

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 8, 2020

The Honorable Mark Lee Greenblatt
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Greenblatt:

The nation watched with horror as the U.S. Park Police and other federal law enforcement agencies violently removed peaceful protesters and journalists from Lafayette Park to clear the way for a staged photo of Donald Trump in front of St. John's Episcopal Church on June 1, 2020. The Park Police have acknowledged that denying there was any use of tear gas was a mistake and that officers used force to disperse crowds that included "smoke canisters and pepper balls,"¹ and two of officers have been placed on administrative duty as the agency investigates an attack on Australian journalists.² Protesters reported being kicked and punched,³ and the attached photograph shows a Park Police officer chasing a fleeing protestor with a baton beyond the boundaries of Lafayette Park.⁴ The Park Police is also a named defendant in a lawsuit alleging that the constitutional rights of protesters were violated by the Trump Administration's decision to violently clear the park.⁵

I request that the Office of Inspector General (OIG) investigate whether the Park Police's use of force in Lafayette Park complied with applicable law, regulations and agency guidance, including standards set by the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center. The OIG's investigation should extend to actions taken by the Park Police and any other Department of Interior law enforcement agencies involved in responding to protests since the death of George Floyd. It also should examine from where the agency received its directives. In order to facilitate its investigation, I urge the OIG to create a website for people who were targeted by the Park

¹ Press Release, National Park Service, "Statement from United States Park Police acting Chief Gregory T. Monahan about the actions taken over the weekend to protect life and property," June 3, 2020, https://www.nps.gov/subjects/uspp/6_2_20_statement_from_acting_chief_monahan.htm.

² Victoria Sanchez, "Australian journalists 'brutally attacked' by U.S. Park Police while covering DC protest," *WJLA*, June 2, 2020, <https://wjla.com/news/local/australian-journalists-brutally-attacked-while-covering-dc-protest>; 7News, "Scary moment Sunrise reporter Amelia Brace is caught up in US violence," June 1, 2020, <https://7news.com.au/sunrise/on-the-show/scary-moment-as-sunrise-reporter-caught-up-in-us-violence-c-1073136>; see also Attachments, Photograph 2.

³ Dan Zak, et al., "'This can't be happening': An oral history of 48 surreal, violent, biblical minutes in Washington," *Washington Post*, June 2, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/this-cant-be-happening-an-oral-history-of-48-surreal-violent-biblical-minutes-in-washington/2020/06/02/6683d36e-a4e3-11ea-b619-3f9133bbb482_story.html.

⁴ Photograph, Ken Cedeno, *Reuters*, June 1 2020, see attachment, and at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-minneapolis-police-washingtondc/on-the-streets-of-washington-pleas-for-change-met-with-batons-and-rubber-bullets-idUSKBN2392VX>; Attachments, Photograph 1.

⁵ Black Lives Matter, et al. v. Donald J. Trump, et al., 1:20-cv-01469 (D.D.C., 2020), aclu.org/legal-document/black-lives-matter-dc-v-trump.

Police or other law enforcement agencies within the Department to provide statements and photographic or video evidence.

This is not the first time that the use of force by Park Police has come under scrutiny. According to press reports earlier this year, the agency changed its policies regarding use of force and vehicular pursuits following the shooting and death of an unarmed motorist, Bijan Ghaisar, in 2017.⁶ The matter remains under investigation by Virginia prosecutors.⁷ In addition, past OIG reports have identified serious deficiencies within the Park Police related to firearms training and inventory management. In 2013, the OIG described a “theme of inaction and indifference by U.S. Park Police leadership and a lackadaisical attitude toward firearms management,” after finding a “multitude of problems ... [that] ranged from fundamental errors in recordkeeping to glaring nonfeasance by senior command officers.”⁸ A 2008 report found that Park Police, including 7 percent of officers in Washington, D.C., had not taken required semi-annual firearms refresher courses. One officer told the OIG at the time that “no one had requalified on the shotgun for the past two years.”⁹ This documented history of problems adds further urgency to the need to investigate last week’s troubling events.

The First Amendment rights to free speech, peaceful assembly, and free press are the building blocks of all other rights. Any actions by the Park Police to muzzle these rights is an affront to all Americans and should be swiftly addressed.

Thank you for your prompt consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Ron Wyden
U.S. Senator

Raúl M. Grijalva
U.S. Representative

Debra Haaland
U.S. Representative

⁶ Tom Jackman, “Park Police changed their policies on use of force, pursuits after officers chased and killed motorist Bijan Ghaisar,” *Washington Post*, February 7, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/crime-law/2020/02/07/park-police-changed-their-policies-use-force-pursuits-after-officers-chased-killed-motorist-bijan-ghaisar/>.

⁷ Tom Jackman, “Citing lack of information in Bijan Ghaisar killing, Mark Warner places hold on Interior nominee,” *Washington Post*, March 20, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/crime-law/2020/05/20/citing-lack-information-bijan-ghaisar-killing-mark-warner-places-hold-interior-nominee/>.

⁸ Office of Inspector General for the Department of Interior (DOIOIG), “Review of U.S. Park Police Weapons Accountability Program,” (PI-PI-13-0141-I), June 2013, at <https://www.doioig.gov/sites/doioig.gov/files/ReviewOfUSPPWeaponsAccountabilityPublic.pdf>.

⁹ DOIOIG, “Assessment of the U.S. Park Police,” (PI-EV-0001-2007), February 2008, at <https://www.doioig.gov/sites/doioig.gov/files/USPP-Assessment-02-05-08.pdf>.

Attachments

Photograph 1: *Reuters* reported, “Riot police chase a man as they rush protestors to clear Lafayette Park and the area around it across from the White House for President Donald Trump to be able to walk through for a photo opportunity in front of St. John's Episcopal Church, during a rally against the death in Minneapolis police custody of George Floyd, near the White House, in Washington, U.S. June 1, 2020.” (Source: *supra*, note 4).



Photograph 2: This still image from a video shows a U.S. Park Police officer punching a cameraman with an Australian news outlet. The Australian government has called for an investigation of the attack (Source: *supra*, note 2).

