

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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<https://oversight.house.gov>

March 15, 2022

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

Dear Secretary Haaland:

I write with serious concerns about the Department of Interior's (DOI) management of the U.S. Park Police (USPP) in light of recent reports of staffing shortages, training deficiencies, and dilapidated facilities.¹ Our USPP officers and the public they serve deserve engaged and competent leadership from DOI. But the poor conditions our USPP officers confront combined with these longstanding staffing challenges reveal the USPP is in a serious state of neglect.

The USPP operates within the National Park Service (NPS) to provide law enforcement services throughout the national park system, and is particularly concentrated within the D.C. metropolitan area.² In addition to performing critical law enforcement and public safety functions, they protect our national treasures and historical artifacts.³ Based on my conversations with frontline USPP officers, I am well aware that First Amendment demonstrations, threats, civil disturbances, and the growing number of monuments have increased demands on the USPP in recent years even though its budget has remained constant. As a result of inadequate staffing, officers have long reported working extended shifts, and overtime is frequently used which creates a safety concern for officers.⁴ Despite their critical mission, I fear they have not been prioritized by DOI leadership for several years, leading to acute staffing shortages and safety concerns.

According to a recent management advisory issued by the Office of Inspector General for the U.S. Department of the Interior (OIG), there are "significant safety concerns and other deficiencies at the USPP's dispatch operations center" located in the DC metropolitan area.⁵ These issues include black mold located throughout the workspace, holes in the roof that permit

¹ Jackman, Tom, *Report says Park Police dispatch center has outdated equipment, mold, inability to monitor alarms*, WASH. POST (Feb. 26, 2022).

² United States Park Police, available at <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/uspp/index.htm> (last accessed Mar. 4, 2022).

³ *Id.*

⁴ Office of Inspector General, U.S. Department of the Interior, *Assessment of the United States Park Police*, (Feb. 2008) (PI-EV-NPS-0001-2007).

⁵ Office of Inspector General, U.S. Department of the Interior, *Management Advisory: Safety Concerns and Other Deficiencies at the U.S. Park Police's Dispatch Operations Center in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area*, (Feb. 25, 2022) (OI-SI-21-0171-W).

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birds to enter and “leave droppings on the computer equipment and office furniture”, and “[o]utdated and deficient equipment that lacks critical safety features.”⁶ The OIG has also noted “[l]ongstanding staffing and training deficiencies, including an insufficient number of employees staffing the dispatch center at times and a complete absence of formal dispatch training for some dispatch personnel.”⁷ It is outrageous that federal law enforcement professionals are subjected to such conditions at all, let alone after raising repeatedly identifying a “crisis” in complaints to USPP leadership.⁸ In addition, these deficiencies place the public at risk, as evidenced by failure to respond to audible alarms.⁹

I have sought to alleviate broader staffing shortages through legislation to incentivize recruiting by creating pay parity between the USPP and other similarly situated uniformed federal officers. As you may be aware, I introduced H.R. 3924, the U.S. Park Police Modernization Act, which would change the current USPP pay scale of 14 service steps over 30 years to a compressed 13 step, 22-year service schedule, with the goal of ensuring more parity between comparable agencies to permit USPP to better recruit and retain qualified officers.¹⁰

The USPP deserves competent management and appropriate resources from DOI and NPS. To assist Republicans on the Oversight Committee in conducting important oversight over the management of the USPP by DOI and NPS officials, please provide a member level briefing on staffing issues at the USPP as well as the following documents and information no later than March 29, 2022:

1. All documents and communications regarding dilapidated facilities, outdated technology, and safety concerns for officers or the public caused by staffing shortages;
2. All documents and communications regarding DOI and NPS’s response to the concerns identified by the Inspector General’s Management Advisory;
3. All documents and communications regarding any staffing analysis of the USPP and the impact on staffing shortages on officer or public safety;
4. All documents and communications regarding any analysis of overtime and the impact of overtime on officer or public safety;
5. All documents and communications reflecting retention or recruiting problems at the USPP and any planned responses to resolve those issues.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. To make arrangements to deliver documents or ask any related follow-up questions, please contact Committee on Oversight and Reform Republican Staff at (202) 225-5074. The Committee on Oversight and

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ H.R. 3924, available at <https://www.congress.gov/117/bills/hr3924/BILLS-117hr3924ih.pdf>.

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Reform is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. Thank you in advance for your cooperation with this inquiry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jody Hice". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jody Hice
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Government Operations

cc: The Honorable Gerald E. Connolly, Chairman
Subcommittee on Government Operations