

**Washington, D.C.** - Today, Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and Representative David Price (D-N.C.) announced the introduction of legislation to ensure accountability under U.S. law for American contractors and employees working abroad. Their bill responds to several major incidents involving misconduct by overseas contractors in recent years. The Leahy-Price Civilian Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act (CEJA) will close a gap in current law that has allowed contractors to go unpunished for murder, rape, and other serious abuses, ensuring that legal accountability for such crimes doesn't end at the water's edge.

"For too long, contractors employed by our government have operated in a legal no-man's land, evading accountability for crimes such as murder, rape, and assault," Rep. Price said. "Our country's failure to hold its own employees accountable has damaged our relations with key allies, undermined our military and diplomatic missions, and compromised our core national values. It is time to close this accountability gap once and for all."

Last month, Sen. Leahy, the Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, convened an [oversight hearing](#) on the subject of contractor accountability, in which witnesses from private industry and academia testified in favor of the bill. Assistant U.S. Attorney General Lanny Breuer also testified at the hearing in support of closing the gaps in the law the Price and Leahy bills would address. Sen. Leahy is expected to schedule a markup of the legislation soon.

"Ensuring criminal accountability will improve our national security and protect Americans overseas," said Leahy. "Importantly, in those instances where the local justice system may be less fair, CEJA will also protect Americans by providing the option of prosecuting them in the United States, rather than leaving them subject to hostile and unpredictable local courts. I hope Senators of both parties will work together to pass this important reform."

Rep. Price has authored similar legislation to hold overseas contractors accountable in each of the last several Congresses. In 2007, after security contractors employed by Blackwater USA opened fire in a crowded square in Baghdad, killing up to 17 civilians, [the House approved Rep. Price's MEJA Expansion and Enforcement Act \(H.R. 2740\)](#) by a broad bipartisan margin, but the Senate failed to act on the companion legislation introduced by then-Sen. Barack Obama. In the last Congress, Rep. Price and Sen. Leahy introduced the Civilian Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act (H.R. 4567/S. 2979), an updated version of Price's previous legislation on which the current bill is based.

The proposed legislation creates no new substantive offenses, but rather allows the Department of Justice to prosecute government contractors and employees for certain serious crimes committed overseas. The legislation would complement the Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act (MEJA), which provides similar extraterritorial jurisdiction over Department of Defense employees and contractors but does not clearly apply to U.S. contractors working overseas for other federal agencies, such as the Department of State. The legislation would also require the Department of Justice to establish task forces to investigate and prosecute offenses under CEJA and to report to Congress on its progress implementing the law.

Price is the Ranking Member of the House Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee and the Co-Chair of the House Democracy Partnership, which works to strengthen civilian democratic institutions around the world.

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