

May 4, 2015

The Honorable Claire McCaskill
U.S. Senator, State of Missouri
United States Senate
730 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator McCaskill:

Thank you for your diligent work to represent the interests and care for the concerns of the citizens of the State of Missouri, particularly in light of the challenges of the past year. Unfortunately, the St. Louis region and the city of Ferguson have been joined by the people of Cleveland, Staten Island, Beaver Creek, North Charleston and Baltimore in deep distress regarding the relationship between the community and law enforcement. Your early hearings regarding the impact of militarized weapons and special tactics shined important light on key points regarding the importance of local oversight and of maintaining professional standards. With these things in view, I am pleased to have reviewed and am writing to express my full support of the proposed "Protecting Communities and Police Act."

As the leader of a faith-based foundation committed to child well-being, I am aware that global experts, like Dr. Asher Ben-Arieh, identify neighborhood safety as a leading indicator of child well-being. In surveys of children, their sense of well-being is significantly impacted by perceptions of local police. In the words of Cincinnati police chief, Jeffrey Blackwell, officers should be seen as "guardians not warriors." The provisions of the proposed legislation will advance this positive view of officers by strengthening training, leadership and oversight, particularly for smaller departments.

As co-chair of the Ferguson Commission, I have heard testimony from scores of citizens and subject matter experts calling for more accountability to the community for police actions and policies. To know that federal pass-through programs could undermine local decision-making regarding grants and equipment is disconcerting. The bill's provision for transparency through data collection and reporting will help to heal the divide in our communities.

As a pastor, I hear from congregants and organizations serving people living in environments strained by unhealthy, stress-filled interactions between the community and police. A federal investment in basic oversight of police spending is an investment in the health and safety of families across our nation.

I urge members of the legislature to pass this law designed to support law enforcement agencies while strengthening oversight and transparency. Please demonstrate commitment to the well-being of children, families and communities by passing the Protecting Communities and Police Act.

Thanks again for your work and commitment. Please feel free to call on me to help advance this important legislation for our state and nation.

Grace and peace,

The Reverend Starsky D. Wilson
President and CEO, Deaconess Foundation
Pastor, Saint John's Church (The Beloved Community)
Co-Chair, The Ferguson Commission