

Durbin, Duckworth to Trump: stop tweeting about Chicago and get serious about gun violence

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WASHINGTON—Illinois Senators Dick Durbin and Tammy Duckworth today called on President Trump to do more than just tweet about the gun violence epidemic in Chicago, and join them in providing a surge in federal support and resources to assist in public safety, law enforcement, and economic development efforts in the city.

“Tweeting does not break cycles of violence; tweeting does not help lift people out of poverty; tweeting does not save lives. We urge you instead to provide a surge in federal support and resources for Chicago to reduce violence and expand economic opportunities for neglected communities,” the senators wrote. **“We note that you have urged Congress to fund the construction of a wall on the Southern border that would reportedly cost at least \$21.6 billion, even though the wall would not fix**

our broken immigration system and even though Republican Congressman Will Hurd, whose district covers 800 miles of the border, has said “building a wall is the most expensive and least effective way to secure the border.” If your Administration were to take even one percent of this funding and devote the resources instead to help Chicago’s public safety efforts, it would make a dramatic difference in reducing Chicago’s violence.”

Full text of the senators’ letter:

February 10, 2017

President Donald J. Trump

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue

Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

During the 2016 presidential campaign and in numerous tweets and comments since the election, you have lamented the recent surge of gun violence in Chicago and said the federal government could help stop the violence. While the level of shootings and homicides is clearly unacceptable, tweeting alone will not fix it. Tweeting does not break cycles of violence; tweeting does not help lift people out of poverty; tweeting does not save lives. We urge you instead to provide a surge in federal support and resources for Chicago to reduce violence and expand economic opportunities for neglected communities.

Public safety is primarily a local responsibility, but the federal government must be an engaged partner in public safety efforts alongside local officials, law enforcement, and community stakeholders. There is much the federal government can do to help.

Instead of tweeting, you could begin by directing your Administration to enhance U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) programs that improve community policing, such as the COPS Hiring Program to help local police departments put more cops on the beat, and the Byrne-JAG grant program to enable local law enforcement to purchase or upgrade equipment. We note that in his first year in office, President Obama pushed for a surge in COPS and Byrne-JAG funding through the Recovery Act and the appropriations process that provided Chicago with \$13.256 million in COPS Hiring funding and \$35.637 million in Byrne-JAG funding. This is more than four times the

amount of COPS funding and 15 times the amount of Byrne-JAG funding that the City received last year. You could push for a similar funding surge.

We also urge you to direct DOJ to promote mentoring and job training programs for youth and the formerly incarcerated. We are ready to work with you to strengthen the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to improve mentoring and violence prevention initiatives and to boost funding for recidivism reduction programs under the federal Second Chance Act. We urge you to direct DOJ to abide by its commitment to help implement policing reforms recommended by the Department's Civil Rights Division. We also request your support for legislation to close gaps in the FBI gun background check system and in federal firearm laws that enable straw purchasers and gun traffickers to flood Chicago's streets with illicit guns.

Federal efforts must also transcend law enforcement and criminal justice programs to focus on causal factors, including the lack of economic opportunity. We urge the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Labor to prioritize important career and youth training programs that, if properly funded and expanded, would address the role that poverty plays in the violence epidemic facing Chicago and other communities around the country.

Before you send your next tweet, you could request a surge in additional federal resources for these public safety and economic development efforts in Chicago. But so far, your Administration has refused to commit to spend any additional resources to combat Chicago's violence and has actually threatened to cut federal funds for the City. Now is not the time for the federal government to abandon its support for Chicago and its people.

This week, you reportedly attributed Chicago's crime situation to the presence of undocumented immigrants. This coincides with your January 25 executive order that makes up to eight million immigrants priorities for deportation and seeks to create a mass deportation force by tripling the number of immigration agents. The vast majority of immigrants in our country are peaceful and have strong family values, and studies have shown that immigrants are less likely to commit serious crimes than native-born individuals. We are aware of no evidence that undocumented immigrants are responsible for any significant proportion of the murders in Chicago, and claims otherwise do nothing but distract from efforts to meaningfully reduce the City's recent increase in violence.

We note that you have urged Congress to fund the construction of a wall on the Southern border that would reportedly cost at least \$21.6 billion, even though the wall would not fix our broken immigration system and even though Republican Congressman Will Hurd, whose district covers 800 miles of the border, has said

“building a wall is the most expensive and least effective way to secure the border.” If your Administration were to take even one percent of this funding and devote the resources instead to help Chicago’s public safety efforts, it would make a dramatic difference in reducing Chicago’s violence. We urge you to reprioritize federal resources that you would request for wall construction and commit those resources instead to reducing gun violence in Chicago and other violence-prevention efforts around the nation. Doing so could save many more lives than tweeting.

Thank you for your consideration on this important issue.

Sincerely,

RICHARD J. DURBIN

United States Senator

TAMMY DUCKWORTH

United States Senator