

Testimony of Congressman Henry C. “Hank” Johnson, Jr. (GA-04) to the House Armed Services Committee

Date: April 28, 2022

M. Chairman. Thank you for allowing me to testify in front of your committee here today.

I would like to thank my colleague from Texas, Ms. Escobar for being a tireless advocate of this amendment on this Committee and joining me in this effort for the past several years. We must seize this opportunity to enact much-needed reform.

The DOD’s 1033 program allows law enforcement agencies to obtain surplus military equipment that the Department of Defense declares it no longer needs. In addition to clothing, medical and office equipment, and other materials, DOD also declares military grade weapons as excess property, making such weapons available for transfer to law enforcement agencies without limits.

The result has been the flooding of surplus military grade weapons onto the streets of America, with a requirement that the property be placed into use within 1 year of receipt. This has led to the misuse of such equipment, and the inappropriate and excessive militarization of police departments.

Law enforcement agencies should not have the sole authority to obtain military grade weaponry to deploy against citizens – especially when its civilian leaders have been left out of the acquisition and approval process. Our law enforcement agencies should not become occupying militaries, and our communities should not look like battlefields. This undermines the nature and character of our civilian authorities.

Over the last several years, we witnessed the response by law enforcement to civil rights demonstrations. We saw images of local police in military vehicles, with military-grade weaponry trained on citizens simply exercising their constitutional right to peacefully protest. Time and again, we have seen irrefutable proof that this program must be reformed. Our current system goes against everything we stand for as Americans. The time for reform is now.

For years, momentum has been building towards reform of the Pentagon’s 1033 program. Since the program’s inception in 1990, it has transferred more than 7.6 **billions** dollars in excess military equipment to over 8,000 federal, tribal, state, and local law enforcement.

I first introduced the Stop Militarizing Law Enforcement Act in 2014, and I have continued to offer this bipartisan language each and every Congress because reform of the 1033 program is vital.

This reform is the kind of change our country needs and supports. Public polling indicates that a majority of Americans favor reform and over 50 non-governmental organizations across the political spectrum support this language. This exact text has passed the House twice as part of the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act – first in 2020 and again in 2021.

Reform of the 1033 program is long overdue, and I ask that you support this amendment.

In closing, I would like to stress that in no way does passage of this amendment defund our police. This amendment does not prohibit civilian authorities from authorizing the purchase of whatever equipment is deemed necessary to protect its citizens. This amendment simply shuts down the pipeline of certain military grade weaponry directly from the DOD to law enforcement agencies.

I encourage this committee to carefully consider this issue with the deference it requires and make the amendment in order. Thank you.