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February 2, 2026

Dear Member of Congress:

We, the undersigned board members and task force co-chairs of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, write to express our horror, grief, and outrage at the escalating violence and lawlessness carried out by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), particularly Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP), targeting communities of color.

When it comes to DHS funding, Congress faces a choice: continue funding agencies that operate with impunity and terrorize our communities, or finally exercise its constitutional responsibility to stop the harm.

The spate of recent killings by federal agents in American cities, including those in Minneapolis, is the foreseeable result of this administration's racially biased, anti-immigrant agenda, which most recently has channeled its hate against Somali and Haitian communities. And it is fueled by colossal enforcement budgets, incompetent and corrupt leadership, sweeping authorities that invite abuse, and a lack of accountability when federal officers violate civil rights.

For the communities we represent, this moment is not unprecedented. The federal government has repeatedly justified civil and human rights violations in the name of "national security," at times later acknowledging the profound harm inflicted. For example:

- Native communities have endured generations of violence and criminalization, including targeting in recent years by DHS for peacefully protecting water and land;
- Chinese immigrant workers historically faced a series of overtly racist laws and violence, and recently following COVID-19, faced allegations of espionage through DOJ's "China Initiative";
- Mexicans and Mexican Americans were deported and repatriated *en masse* in the 1930s, and experience ongoing racial profiling and human rights abuses by DHS agents along the border;
- People of Japanese American descent, including U.S. citizens, were forced into internment camps during World War II;
- Government workers suspected of being LGBTQ+ were purged during the Lavender Scare;
- Black communities and civil rights leaders were consistently targeted with violence and criminalization for generations, from COINTELPRO through today's "black supremacist extremist" designation; and
- Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian communities have been persistently subjected to heavy surveillance and detention since 9/11.

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In every era, the federal government told communities of color and the broader public that these measures were necessary for economic and/or defense security. History proved otherwise, and it will again. Congress must not continue to repeat the mistakes of the past.

DHS Funding Has Been Expanded at the Expense of Our Communities

Last year, Congress provided a staggering \$170 billion in supplemental funding for immigration enforcement and border security. ICE received \$75 billion, in addition to its base budget of \$10 billion a year, effectively tripling its size for the next four years—and making it the largest law enforcement agency in history. Congress also gave tens of billions more to CBP for staffing, infrastructure, and technology. These funds have drastically increased the enforcement footprint nationwide, and they were provided without any enforceable, meaningful civil rights protections.

At the same time, that funding did not come from nowhere. It came at the expense of **critical programs and social supports that our communities rely on for safety, stability, and opportunity**. To make room for these massive increases in enforcement funding, Congress cut or reduced funding for essential priorities, including:

- **Health care access and affordability**, particularly for low-income families and elders;
- **Nutrition assistance and food security programs**, increasing hunger and instability;
- **Housing stability and homelessness prevention**, deepening displacement and insecurity;
- **Family supports and childcare benefits**, undermining economic stability for caregivers; and
- **Education, disaster response, and workforce development**, weakening long-term community resilience.

Congress chose to disinvest in the basic needs of all American communities and especially communities of color, while dramatically expanding the capacity of ICE and CBP to surveil, detain, and use force with virtually no accountability. Taxpayer dollars are now being used to deploy roving groups of masked federal agents into residential neighborhoods, carrying out enforcement actions that have inflicted profound harm on communities of color, including:

- **Warrantless arrests and investigative stops**, even in homes, violating Fourth Amendment protections;
- **Family separations and the detention of children and caregivers**, causing lasting trauma;
- **Racial profiling stops** based on race, language, accent, occupation, or location;
- **Intimidation of entire neighborhoods**, creating fear that keeps people from work, school, houses of worship, and medical care;
- **Surveillance and other tech-fueled authoritarian tactics** used to track, document, and suppress dissent;
- **Suppression of civic participation and intimidation of legal observers and journalists**, to deter people from voting, organizing, or engaging as protected by the First Amendment; and
- **Deaths and serious injuries caused by federal agents**, with little transparency or accountability.

