

June 10, 2020

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt,

As the Ranking Member of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee's Subcommittee on National Parks, I write today because I am deeply concerned and distressed by the role of the United States Park Police in the events which took place at Lafayette Square Park in Washington, D.C. on the evening of Monday, June 1. On Monday evening, protesters exercising their constitutionally guaranteed rights gathered in President's Park, which includes Lafayette Square, to demonstrate peacefully against systemic racism. They joined together to call for justice, increased transparency, and accountability from law enforcement following the brutal killing of George Floyd, an unarmed black man, by police in Minneapolis.

During these demonstrations, the U.S. Park Police, among other Federal law enforcement officers, appeared to use excessive force, chemical agents, and projectiles to indiscriminately remove protesters from President's Park, a park whose founding purpose is described as providing "a large open area associated with the White House for freedom of public expression and assembly activities."¹ During the protests, according to multiple witnesses, U.S. Park Police officers also attacked credentialed journalists with shields and riot gear, further infringing upon the American liberties that are supposed to define our nation and democratic government.

The U.S. Park Police Strategic Plan for 2017-2021 states: "Our success is based upon the sanctity and preservation of our nation's civil liberties and our enduring commitment to evolve with the growth of our nation and its communities."² The actions and methods employed by the U.S. Park Police on the evening of June 1 in Lafayette Square do not appear to meet that definition of success, but instead, undermine the very values that our National Parks embody.

I respectfully request that answers be provided to the following questions:

1. What portion of the Department of the Interior's annual budget is allocated to the procurement of riot gear, including but not limited to shields, batons, and chemical agents for use by the U.S. Park Police?

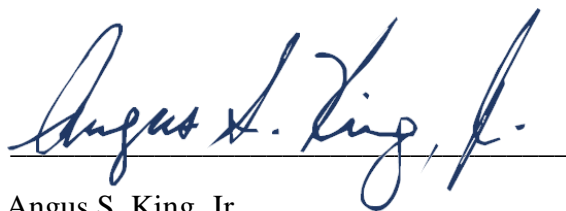
1. National Park Service. (2014, September). Foundation Document: The White House and President's Park Washington, D.C.. Retrieved from https://www.nps.gov/whho/planyourvisit/upload/WHHO_FD_2014_low.pdf.

2. National Park Service. (2017). United States Park Police Strategic Plan 2017-2021. Retrieved from <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/uspp/upload/USPP-Strategic-Plan-final.pdf>.

2. What training do U.S. Park Police officers receive regarding the use of riot gear, de-escalatory policing tactics, and civil liberties protections? Are those trainings mandatory for all officers?
3. What methods of force are U.S. Park Police officers authorized to employ as a part of their law enforcement duties?
4. What specific guidance were U.S. Park Police officers given regarding their role during the protest activities in Lafayette Square on June 1?
5. Multiple law enforcement agencies were involved in the protest activities on June 1. Where does the U.S. Park Police fall in any hierarchy of these agencies and how does their role differ from that of the Secret Service, Metropolitan Police Department, and other relevant agencies?
6. Who gave the order to U.S. Park Police officers to patrol the June 1 protests? Specifically, who gave the order to clear demonstrators from Lafayette Park on June 1 and when, precisely, was that order given?
7. Were all U.S. Park Police officers patrolling during the events on June 1 wearing insignia identifying the agency that they work for? If not, what was the reason for not wearing insignia?
8. What are the Department's policies and procedures following unauthorized or illegal actions taken by a U.S. Park Police officer while on duty? Does the Department have plans to review the involvement of the U.S. Park Police in the events of June 1 more broadly?
9. On Wednesday June 3, the U.S. Park Police announced that two officers were placed on administrative leave and an investigation was underway following video of them attacking two Australian journalists during the Lafayette Square protests. Can you provide an update on this investigation and what actions will be taken if these officers are found to have violated Department policy or procedures?
10. Does the U.S. Park Police have a method for members of the public to file a citizen complaint or commendation?

The National Park Service is one of the most beloved and recognizable federal agencies and our national parks not only preserve places of natural beauty, but they also protect sites of historical and cultural significance. Regardless of one's race, gender, or creed, parks can provide us all with a source of inspiration, solace, and healing. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss how all National Park Service employees can continue to uphold the mission of the agency: to preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Angus S. King, Jr." The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Angus S. King, Jr.
UNITED STATES SENATOR