

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 15, 2019

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

Dear Secretary Bernhardt:

November 17th, 2019 marks the two-year anniversary of the shooting death by U.S. Park Police of 25-year-old Virginian Bijan Ghaisar. We write to request a briefing to discuss unresolved questions that were raised by this case.

In a February 26, 2018 meeting, then-US Park Police Chief MacLean mentioned to Congressman Beyer that Interior would wait to conduct an internal review of the investigation until after the Department of Justice (DOJ) concluded their review. The review has now concluded. The Department of the Interior (DOI) has already had two years to make its own improvements to relevant policies brought to light by this case. There should not be any more delays.

The shooting was captured on camera by the Fairfax County Police who were also on the scene, but not by the U.S. Park Police as they had neither body cameras nor car dashboard cameras to capture video. Bijan Ghaisar's case illustrated how police cameras have the potential to improve policing by providing transparency and accountability for police actions when used properly. DOI has roughly 3,500 law enforcement officers; close to 4,000 during peak season. At an April 18, 2018 briefing with DOI, we were told that DOI was piloting a Department-wide body-worn camera policy. DOI staff informed us that participation in the pilot was voluntary for all divisions, and that it was unclear if there would be a future budget set-aside, as it was currently using unobligated funds.

At the April 2018 briefing, we also discussed the DOI Office of Inspector General report, which found that DOI's "body camera policy and practices are not consistent with industry standards." The OIG identified 13 recommendations that would help DOI bring its body cameras in line with industry best practices. We understood that the Department aimed to implement those IG recommendations and update its policies. However the DOI policy deferred to bureau policies on some of the most contentious questions. At the briefing, we learned that DOI had no intention to require the bureaus to create or update their policies.

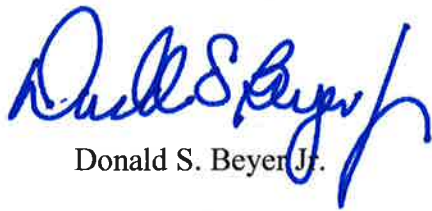
We request a briefing to answer questions including the following:

1. When does the Department plan to do a holistic review of the November 17, 2017 incident?

2. What is the status and timeline of DOI's body-worn camera pilot program? Is the pilot program still a "pilot" program over a year after it began? Which bureaus participated?
3. Is there funding dedicated to the body-worn camera program?
4. Have all DOI law enforcement divisions participated or is it still voluntary? What percentage of DOI's law enforcement participates in the program?
5. Has DOI and all its bureaus with law enforcement staff fully implemented the OIG recommendations? Which bureaus have created or updated their policies?
6. Has DOJ provided any recommendations to improve DOI's body-worn camera policies and practices in light of the Ghaisar investigation?

Please contact Kate Schisler with Congressman Beyer's office or the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee staff to schedule the briefing.

Sincerely,



Donald S. Beyer Jr.



Raúl M. Grijalva