

## **Joint Statement by Law Enforcement Leaders on Protecting Voters**

As law enforcement leaders, elected prosecutors, and chief legal officers of our jurisdictions, we know that the right to vote is fundamental to our democracy and our identity as Americans, regardless of political affiliation. It is a constitutional right and, ultimately, a public trust and safety issue.

Public trust in democracy, the rule of law, and the integrity of our government is integral to public safety. When one system is attacked and fails, it compromises the ability of all systems to function, including our criminal justice system. And when communities do not trust us, we cannot effectively keep them safe.

Efforts to interfere with the United States Postal Service imperil the democratic process and erode confidence in the integrity of all government systems. Within the context of a pandemic, we should already be deeply concerned that crowds at polling places will endanger our residents. And now, recent threats and intimidation tactics, including deploying law enforcement to police the polls, raises the prospect of voter intimidation, damaging bonds of trust between law enforcement and communities they serve. This is playing out at a time when the number of Americans expressing confidence in law enforcement has fallen to [an all-time low](#). That is why, as leaders charged with protecting public safety, we call for free and fair elections and condemn efforts to interfere with the Postal Service and undermine the voting process.

It is more important than ever that we protect the integrity of our democracy, and, in the era of COVID-19, the ability to vote by mail is essential to protecting our cherished democratic process. As law enforcement and government leaders, we have been involved in ongoing efforts to protect our communities from the novel coronavirus. This is a time when all public leaders are being tested and we must come together in protecting the American people from this devastating disease. The ability to vote by mail is inextricably tied to our efforts to protect our communities – and the rights of those who reside there. Our communities must not be asked to choose between health and exercising their fundamental rights. Nor are we willing to shirk our responsibility to protect those in our community from exercising their constitutional rights free of interference and intrusion.

It is imperative to our prosperity as a nation that the American people have faith that they are able to elect the local and national leaders of their choice. Every day, we are working to earn the trust of our communities – and that trust is our greatest tool in identifying and addressing crime and keeping our neighborhoods safe. An election in which countless citizens are unable to vote would irreparably damage that trust. For the sake of our common safety, we call for an election process that ensures that the voice of the American people will be heard.

To that end, we condemn the threat to deploy law enforcement to the polls. The President lacks the jurisdictional authority to give orders to state and local law enforcement. Moreover, there is

no legitimate purpose in sending law enforcement to the polls – voter fraud is extraordinarily rare. And federal officials are legally prohibited from interfering in elections, including through the use of armed forces. These prohibitions are embodied in criminal statutes, carrying potential jail time – an indication of how seriously our government has historically taken election interference.

Disturbingly, the threat to police the polls evokes the darkest chapters of American history, a shameful and devastating part of our past that still haunts us today. Law enforcement in the Jim Crow South blocked Black citizens from accessing the polls. Voter intimidation came in the form of implicit and explicit threats, violence, and lynchings. After Reconstruction, white politicians stuffed ballot boxes to favor their preferred candidate, threatened Black voters into voting for that candidate, and, when all else failed, overthrew Black elected officials by force. As leaders committed to justice and fairness, we are unwilling to resurrect an intolerable and inhumane playbook that recreates some of our nation’s ugliest behaviors. Fair elections must be free from even the hint of voter intimidation.

The 15th Amendment states, “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” As elected prosecutors and law enforcement officials sworn to uphold the law, we are steadfastly committed to preserving the rights set forth in our Constitution and all of the political freedoms it represents. The American people must be able to safely vote and they must have faith those votes will be counted. We strongly condemn all efforts to interfere with and undermine the democratic process. And we call on all leaders around the nation to join us in combatting these disheartening and destructive efforts. That is a responsibility we owe our community, as public servants, and as Americans.

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