

**Statement of the Honorable Mary Gay Scanlon, Vice Chair of the Committee
on the Judiciary, for the Members' Day Hearing on the Fiscal Year 2020
Budget Resolution Before the House Committee on the Budget**

March 6, 2019

Chairman Yarmuth, and Ranking Member Womack – It is an honor to appear before you today as Vice Chair of the Committee on the Judiciary. I am pleased to discuss the Committee's priorities for the fiscal year 2020 budget resolution.

As you know, the Judiciary Committee's jurisdiction covers a vast array of federal agencies and programs with responsibility for federal law enforcement, our nation's immigration system, the administration of the federal criminal and civil justice systems, and the encouragement of innovation in the arts and sciences, among other matters.

The work of the Department of Justice, the federal courts, the Department of Homeland Security, and all the other federal entities and programs the Judiciary Committee oversees is vital to safeguarding the values upon which our country was built. While there may be disagreements with, and indeed sometimes sharp criticism of, certain agencies, their leadership, or priorities, I believe we can all agree on the fundamental importance of their mission. I urge the Budget Committee to fund these critical programs and agencies at levels appropriate to accomplish their important missions.

I would like to use the remainder of my time to highlight several funding priorities that I hope your Committee will consider favorably.

To begin, we recommend funding the Executive Office for Immigration Review at a level that will address the overwhelming backlog of immigration court cases. Perhaps no other issue has caused more passionate debate in Congress than that of our country's broken immigration system. I trust we can all agree that regardless of how we

believe immigration policies must be reformed, fair and timely adjudication of immigration cases is necessary both to ensure access to justice and effective enforcement of our nation's laws. Therefore, we strongly recommend the Office for Immigration Review is funded at a level appropriate to effectively administer the laws Congress has passed.

In addition, there are a number of criminal justice matters in need of Congress' attention. First, the Congress must address the scourge of gun violence afflicting the nation. In a given year, 120,000 Americans are shot during murders, assaults, suicides, unintentional shootings, or through police action, resulting in 35,000 gun related deaths. On any given day, an average of 34 Americans are murdered on account of gun violence. The House has already demonstrated a commitment to addressing this epidemic of gun violence through the passage of H.R. 8, the "Bipartisan Background Checks Act," and H.R. 1112, the "Enhanced Background Checks Act." Congress, however, can and must do more to ensure guns do not fall into the hands of those who would commit violent acts.

To that end, we should not only fund the Justice Department's relevant agencies and programs at appropriate levels to carry out their missions, but increase funding for the investigations and inspections functions of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, in addition to any further resources that may be allocated to the processing of applications for regulated firearms and related devices.

Second, Congress must do more to address criminal justice reform. In December, Congress passed a bipartisan measure—the First Step Act—to initiate urgently needed reforms to our nation's criminal justice system. Many states have already adopted policies to address both the injustices and fiscal concerns raised by incarceration. Reducing federal incarceration and providing prisoners with rehabilitative programs to end recidivism is not just a moral necessity, but will also generate substantial cost savings. Criminal justice reform, if pursued aggressively and funded at appropriate levels, will save money which

can be invested into other initiatives to reduce crime and make our communities safer. Congress should fully fund the First Step Act to further aid the Federal Bureau of Prison efforts to expand its recidivism reduction programs.

There are also a number of civil justice matters to which I would like to call attention here today. In February, the 9/11 Victims Compensation Fund announced it would be unable to continue fully compensating current and future claimants, and that responders and survivors would receive a 50% cut to awards for pending claims and a 70% cut to awards for future claims.

Congress originally enacted the Fund as an alternative to litigation and to compensate physical injuries and death suffered in the immediate aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks. Congress subsequently expanded the fund to include the thousands of responders and survivors that have become ill or died following their exposure to the toxic debris and chemicals released by the attack. In order to correct this injustice, Chairman Nadler intends to report H.R. 1327, the “Never Forget the Heroes: Permanent Authorization of the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund Act,” which would authorize funding for the VCF necessary to continue funding through FY 2090. We need to ensure sufficient funding levels so that first responders, survivors, and their families do not face financial ruin due to the ongoing adverse health effects caused by 9/11 attacks.

Finally, I want to highlight the funding needs of the Legal Services Corporation, an agency with which I worked for over 30 years before coming to Congress. LSC – which provides civil legal representation to Americans living at or near poverty – has enjoyed bi-partisan support since it was created in 1974. LSC funds legal aid organizations that cover every county in every state, returning tax dollars back to communities; protecting the most vulnerable – veterans, the elderly, and domestic violence victims. Civil legal aid is one of the best anti-poverty programs our country has as it protects individuals from losing housing

or veterans benefits, or from abusive relationships, so that they can remain healthy and productive workers, and contribute to our communities and economy. Civil legal aid stimulates economic growth, saving millions of dollars that would otherwise be spent on emergency shelters, health care, foster care, and law enforcement.

These are only a few of the vital programs within the Judiciary Committee's jurisdiction. I recognize that your Committee has many competing interests and I trust you appreciate the important work of the many federal agencies and programs entities overseen by the Judiciary Committee and their critical role in ensuring the constitutional rights and procedural safeguards that have protected our democracy for over two centuries. Thank you.