

**STATEMENT OF
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BEFORE THE
HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
ON
ACTIONS TAKEN TO PROTECT LIFE AND PROPERTY
JULY 28, 2020**

Good morning Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop, and members of the Committee. My name is Gregory Monahan and I am the acting Chief of the United States Park Police.

The United States Park Police, established in 1791, is the oldest uniformed Federal law enforcement agency in the United States. An urban law enforcement unit, the United States Park Police provides law enforcement services to designated areas administered by the National Park Service (NPS), primarily in the Washington, DC, New York City, NY and San Francisco, CA metropolitan areas, protecting the safety of visitors and park resources.

In the District of Columbia, the Park Police has primary jurisdiction over Federal parkland, including the National Mall and Lafayette Park. Each year the Park Police facilitates hundreds of First Amendment demonstrations and special events in the Washington DC area, some with permits and some without, to ensure the safety of the public and the protection of national cultural assets. In facilitating these demonstrations, the Park Police partners and coordinates with numerous public safety and protection agencies within the National Capital Area of Region 1.

In the days following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, videos from witnesses and CCTV became public and ultimately led to protests in cities throughout the United States and abroad. The Nation's capital became a focal point for demonstrators. One of the most highly concentrated areas of protest occurred in and around Lafayette Park, which sits on the north side of the White House on H Street between 15th and 17th Streets, NW. Lafayette Park is recognized as a public forum for freedom of assembly and speech. The Park Police is accustomed to managing large, and on occasion unruly public demonstrations and spontaneous events at the Park, as well as throughout the National Capital Area of Region 1. In these instances, we have an obligation to protect the safety of peaceful demonstrators, maintain law and order, and keep our law enforcement officers safe.

Unfortunately, beginning on Friday, May 29, 2020, public use of Lafayette Park became a danger to public safety, good order, and health, and was inconsistent with the preservation of

NPS resources. Violent demonstrations occurred between May 29 and June 1 and included projectiles aimed at law enforcement officers that included bricks, rocks, caustic liquids, water bottles, lit flares, fireworks, and 2x4 sections of wood. Protestors were also physically combative with members of law enforcement. These violent protestors caused injuries to over 50 officers of the United States Park Police. Of those, 11 officers were transported to the hospital and three were ultimately admitted.

The unprecedented and sustained nature of the violence and destruction associated with some of the activities in Lafayette Park and surrounding park areas immediate and adjacent to the White House required de-escalation. Late Saturday evening of May 30 into Sunday morning May 31, the United States Park Police, in consultation with the United States Secret Service, decided to temporarily restrict access to Lafayette Park and the adjacent streets and sidewalks by ordering and installing no-scale fencing across the north side of the Park. The installation of the fence would meet the resource protection and de-escalation goals while enabling First Amendment activity to continue.

Once we made the decision to order the no-scale fence, the installation of the fence was dependent on two factors: the first was that we were required to have sufficient resources on scene to safely clear Lafayette Park and H Street; and the second was that the fencing had to be present at the Park. Both of these requirements were not met until later in the day on Monday, June 1. Once the fencing arrived, an on-the-ground assessment of the violence and danger presented by the crowd led to the clearing of the Park and the installation of the fence.

The United States Park Police has faced a significant amount of criticism on the heels of the June 1 operation. However, the installation of the no-scale fence on the north side of Lafayette Park was a key tactic that served to greatly reduce the violent behavior of bad actors. The Park Police takes seriously its commitment to protect the public and our Nation's parklands and cultural assets, and the decision to install the fencing was in furtherance of that commitment. Fortunately, that decision had the intended effect – violence dropped dramatically on June 2 and afterward in that area and First Amendment activities continued.

I believe the vast majority of law enforcement officers throughout this country are dedicated public servants who pursue this noble calling with courage in their hearts and decency in their actions. On the whole, the United States Park Police acted with tremendous restraint in the face of severe violence from a large group of bad actors who caused 50 of my officers to seek medical attention. Our actions as an agency on June 1 centered around public safety and the safety of my officers.

I look forward to answering any questions the Committee has and I thank you for the opportunity to testify today.