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June 3, 2020

The Honorable William Barr
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Barr,

In the wake of the recent tragic deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, Americans are rightfully demanding justice and accountability. To that end, I write to urge you to use your authority as the nation's top law enforcement officer to root out misconduct in local police departments and to help restore trust between these departments and the communities they serve.

When the Department of Justice has reason to believe that local police departments have engaged in systemic misconduct that violates the Constitution or federal law, it has a proven track record of using pattern-or-practice reviews to investigate. If misconduct is established, the Department of Justice may act on that information by entering into a consent decree requiring court-enforced reforms.

Unfortunately, news reports indicate that the Department of Justice has walked away from pattern-or-practice reviews in recent years. Additionally, the Department of Justice implemented a policy change in November 2018 that placed tighter restrictions on the use of consent decrees, making it more difficult to pursue reforms where they are needed. I ask that you immediately resume the robust use of pattern-or-practice reviews and reinstate a policy that allows greater latitude for officials to enter into consent decrees.

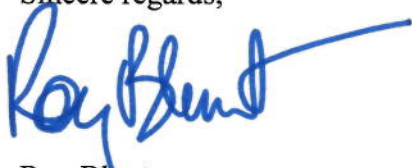
Missouri provides an example of how valuable these tools can be. Following the unrest that occurred in response to the deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson and Anthony Lamar Smith in the City of St. Louis, three St. Louis-area police departments underwent comprehensive reviews by the Department of Justice to examine police department practices and law enforcement responses to protests. The Department of Justice's actions included a pattern-or-practice review of the Ferguson Police Department, which led to a consent decree to address unlawful police practices.

St. Louis-area law enforcement and community leaders have worked tirelessly to address community fear and anger since the civil unrest in 2014. There is more work to be done, but there is a foundation for continued progress that is built on a full accounting of past violations and detailed recommendations for reform.

I have seen firsthand how the federal government can play an important role in addressing failures in the local justice system, rebuilding trust in police departments, and restoring confidence in government institutions. I am not advocating for any action that would allow for federal control of local departments or place undue burdens on them. We need to be mindful of concerns about federal overreach that would be counterproductive to implementing needed reforms at the local level. However, these principles can coexist with policies that give the Department of Justice the ability to address injustice in full measure.

I appreciate your attention and consideration. Your leadership is indispensable as the federal government responds to unlawful actions across the nation and upholds justice and the rule of law.

Sincere regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Roy Blunt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Roy Blunt
United States Senator