

HENRY C. "HANK" JOHNSON, JR.
4TH DISTRICT, GEORGIA

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TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

SENIOR WHIP

REGION VIII WHIP

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1004

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RAILROADS, PIPELINES, AND

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

NATIONAL SECURITY

ECONOMIC AND CONSUMER POLICY

April 6, 2021

Mr. Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

We write to urge you to issue an executive order to direct the Department of Defense to effectuate the revisions to the "1033 program" found in my legislation, the Stop Militarizing Law Enforcement Act (H.R. 1694), introduced March 9, 2021 in the House of Representatives. My bill would codify commonsense reforms to prevent the transfer of certain excess Department of Defense (DOD) military-grade weaponry to federal, tribal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. We believe that utilizing this same language in an executive order is a reasonable step towards demilitarizing our police forces while preserving the safety of our communities.

Decades of militarization of our nation's law enforcement have led to some police departments looking more like an occupying army than a community-based regulatory arm of state and local government. To date, DOD has transferred more than \$7.4 billion in excess military equipment to over 8,000 federal, tribal, state and local law enforcement agencies across the country. Law enforcement's response to the civil rights demonstrations last summer show irrefutable proof of our police forces' increasing aggression and brutality – images of local police in military vehicles, with military-grade weaponry trained on citizens exercising their constitutional right to peacefully protest.

Studies have shown that the presence of military hardware in untrained hands increases the likelihood of negative outcomes. When a law enforcement officer is armed with a military-style weapon, they are simply more likely to use it. The inappropriate use of such weapons is incentivized by a perverse requirement that to keep the equipment transferred under the 1033 program, the receiving agency must utilize it within one year or it must be returned to DOD. This militarization of our police departments inherently decreases the trust that is crucial to the successful and necessary relationship between these agencies and the communities they are sworn to protect and serve. This program instead blurs the line between local police and an occupying military force.

Although President Obama issued an executive order to limit the transfer of military weapons and equipment, it stopped short of full reform and was ultimately reversed by President Trump in 2017. We believe that the provisions of my bill, the Stop Militarizing Law Enforcement Act, in the form of an executive order is a necessary step to implement commonsense reforms to the 1033 program. Only you, Mr. President, have the power to make this change immediately.

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The language in my legislation has already successfully passed the House as part of the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act in the 116th and 117th Congresses. It would prevent the transfer of equipment contrary to the safety purposes of local policing, such as military weaponry, long-range acoustic devices, grenade launchers, weaponized drones, armored military vehicles, grenades and other explosives. It would also require recipients to certify that they can account for all military weapons and equipment. This bill would prohibit re-gifting from one agency to another and add much-needed requirements to enforce tracking mechanisms that control transfers of the equipment.

During your campaign, you reiterated your commitment to stopping the transfer of weapons of war to local police forces. My legislation not only fixes what is broken but does so without compromising the integrity of the parts of the program that provide integral office and safety equipment to law enforcement agencies.

Our neighborhoods need to be protected, including from dangers posed by the militarization of police. This reasonable step falls squarely within your executive authority as President of the United States. We urge you to exercise this power immediately and sign an executive order that outlines the above before another small town is transformed into a war zone with gifts of grenade launchers and armored military vehicles.

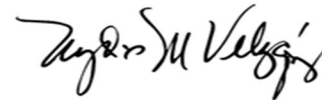
Sincerely,



HENRY C. "HANK" JOHNSON, JR.
Member of Congress



GWEN MOORE
Member of Congress



NYDIA M. VELÁZQUEZ
Member of Congress



ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON
Member of Congress



BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN
Member of Congress



RICK LARSEN
Member of Congress



BRENDA L. LAWRENCE
Member of Congress



BARBARA LEE
Member of Congress



KAREN BASS
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MARK POCAN
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EARL BLUMENAUER
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MARCY KAPTUR
Member of Congress



STEVE COHEN
Member of Congress



ALCEE L. HASTINGS
Member of Congress



CORI BUSH
Member of Congress



DONALD M. PAYNE, JR.
Member of Congress



RAÚL M. GRIJALVA
Member of Congress



JAMES P. McGOVERN
Member of Congress




RASHIDA TLAIB
Member of Congress



DONALD S. BEYER JR.
Member of Congress



PRAMILA JAYAPAL
Member of Congress



ADRIANO ESPAILLAT
Member of Congress



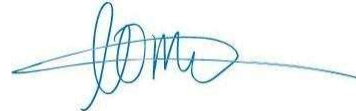
PETER WELCH
Member of Congress



ANTHONY G. BROWN
Member of Congress



JESÚS G. "CHUY" GARCÍA
Member of Congress



ILHAN OMAR
Member of Congress

/S/

NANETTE DIAZ BARRAGÁN
Member of Congress

/S/

ANDRE CARSON
Member of Congress

Supporting Organizations:

American Federation of Teachers
Beyond the Bomb
Campaign for Liberty
Center for Civilians in Conflict
Center for International Policy
Center on Conscience & War, Church World Service
CODEPINK
Coalition to Stop Gun Violence
Common Defense
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach
Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)
Defending Rights & Dissent
The Feminist Foreign Policy Project
Foreign Policy For America
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Gays Against Guns
Government Information Watch

Grassroots Global Justice Alliance
Historians for Peace and Democracy
Human Rights First
Japanese American Citizens League
Jetpac
Jewish Voice for Peace Action
Justice is Global
Justice for Muslims Collective
Massachusetts Peace Action
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Priorities Project at the Institute for Policy Studies
New Internationalism Project at the Institute for Policy Studies
Open the Government
Oxfam America

Pax Christi USA
Peace Action
Poligon Education Fund
Progressive Democrats of America
Project Blueprint
Project On Government Oversight (POGO)
The Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft
Restore the Fourth
ReThinking Foreign Policy
RootsAction.org
Secure Families Initiative
Security Policy Reform Institute (SPRI)
Southern Border Communities Coalition
Stand Up America
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
U.S. Labor Against Racism and War
Veterans for American Ideals, Women's Action for New Directions
World BEYOND War