

# Congress of the United States

## Washington, DC 20515

November 2, 2020

The Honorable William P. Barr  
Attorney General of the United States  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Barr:

We are writing to urge the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Civil Rights Division's Criminal Section to immediately open an investigation into the events that took place in Graham, North Carolina on October 31, 2020, when a group of peaceful demonstrators marching to the polls was forcefully, and without provocation, dispersed by law enforcement officers. Specifically, we urge an investigation into the actions taken by the Alamance County Sheriff's Office (ACSO) and the City of Graham Police Department.

According to reports, a diverse group of around 200 people were participating in a peaceful march to the polls for the last day of early voting in North Carolina. Based on numerous accounts, including videos from multiple individuals at the scene, Alamance County sheriff's deputies and City of Graham police officers dispersed demonstrators with pepper spray and made several arrests after a moment of silence in remembrance of George Floyd. Several children, seniors, and even an individual in a wheelchair were sprayed, and the police arrested a journalist covering the unfolding events.<sup>1</sup>

This aggressive response to a peaceful and lawfully permitted assembly is unacceptable in any circumstance, but even more so as these marchers were on their way to cast their ballots on the last day of early voting. It has become clear that some potential voters were unable to cast their ballot due to the actions of law enforcement officers.

We believe the disturbing conduct exhibited by local law enforcement could amount to deliberate voter intimidation and suppression – breaching federal laws that protect an individual's right to vote. Because the Civil Rights Division's Criminal Section enforces the federal criminal statutes that prohibit voter intimidation and voter suppression, we urge you to

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<sup>1</sup> Eanes, Z., & Brosseau, C. (2020, October 31). March to Alamance polls ends with police using pepper-spray on protesters, children. Retrieved November 01, 2020, from <https://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/article246861942.html>

swiftly order a thorough investigation into this incident and the actions taken by Alamance County and City of Graham law enforcement officers.

This event took place in a county with a history of racial violence, a history the protesters were recounting. Eight years ago, Alamance County Sheriff Terry Johnson was subject to a DOJ civil rights lawsuit alleging that his department systematically targeted and racially profiled the county's Latino residents.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, the DOJ reached a settlement with the ACSO that forced them to "undertake a new Bias-Free Initiative to demonstrate its ongoing commitment to bias-free policing."<sup>3</sup> Given the ACSO's disturbing history of civil rights complaints, we believe an immediate investigation is warranted into their actions over the weekend.

Federal oversight is critical to ensuring that every voter can safely and securely access the ballot box, and that voter suppression is never tolerated. We call on the DOJ to swiftly conduct a thorough investigation of the ACSO and City of Graham Police Department's actions on October 31, 2020. We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



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DAVID E. PRICE  
Member of Congress



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G. K. BUTTERFIELD  
Member of Congress



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ALMA S. ADAMS, Ph.D.  
Member of Congress

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<sup>2</sup> Justice Department Releases Investigative Findings on the Alamance County, N.C., Sheriff's Office. (2014, October 09). Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-releases-investigative-findings-alamance-county-nc-sheriff-s-office>

<sup>3</sup> Pauroso, Paige. (2016, August 19). DOJ drops lawsuit against Alamance County Sheriff Terry Johnson. Retrieved November 01, 2020, from <https://www.elonnewsnetwork.com/article/2016/08/doj-drops-lawsuit-against-alamance-county-sheriff-terry-johnson>