Given the scale of this supplemental funding and the documented pattern of abuses that have followed, Congress must not only withhold further appropriations but also **revoke and rescind previously enacted funds that have not yet been obligated or expended**. Congress should immediately claw back unspent enforcement funds provided through last year's reconciliation legislation, including funds allocated to

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ICE and CBP for detention expansion, surveillance, and interior enforcement. Taxpayer dollars that are enabling unconstitutional conduct, racial profiling, and deadly enforcement must be redirected toward programs that actually support the safety, stability, and well-being of our communities.

Surveillance, Data Weaponization, and Threats to Democracy

We are deeply alarmed by DHS's expanding use of surveillance technologies and the weaponization of personal data. ICE has exploited improperly-obtained, government-held data, including Social Security, tax, and health information, and commercially-obtained data, to surveil, track, and intimidate individuals in our communities. This administration then weaponizes this data by building national citizenship and master databases to target immigrants, people of color, political dissidents, and other groups they disfavor.

Additionally, DHS received at least \$16 billion to procure new surveillance technologies like facial recognition, automated license plate readers, social media scanners, and tracking technologies that enables our government to track, monitor, and surveil people in their homes, businesses, schools, and places of worship—all without meaningful oversight. Indiscriminate surveillance spreads fear, supercharges racial profiling, threatens individual freedom, and dissuades people from seeking out essential services. These practices are direct threats to our democracy and legal protections.

Federal officials, including Attorney General Pam Bondi, the highest law enforcement official in the country, recently have demanded access to voter rolls and other sensitive personal data under the guise of “election integrity,” representing a dangerous escalation of authoritarian tactics of suppression. Our communities know from history that such efforts coincide with voter suppression, racialized targeting, and false narratives of fraud.

Allowing DHS and its components to access or misuse civic and voter data risks turning immigration enforcement into a backdoor voter suppression apparatus. Any agency that terrorizes communities, surveils them without cause, and operates without accountability cannot be trusted with sensitive voter data.

Civil Rights–Based Solutions Are Required

ICE and CBP do not need any more money. Instead, in the context of this bill, Congress needs to:

1. Ensure that agents can be held accountable in court for violations of law or rights;
2. Increase agent transparency, by eliminating face masks and covering of license plates, and requiring visible ID;
3. Curtail surveillance abuses and data weaponization, including AI-driven technologies like facial recognition and other biometric tools;
4. End racial and ethnic profiling;
5. End sensitive locations arrests, family detention, private detention contracts, and 287(g) agreements;
6. Reaffirm the Fourth Amendment's prohibition on arrests without a judicial warrant;
7. Stop militarized roving patrols and mass roundups in Minneapolis and other areas; and
8. Require public reporting by DHS on uses of force, with independent investigations that work with state and local authorities.

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This list is not exhaustive, because ICE and CBP must be overhauled. When it comes to funding, Congress should be boosting things like health care, nutrition, housing, and education instead.

Our Next Steps

We will not be silent as communities of color are placed under siege. We will organize, mobilize, and bring the full weight of our communities to bear to demand accountability, protect voting rights, and advance civil rights-based solutions.

You, Congress, have the power to stop this. We will continue to fight DHS funding and demand accountability. This moment demands courage, not convenience.

Our communities are watching. History is watching. We urge you to stop the funding, demand accountability, and choose justice.

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
Human Rights Campaign
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
NAACP
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF)
National Action Network (NAN)
National Association of Social Workers
National Coalition on Black Civic Participation
National Council of Negro Women (NCNW)
National Education Association (NEA)
National Fair Housing Alliance
National Health Law Program
National Hispanic Media Coalition
National Immigration Law Center
National Organization for Women
National Urban League
National Women's Law Center
People For the American Way
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Sikh Coalition
Southern Poverty Law Center