Date

The Honorable…. The Honorable….

United States Senate United States Senate

Building/room Building/room

Washington, DC 20510 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable…. The Honorable….

United States House of Representatives United States House of Representatives

Building/room Building/room

Washington, DC 20515 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senators \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and Congressmen \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_:

We write to express our strong support of the goals of the policing reform bills now before the House and the Senate. For over a decade, state and local governments have been reducing incarceration, reforming sentencing laws, diverting justice-involved individuals with mental health and substance use disorders into treatment, systematically reducing the collateral consequences of a criminal record, using data-driven solutions to implement programs and practices designed to improve outcomes for individuals returning to the community from prison and jail, and seeking to reduce racial disparities across the justice system. We are proud of the work of our states, counties, cities and townships have done to improve fairness in the justice system and to reduce crime.

The death of George Floyd touched the hearts of so many Americans and exposed how much more our justice systems must change for all Americans to be treated with fairness and dignity in everyday interactions with the police, in court, in jail, in prison, in treatment and in their return to the community. The state and local governments we represent offer full support for bipartisan legislation that is aggressive in driving a change in policing culture, that builds on the reforms already underway in communities across the nation, that is fair, and that continues the constructive partnership that now exists between the Department of Justice and state and local partners.

However, we are concerned that the policing reform bills introduced in both chambers rely almost entirely on penalties to the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (Byrne JAG) and COPS Hiring programs for spurring state and local government action. Not only will this approach decimate the hundreds of important reforms and programs currently supported by Byrne JAG in communities across the country, but the penalties will be wholly ineffective in achieving the goals in these bills. See fact sheet attached.

The nation’s policing reform agenda cannot, and should not, rely entirely on penalties to the Byrne JAG program. We strongly encourage all new requirements to be fully funded and the Department of Justice given responsibility for streamlining reporting and removing as many barriers to compliance as possible. The new funds should be by formula, to the extent possible, to prevent local law enforcement agencies from having to spend time writing numerous federal grant applications.

The Byrne JAG program can play this role with strong established pathways for funds to all states and many localities. We believe a new fund within Byrne JAG to support new training requirements is a sensible approach and could be expanded to address other requirements. Attached you will find additional information related to the impact of requirements in policing reform legislative proposals in Congress.

We thank you for considering our concerns and welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues in more detail at your convenience.

Sincerely