



Chairman Hal Rogers

House Committee on Appropriations

Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Request: U.S. Department of Justice
February 24, 2016
Opening Statement As Prepared

Thank you for yielding, Mr. Chairman. I join you in welcoming Attorney General Lynch to the Committee as we discuss the Department of Justice's (DOJ) budget request for Fiscal Year (FY) 2017. I would also like to echo my support for the men and women under your charge who support our country's counter-terrorism efforts; who protect us from hostile foreign intelligence agencies and espionage; who work tirelessly to beat back against the constant barrage of domestic and foreign cyber-threats; and who risk life and limb to put dangerous criminals here at home behind bars. The importance of these efforts to our national security and our economy cannot be overstated.

This year's DOJ request totals \$29.5 billion, constituting a three percent increase over the FY16 enacted levels. This Committee has a responsibility to prioritize the administration of justice and support for our men and women in law enforcement, and I believe we can do so without spending away our financial integrity. Though it highlights some important programs, this budget request doesn't reflect the very real budget constraints facing Congress. I look forward to working with you to meet this challenge together.

That being said, I am specifically concerned about a few of your requests:

First, I am disappointed to see that your proposal slashes Byrne Justice Assistance Grants by \$39.6 million. I have heard from law enforcement around the country about the importance of this flexible grant program to their crime prevention and drug enforcement activities. Such a drastic reduction in federal support will be devastating for your state and local partners, particularly as we work collaboratively to address the terrible – and magnifying – opioid epidemic.

Speaking of opioids, I am also concerned that your budget cuts money from the national Prescription Drug Monitoring program. Though it may seem insignificant, the \$1 million cut to the PDMP represents nearly eight percent of its funding. Thanks in large part to this grant program, 49 of 50 states have implemented a PDMP – and the monitoring of prescription medications by physicians and authorized law enforcement rightfully remains a key prong of the Administration's anti-drug strategy. However, there is still progress to be made, and this grant program is a part of the solution. I look forward to hearing from you about how we can leverage DOJ funding to ensure interstate interoperability among state-run PDMPs, and also to enhance utilization of these databases by medical professionals and prescribers.

Outside of funding for these specific accounts, I am highly concerned with DOJ's suspension of Equitable Sharing payments from the proceeds of the Asset Forfeiture program. These funds are essential in helping local law enforcement fight drug trafficking. The men and women working at these state and local agencies are your partners, often working side by side with federal agents. DOJ must find a way to restore these payments as soon as possible to avoid permanent harm to public safety around the country.

I also remain troubled by DOJ's tacit approval of marijuana legalization efforts around the country. In clear violation of federal law, four states and our nation's capital have legalized recreational use of this drug without any federal response. Casting aside the fact that marijuana is a known gateway drug for young people and its long-term effects on their intellectual development is unknown, the bottom line is this: Congress makes the laws in this country, and the executive branch enforces them. You are tasked with enforcing federal law as our nation's chief law enforcement officer and I hope you will seize FY17 as an opportunity to fulfill your mandate in this regard.

Ms. Lynch, I thank you again for being with us today. We may disagree on certain issues, but I assure you this Committee will do our best to provide the support necessary to face the ongoing threats and challenges DOJ faces each day. I look forward to your testimony, and I yield back.

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