



Durbin: Systemic Racism Plagues Our Nation & Criminal Justice System

June 17 2020 9:28 AM

WASHINGTON – During today’s Senate Judiciary Committee hearing entitled “Police Use of Force and Community Relations,” U.S. Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) pushed back against Senator John Cornyn’s (R-TX) argument that systemic racism does not exist in our nation’s justice system.

“If you take a look at our system of justice and start with the premise that when it comes to drug users there is an equal percentage of White and Black drug users. Now you look at the number arrested for the use of drugs – it turns out more Blacks than Whites. The number convicted, the number prosecuted, the number incarcerated – dramatically larger among the African American population,” Durbin said. “There is something built into our system that doesn’t equate actual criminal conduct or criminal disposition towards the penalties that are being assessed.”

Durbin also asked Vanita Gupta, President and CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil & Human Rights, about training law enforcement officers in peer intervention and de-escalation techniques as well as the importance of mental health services for police. Ms. Gupta was the head of the Department of Justice (DOJ) Civil Rights Division under President Obama and worked on the Ferguson and Chicago police investigations. The *Justice in Policing Act of 2020* creates law enforcement development and training programs to develop best practices and requires the creation of law enforcement accreditation standard recommendations based on President Obama’s Taskforce on 21st Century policing.

“Questions have been raised, why, when the one officer with his knee on the neck of that poor man literally killing him... what were the other three officers doing? Why wasn’t there some attempt at intervention?” Durbin asked. “Some have explained to me that because there is a military structure to our police that the chain of command makes peer intervention difficult if not impossible. And I think we have to address that when we talk about policing in the future.”

Video of Durbin's questions in Committee is available [here](#).

Audio of Durbin's questions in Committee is available [here](#).

Footage of Durbin's questions in Committee is available [here](#) for TV Stations.

Durbin is a cosponsor of the [*Justice in Policing Act of 2020*](#), a comprehensive approach to hold police accountable, change the culture of law enforcement, and build trust between law enforcement and our communities.

When Durbin chaired the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights, he held several hearings on race in America, including his last hearing as Chairman in December 2014 on the State of Civil and Human Rights in the United States.