



Chairman José E. Serrano
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
Oversight Hearing on DOJ's Community Relations Service
September 10, 2019

The subcommittee will come to order.

Welcome back, everyone. I hope it was an enjoyable August recess. For the Members here, who may be surprised to have a hearing today, let me mention our thinking. I want to ensure we continue our oversight responsibilities this fall, so that we can better understand the agencies this subcommittee oversees, and so we can discuss what changes have occurred in these agencies under the Trump Administration.

Today, we welcome Gerri Ratliff, the Deputy Director of the Community Relations Service at the Department of Justice, a position she has held since January 2017. Deputy Director Ratliff has broad prior Federal management experience with the National Science Foundation, US Citizenship and Immigration Services, and the former Immigration and Naturalization Service. She also served as Counsel to the Deputy Attorney General for immigration policy and special Counsel for the Justice Department Office of Legislative Affairs.

The Community Relations Service, or CRS, has a unique mission within the Justice Department. Rather than being focused on law enforcement or the administration of justice, it fills the gap that exists before those roles come into play. CRS is a small part of the Department of Justice, but it has an important role in helping to reduce tension and find common ground when discrimination, violence, or hate crimes occur in our nation's communities. CRS serves as America's Peacemaker, and acts as a first responder to help rebuild bridges in areas beset by fundamental issues involving civil rights violations. Those efforts range from efforts to reset dialogues between law enforcement and communities after violence, to reacting to hate crimes, to addressing bias in educational systems. Last year alone, CRS mediated in 282 cases across a range of issues at no cost to local communities, in order defuse tensions and promote solutions.

All of this is done with a relatively small budget. In FY 2019, CRS received \$15.5 million dollars. The House bill passed in June included an increase of \$1.5 million dollars, bringing the agency to a total of \$17 million to help the agency address new work in civil rights cold cases.

I believe that CRS's work is unique and needed, especially at this time in our nation's history. Unfortunately, the Trump Administration does not appear to agree with this assessment. They have recommended essentially eliminating this office in their past two budget requests by subsuming CRS within the larger Civil Rights Division - but without proposing an equal increase in funding for that Division to accommodate new personnel. Aside from the serious budgetary impacts of that proposal, that proposal also misconstrues the very different roles that these two parts of DOJ have. The Civil Rights Division has an important role in prosecuting violations of the law—but it is an investigatory body. CRS, on the other hand, is seeking to build trust and propose solutions. I am thankful that this Committee, under both Republicans and Democrats, has rejected this proposal.

I hope that this hearing will be educational and informational for the members here today. I look forward to hearing more about the work that CRS does on behalf of our nation, and how a proposed funding increase would strengthen your efforts.

With that, let me turn to my friend, Mr. Aderholt, for any comments he may have.