police Department, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Homeland Security, or other federal or local law enforcement agencies?
 - f) Which agency or officer of the United States is in charge of all the law enforcement units implementing executive orders 14252, 14231, 14333, and 14339?
 - g) How many DOI personnel have been diverted from the Office of Law Enforcement and Security—including the Law Enforcement Division, Intelligence Division, National Security Division, and Internal Security Division—to comply with the Administration’s new policies?
 - h) Since the expiration of the President’s emergency declaration on September 10, 2025, what legal authority currently authorizes USPP personnel to continue the kind of high-speed pursuits described in Chief Taylor’s August 14, 2025, memorandum?
- 2) Does the USPP intend to incorporate the safeguards identified by the DOJ NIJ and COPS office, including restrictive initiation standards, supervisory authorization, categorical limits on high-risk tactics, structured risk assessment, training and certification requirements, and systematic after-action review?
- a) What specific training and certifications govern USPP personnel authorized to initiate or participate in high-speed pursuits?
 - b) What supervisory oversight and review processes are in place to ensure compliance with the USPP’s revised high-speed pursuit policy?
 - c) Since the effective date of the Administration’s new policies, what is the total number of high-speed pursuits initiated by the USPP?
 - d) Of those, how many of the total number of high-speed pursuits initiated by the USPP were predicated on nonviolent offenses, and how many on violent criminal conduct?
 - e) How many resulted in motor vehicle collisions, injuries, or fatalities involving officers, motorists, or bystanders?
 - f) Since the effective date of the Administration’s new policies, how many high-speed pursuits undertaken by the USPP resulted in injury or death to officers, bystanders, or motorists?
 - g) What is the total estimated dollar value of property damage resulting from USPP high-speed pursuits since the issuance of the revised high-speed pursuit policy?

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- 3) President Trump's executive orders appear to provide no additional funding to comply with their requirements. How much funding has DOI or USPP diverted to comply with the Administration's new policies?
 - a) Which budget line items cover these activities?
 - b) What programs are being reduced to support the new policies?
- 4) The USPP Aviation Unit helicopter, known as Eagle One, is the only aircraft in the District of Columbia capable of conducting life-saving field-to-hospital medevac transports as well as rendering advanced life support (ALS) during transport. Under the 2018 pursuit policy, Eagle One must be "immediately requested" during vehicle pursuits and, in some cases, may continue monitoring even after ground units have terminated.³¹ With the DOI's recent expansion of pursuit authority, Eagle One has been tasked more frequently with pursuit monitoring, reducing its availability for critical medevac operations. How is the DOI ensuring that this lifesaving function is not compromised by the expanded pursuit mission?
 - a) How many instances has Eagle One been diverted from its medevac function to pursuit support since the August 14, 2025, policy change?
 - b) What procedures are in place to prioritize medevac missions over pursuit support when both demands arise?
 - c) Of the total deployments of Eagle One since August 14, 2025, how many were for vehicle pursuits, how many for medevac missions, and how many for other mission types recorded by DOI? Please provide the same breakdown for the 12 months prior to August 14, 2025.
 - d) Has DOI evaluated whether the increased pursuit deployments affect patient outcomes or medevac response times in the National Capital Region? If so, what were the results of that review?

Please contact the Natural Resources Committee Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations minority staff at (202) 225-6065 with any questions about this request. I look forward to your prompt response to this important oversight request.

Sincerely,

³¹ U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Park Police, General Order 2205, Vehicular Pursuits (June 8, 2018), <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/uspp/upload/G-O-2205-Vehicular-Pursuits-rev-2.pdf>.

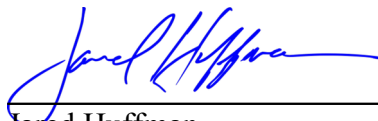
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