

David Bernhardt  
Secretary of the Interior  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C St NW  
Washington, DC 20240

**\*\*Submitted via email\*\***

June 4, 2020

Dear Secretary Bernhardt,

We write with deep concern about the recent actions of the United States Park Police during ongoing protests in Washington, DC. Like protests around the country, those in our nation's capital are calls for justice for the Black community. We grieve and condemn the recent horrific acts of violence and intimidation against Black people in our country, and the June 1 expulsion of peaceful protesters from in and near Lafayette Park, a national park unit, which was both unprovoked and unnecessarily aggressive. We are appalled by this injustice. The Park Police have become a face of violence in the streets of our nation's capital. On behalf of our millions of members and supporters across the country, we ask that you provide explanations for the Park Police's use of force to clear a public space where people were exercising their constitutional rights.

Lafayette Park has a painful and evolving history. It has been a graveyard, a slave market and an encampment for soldiers. Fredrick Douglass's Freedman's Bank was once located on its borders and Dolly Madison's house still stands adjacent to the park.<sup>1</sup> As with all other sites under National Park Service jurisdiction, the agency is tasked with not only protecting the place and its history, but ensuring the public is able to access, learn, experience and enjoy them.

This is not the first public protest to take place in this space or in the national parks of Washington, DC, and it will not be the last. From the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963 to the Women's March in 2017, and all the gatherings large and small in between, people have come to the national parks in our nation's capital to let their voices be heard and push our country along the path to form a more perfect union. National parks in the District of Columbia have been and must continue to be safe spaces for protestors exercising their constitutional rights.

It has been devastating to watch the Park Police stray so far from the vision they outline for themselves – providing a safe haven for enjoyment of parks without fear, serving people with respect and dignity, and ensuring citizens are free to safely exercise their First Amendment rights of free speech and assembly.<sup>2</sup> We do not believe that launching tear gas, flash bangs and rubber bullets at peaceful protestors are the actions of the “premier police organization within the Federal Government” the Park Police claim they are striving to be. These actions make clear that the Park Police are simply another example of the larger systemic issues across law enforcement and they must be held accountable.

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<sup>1</sup> “Explore the Northern Trail (Lafayette Park),” National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/whho/planyourvisit/explore-the-northern-trail.htm>. Accessed June 2, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> “Mission Statement,” United States Park Police, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/uspp/mission-statement.htm>. Accessed June 2, 2020.

These actions raise a series of questions about the current mission and operating standards of the Park Police:

- The Park Police have protected protestors and public spaces at numerous gatherings in the past. What has changed in the agency's mission or guidelines that permitted the use of tear gas and rubber bullets on people obeying the law?
- Multiple law enforcement agencies have been involved in activities related to the current protests. Where does the Park Police fall in the hierarchy of these fellow agencies and how does or should their role differ from that of the Secret Service, Metropolitan Police Department and other relevant agencies?
- Does the National Park Service or the Department of the Interior have the authority to remove Park Police from participating in activities that are antithetical to the mission of the Park Police or the Park Service?
- What criteria does the Park Police use to authorize the use of helicopter assistance in law enforcement activities? What level of helicopter assistance was utilized by the Park Police during recent protests?
- As related to the activities of May 31 and June 1, what level of resistance justified the use of Defensive Tactics as defined in General Order 3615 – Use of Force?
- As related to the activities of May 31 and June 1, how is the Park Police utilizing incident reports stemming from the well documented widespread uses of force beyond Cooperate and Contact as defined in General Order 3615 –Use of Force?
- As related to the activities of June 1, what levels of the official chain of command<sup>3</sup> participated in the decision to use Park Police to violently move peaceful protestors from Lafayette Park and adjacent areas of H Street NW?
- As related to the activities of June 1, were there any efforts made to obscure that it was Park Police that were actively participating in the violent enforcement activities?
- Following the activities of June 1, have there been any changes to mutual aid agreements that the Park Police agreed to among regional law enforcement entities?
- Does the Park Police have an established and public after-action analysis process?
- Does the Park Police have a method for the public to file a citizen complaint or commendation?

The Park Police may be only one law enforcement agency among many in the context of the protests in Washington, DC. But they are also ambassadors for one of the most beloved agencies in the federal government, the National Park Service. And just as our national parks are held to the highest standards, so too must be all those who wear a badge in their name, as well as those who lead the Interior Department.

The Black community and people of color deserve better. Our national parks deserve better. The public deserves better. And our democracy deserves better.

Sincerely,

Alaska Wilderness League  
American Society of Landscape Architects  
Appalachian Trail Conservancy

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<sup>3</sup> "Office of the Chief," United States Park Police, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/uspp/office-of-the-chief.htm> . Accessed June 3, 2020.

Atomic Heritage Foundation  
Born Free USA  
Caldera Action  
California Invasive Plant Council  
California Outdoor Engagement Coalition  
Camp Ocean Pines  
Cascade Forest Conservancy  
Center for Biological Diversity  
Children & Nature Network  
Christian Council of Delmarva  
Clean Water Action  
CM Communication International, INC.  
Coalition to Protect America's National Parks  
Defenders of Wildlife  
Discover Your Northwest  
Earthjustice  
Earthworks  
Endangered Species Coalition  
Environmental Action Committee of West Marin (EAC)  
Environmental Protection Information Center  
Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics, and Ecology (FUSEE)  
Friends of Blackwater, Inc.  
Friends of Fort McHenry  
Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens  
Friends of the Blue Ridge Parkway  
Friends of the Earth  
Glen Canyon Conservancy  
Grand Canyon Trust  
Great Old Broads for Wilderness  
GreenLatinos  
Harambee House, Inc. / Citizens for Environmental Justice (CFEJ)  
Harpers Ferry Park Association  
International Fund for Animal Welfare  
International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute  
Katmai Conservancy  
Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center  
Latino Outdoors  
League of Conservation Voters  
Los Padres ForestWatch  
Maryland United for Peace and Justice  
National Ocean Protection Coalition  
National Parks Conservation Association  
National Wildlife Federation  
Native Plant Conservation Campaign  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
NatureBridge  
Next 100 Coalition  
Northcoast Environmental Center

Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides  
NY4WHALES  
Ocean Conservancy  
Ocean Conservation Research  
Oregon Wild  
OVEC-Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition  
Point Reyes National Seashore Association  
Public Lands Alliance  
Resource Renewal Institute  
Roberts & Associates  
Seven Circles Foundation  
Sierra Club  
Soda Mountain Wilderness Council  
Southern Environmental Law Center  
Southwest Environmental Center  
Ten Strands  
The Nuestra Tierra Conservation Project  
The Lands Council  
The Praxis Project  
The Trust for Public Land  
The Wilderness Society  
Tuell Consulting  
Turtle Island Restoration Network  
Western Environmental Law Center  
Western Watersheds Project  
Wilburforce Foundation  
Wild Hope  
WildEarth Guardians  
Youth Outside

Cc: William Barr, U.S. Attorney General