

Office of the Attorney General
Washington, D. C. 20530

April 5, 2017

Mr. William Johnson
Executive Director
National Association of Police Organizations
317 South Patrick Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Mr. Johnson:

It has been just over a month since I was sworn in as Attorney General. Violent crime reduction was a priority of mine during my years in the Senate, and it continues to be a priority for me in this position as well. I know that you are deeply committed to reducing crime in America and supporting the criminal justice system, and I am hopeful that we can work in partnership in the years to come. There are, of course, many reasons that I value your partnership, but one is gravely important: we are at a critical point in our fight against violent crime, and it will take all of our combined efforts to reverse the recent trends we have seen across the country. Whether you are in law enforcement, part of a community advocacy group, or represent victims of violent crimes, all of us want to keep people safe. It is what drives us every day to continue the fight, even when the odds seem against us.

The latest FBI data reflects that from 2014 to 2015, the violent crime rate in the U.S. increased by more than 3 percent – the largest one-year increase since 1991. The murder rate increased 10 percent – the largest increase since 1968. Unfortunately, the preliminary data for the first half of 2016 confirmed these trends. These numbers should trouble all of us. Behind all the data are real people whose safety and lives are at stake; each victim is someone's parent, child, or friend.

And although we know that violent crime is rising – significantly – in some places, we must also remember that overall crime rates in our country remain near historic lows. Murder rates are half of what they were in 1980. The rate of violent crime has fallen by almost half from its peak. That is the good news. But we cannot risk losing that progress. We cannot afford to be complacent. We know from history that when crime rates start to move in the wrong direction, they can move quickly.

I have spent a good portion of the last several weeks ensuring that everyone throughout the Department of Justice knows that combating violent crime is a priority of mine, and of this Administration. I believe my message is being heard. But we cannot fight this battle alone. We must rely heavily on those on the frontlines – the brave men and women in state, local, and tribal law enforcement. And we must partner with individuals in the communities most affected by the scourge of violent crime, ensuring that the voices of victims and community members are heard, and respected.

Every day you do important work toward the goal of ensuring a safer and more just society, and I thank you. I want to take this opportunity to provide you with an update on some of the Department's recent efforts in this area, and to ask for your assistance.

On February 27th, I established the Department's Task Force on Crime Reduction and Public Safety (the Task Force). This Task Force will identify ways in which the federal government can more effectively combat illegal immigration and violent crime, such as gun crime, drug trafficking, and gang violence. The Task Force will accomplish its work through a variety of subcommittees, and those groups are already hard at work. I have asked for initial recommendations from the Task Force no later than July 27th, but will continue to act upon recommendations as they become available and direct the policy of the Department on an ongoing basis.

One subcommittee will make recommendations for the Department's overall violent crime reduction strategy. While this effort will include focused enforcement against violent offenders, it will also examine ways in which we can leverage existing law enforcement efforts; support local partners engaged in prevention and reentry efforts; and measure the effectiveness of our work. We have already begun to make progress on this front: on March 8th I directed all federal prosecutors to engage in a focused effort – in partnership with federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies – to investigate, prosecute, and thus deter violent criminals.

Task Force subcommittees will also undertake a review of existing Department policies in the areas of charging, sentencing, and marijuana to ensure consistency with our overall strategy on reducing violent crime. Another subcommittee will explore our use of asset forfeiture and make recommendations on any improvements needed to legal authorities, policies, and training to most effectively attack the financial infrastructure of criminal organizations. Other subcommittees will focus on immigration enforcement and human trafficking to ensure that the federal government has an aggressive and coordinated strategy to deter those who violate our borders and subject others to forced labor, involuntary servitude, sex trafficking, and other forms of modern-day slavery.

We must also protect the civil rights of all Americans, and we will not tolerate threats or acts of violence targeting any person or community in this country on the basis of their religious beliefs or background. Accordingly, another subcommittee will develop a plan to appropriately address hate crimes to better protect the rights of all Americans. As with many other areas of the Task Force's work, we are already making significant progress toward our goal of a safer America. Recently, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, working with law enforcement partners

Mr. William Johnson

Page 3

in Israel and elsewhere, helped secure the arrest of a man believed to be responsible for the recent surge in threats of violence against Jewish community centers and synagogues. I commend their outstanding efforts.

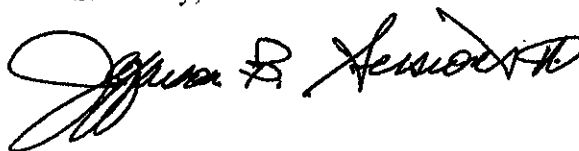
Much of this work will require that we have access to complete, accurate, and timely crime data and that the Department and our law enforcement partners and prosecutors across the country are able to rely on prompt and accurate forensic science analysis to investigate and prosecute violent offenders. Task Force subcommittees will examine these issues as well and make recommendations to me on needed improvements.

This is a substantial undertaking and I need your help. We cannot carry out this important work without the support and participation of our law enforcement and community partners. I have directed the Task Force to hold a National Summit on Crime Reduction and Public Safety, so that we can hear from you about how we can best support and replicate successful local violent crime reduction efforts. This partnership is essential, and we have much to learn from you.

In addition, as part of the important work the Task Force is undertaking to combat hate crimes, the Department's Civil Rights Division will be reaching out to affected communities to hear directly what strategies and support are most needed to help reduce this particularly pernicious crime. If there are specific groups you would recommend participate in that conversation, please advise Tom Wheeler, Acting Assistant Attorney General, Civil Rights Division, at Tom.Wheeler@usdoj.gov.

You should expect to receive an invitation to the Summit in the coming weeks, and I want to thank you in advance for your contributions to these efforts. Working together, I am confident that we can secure the safety of all Americans, including the brave men and women of law enforcement, while ensuring fairness, impartiality, and equal justice under law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jefferson B. Sessions III". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "S".

Jefferson B. Sessions III
Attorney General