

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 9, 2014

The Honorable Jason Chaffetz
Chairman-Elect
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Michael T. McCaul
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairmen:

As the Ranking Members of the Committees on Oversight and Government Reform, the Judiciary, and Homeland Security, we are writing to request that our committees of jurisdiction hold a series of in-depth hearings to examine the Federal response to the multiple, complex issues raised by the tragic deaths of Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York, Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and other unarmed black individuals at the hands of police, as well as the incidents that followed these killings.

In the wake of these incidents, Federal law enforcement agencies have played an important role in addressing community concerns. However, it is clear that existing statutory authority has failed to generate a comprehensive response to divisions between the police and minority communities, with the repetition of tragic, police-involved shootings being all too commonplace.

On Thursday, December 4, the day after a grand jury declined to indict the police officer who used a chokehold to kill Mr. Garner—a tactic banned by the New York City Police Department—House Republican Conference Chairwoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers said there should “absolutely” be hearings. Appearing on national television, she stated:

I think we all have a lot [of] serious questions that need to be addressed, and we need to understand what happened, why this decision was made. I believe I would call for the House to have those hearings so that we can better understand. But we need to be taking action, appropriate action, making sure our local law enforcement have the training, that they're using appropriate force, which I think we all recognize that these are tragedies, and it has raised a lot of questions.¹

Later that day, House Speaker John Boehner echoed Rep. McMorris Rogers' concerns, stating, "There are a lot of unanswered questions that Americans have and, frankly, I have."²

We agree that these troubling events raise grave concerns not only about what happened to these individual unarmed men, but also about what occurred before and after these incidents in the police departments and district attorneys offices that handled their cases. Given the critical need for congressional oversight of these issues, we respectfully request that our three committees work together to develop a detailed agenda for hearings in the coming year on these topics and others:

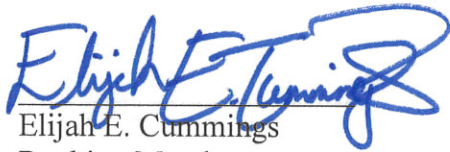
- the policies and procedures governing the use of force by police departments;
- the policies governing police department hiring, training, and outreach practices;
- the guidance for Federal law enforcement agencies regarding the use of race, ethnicity, gender, national origin, religion sexual orientation, or gender identity;
- accountability and transparency policies relating to policing, including data collection, cameras, and civilian complaint review programs;
- the effects of providing military equipment, processes, and training to state and local law enforcement authorities, Federal efforts to improve training, oversight, reporting requirements, and accountability for related military-style equipment, and efforts to improve Federal coordination of these actions;
- Federal efforts to assist State and local law enforcement agencies develop robust training programs designed to help law enforcement avoid civil rights violations;
- the grand jury process, the potential role of outside prosecutors, and other components of the criminal justice system; and
- proposals to help rebuild communities by fostering dialogue and trust between law enforcement and those they serve.

¹ *Morning Joe*, MSNBC (Dec. 4, 2014) (online at <http://www.msnbc.com/morning-joe/watch/gop-rep.--no-one-is-talking-about-shutdown-367111747598>).

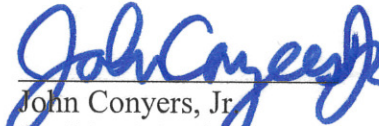
² *Boehner Open to Hearings on Garner's Death*, Politico (Dec. 4, 2014) (online at www.politico.com/story/2014/12/john-boehner-eric-garner-death-113331.html).

We firmly believe that events in Staten Island, New York, Ferguson, Missouri, and elsewhere have fractured the trust of Americans in the integrity of the criminal justice system. The Federal government has a critical role to play in ensuring that all Americans are treated equally before the law, especially by their local police, and it is our responsibility to exercise oversight of the funding and resources that the Federal government allocates to these local jurisdictions. Hearings into these topics will be important early steps on the long road of healing across the country. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

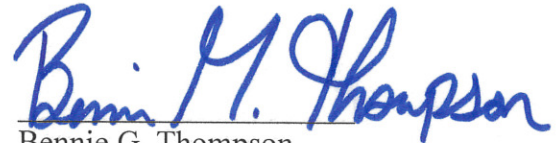
Sincerely,



Elijah E. Cummings
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and
Government Reform



John Conyers, Jr.
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary



Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security