



June 2, 2015

## Oppose FY 2016 Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Bill

Dear Representative:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States, we write to express our strong opposition to the funding levels set out in the Fiscal Year 2016 Commerce, Justice, and Science (CJS) Appropriations bill (H.R. 2578). The House proposal significantly underfunds agencies, programs, and services that are critical to ensuring that the justice system works, and that the civil rights of all Americans are upheld. We urge you and your colleagues to reject it.

**The Leadership Conference opposes the bill because of significant concerns including: major cuts to funding for civil rights enforcement; cuts to the Census Bureau; and inadequate resources for improving relations between communities and police and vital criminal justice assistance grants. Our top-line concerns with the FY 2016 CJS appropriations bill are outlined below:**

- **Census:** H.R. 2578 cuts the Census Bureau's budget request by \$387 million, or 26 percent, a reduction that primarily will affect planning for the 2020 Census at a critical point in the decennial cycle and that is dangerously low. This funding must be restored. The Leadership Conference is also opposed to any amendments that would further reduce funding for the Census Bureau in order to pay for other programs within the CJS bill. Finally, we oppose any efforts to make responses to the American Community Survey (ACS) voluntary, to eliminate the survey, or to further reduce the funding level for the ACS.

- **Department of Justice:**

- **Civil Rights Division:** The bill fails to provide appropriate funding for the Civil Rights Division, which plays an integral role in upholding the civil rights of all Americans, including voting rights and addressing unconstitutional policing practices. The Leadership Conference urges the House of Representatives to fully fund the Civil Rights Division at the level requested in the President's budget request, which is \$175 million. Given the ongoing demands on the Civil Rights Division, flat line fiscal support along the lines of the underfunded FY 2015 allocations are inadequate.

- **Community Relations Services:** H.R. 2578 funds the Community Relations Service (CRS) at \$1.446 million below the President's budget request. CRS is responsible for providing assistance to state and local communities in the prevention and resolution of tension, violence, and civil disorders relating to actual or perceived discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin. In recent months, CRS has played a critical role in helping the Department of

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Justice respond to growing tensions between communities of color and the police in communities across the nation, from Ferguson, Missouri to Baltimore, MD. CRS has been a first responder during protests and worked with community leaders and police to assist in managing conflict during subsequent investigations.

○ **Criminal Justice funding:**

- The FY 2016 appropriations bill eliminates outright the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) and the hiring grants program. Given recent events, it is astonishing that the House Appropriations committee would vote to eliminate funding for an office that focuses on improving relations between police departments and their communities.
- The funding bill provides only half of the President's request for the Body Worn Camera program budget request of \$30 million, even though there is bipartisan agreement that the federal government should undertake efforts to fully support pilot body worn camera programs.
- The bill also eliminates funding for important programs to improve policing, including \$5 million for incentive grants to increase diversity in law enforcement, \$20 million for training and technical assistance, and \$20 million for collaborative reform programs that provide technical assistance to law enforcement agencies to assess issues that affect police community relations.
- H.R. 2578 would also provide \$11 million to the U.S. Marshals Service and \$145 million to the Bureau of Prisons for construction or acquisition of new prisons. The Leadership Conference opposes the expansion of the federal prison system. The Department of Justice reported that the federal prison population declined by 4,800 in FY 14, and projects further decreases of 12,200 over the next two fiscal years. It makes no sense for the House to fund construction of unneeded prison beds.

○ **Office of Justice Programs/State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance:** H.R. 2578 cuts an additional \$225.6 million from FY 2015 funding levels. These cuts will impact programming designed to reduce recidivism, increase procedural fairness, build community trust in the juvenile and criminal justice systems, and increase access to the courts for indigent defendants.

○ **State and local law enforcement activities:** We oppose the \$326 million cut from FY 2015 for state and local law enforcement activities. This cut eliminates dedicated funding for the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). The NIJ focuses on important research and evaluation programs that could include social science research on indigent defense, human trafficking, as well as demonstration experiments in reentry and probation. It would also impact BJS programs data collection and analysis capabilities. This data collection is critical to providing transparency and accountability within the criminal justice system.

○ **Juvenile Justice Programs:** The bill also undercuts recent bipartisan efforts for juvenile justice reform. The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 provides funding to states that comply with federal safeguards designed to

protect youth in the justice system. It contains *zero funding* for Title II, which is the main funding vehicle for the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (JJDP). This would result in no federal dollars for prevention programs, no resources for evidence-based interventions for at-risk youth, and no core protections for kids in the system. In contrast, President Obama's FY 2016 budget proposal included \$339.4 million for critical juvenile justice programs, including \$70 million for Title II programs under the JJDP. These programs provide community-based services to address the underlying issues causing delinquency and will help to ensure that children who commit status offenses — or misdemeanors that only a child can commit, such as skipping school, running away, breaking curfew, and possession or use of alcohol — are not punished excessively and inappropriately. Without them, more children would be locked up, sometimes in adult facilities, increasing the likelihood that a brush with the law will become a regular occurrence.

- **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission:**
  - We strongly support the President's FY 2016 request of \$373.1 million for the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The EEOC is the leading government agency charged with enforcing federal laws that make it illegal to discriminate against a job applicant or an employee because of the person's race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information. While there has been much progress since the agency first opened its doors 50 years ago, there is still much work to do. The CJS appropriations bill cuts approximately \$8.6 million from the President's budget request for the EEOC. The recent decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in *EEOC v. Abercrombie & Fitch* affirms the vital role that the EEOC plays in upholding our national value of freedom of religion. Nearly 25 years after the Americans with Disabilities Act, the EEOC achieved a landmark \$240 million jury award against Henry's Turkey for a group of individuals with intellectual disabilities. This budget request will allow the agency to continue this critical work.
- **Legal Services Corporation:** The dramatic cuts to funding for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) in H.R. 2578, which represent a 20 percent decrease from current levels, will drastically impact the LSC. The LSC provides civil legal aid for low-income Americans in the nation, including veterans, elderly victims of foreclosure, women and children trying to escape domestic violence, and military families. While the size of the population eligible for LSC-funded services is at an all-time high, LSC's funding is near an all-time low in inflation adjusted dollars. The CJS Appropriations eliminates \$75 million from the already meager FY 2015 allocation of \$375 million, and comes in \$152 million below the President's budget request for \$452 million. This bill cuts LSC's funding to the lowest level in 15 years.
- **U.S. Commission on Civil Rights:** We recommend restoring funding for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights to \$9.4 million as recommended by the President in his budget. The once called "the Conscience of the Nation," requires adequate funding to meet its historic role of drawing attention to key civil rights challenges faced by the nation, including sex trafficking and policing practices.



For these reasons, we oppose the funding allocations set out by the FY 2016 CJS appropriations bill and urge you to oppose it. Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact Emily Chatterjee, Senior Counsel at (202) 466-3648.

Sincerely,



Wade Henderson  
President & CEO



Nancy Zirkin  
Executive Vice President