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House of Representatives

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Opening Statement Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member

Congressional Forum “NFL Players Speak Up: First-Hand Experiences and Building Trust Between Communities and Police”

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Good morning, and welcome to this congressional forum entitled, “NFL Players Speak Up: First-Hand Experiences and Building Trust Between Communities and Police.” Today’s forum is an opportunity for NFL players to provide their own take on what it was like for them growing up in their hometown communities, and what they are doing now to make productive changes to build greater trust between minority communities and police.

I would like to start by thanking my co-hosts for this forum. Rep. John Conyers is the top ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, and he has been a tremendous leader for decades not just on criminal justice issues, but on a wide variety of critical issues that face this country. We have a portrait of him hanging in our anteroom because he also used to be the chairman of this very committee.

I also want to welcome my colleagues, Rep. Cedric Richmond, who serves as the Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, and Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, who is the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations. I am honored that you are here today to host this forum with me.

What we are going to do is have each of our hosts give a short opening statement, and we will limit it to just those four Members of Congress. Then we will ask our panelists to give their statements. Then, we will open it up to all Members to ask questions, and we will see how far we can get by 12:30, when the players have to leave.

We are here today to discuss ways to build greater trust between police and minority communities. We also want to discuss concrete proposals to help former inmates who have done their time and are leaving prison to re-enter society and make meaningful contributions to the neighborhoods in which they live.

Community policing has garnered national attention following several police-related killings of unarmed African Americans. As you all know, my own hometown of Baltimore is one of many communities across the country that is now working to repair the fractured relationship between police and the communities they serve.

We also need to ensure that individuals returning to society from prison have the tools they need to rejoin their communities and contribute positively. According to the NAACP, in 2001, one in six black men living in this country had been incarcerated. Think about that statistic and the ripple effect it has on families and communities throughout the country.

We must work to ensure that everyone—our fellow citizens, our law enforcement officials, *everyone*—treats them with respect and that we afford them opportunities to find gainful employment, get an education, and support themselves and their families.

I will soon be re-introducing legislation to give formerly incarcerated individuals a better chance at getting federal jobs. My bill, called the Fair Chance Act, would ban the government from requesting criminal history information from job applicants until the end of the hiring process. This is also known as “Ban the Box,” and it would help people looking to contribute to their communities and their country. My bill is bipartisan—it is sponsored by both Democrats and Republicans—and it is supported in the House and the Senate.

I know Ranking Member Conyers is also working on bipartisan legislation, which I will let him describe, to provide incentives to help local police ensure that misconduct is minimized and fully investigated.

These issues have been important to me for as long as I have served in Congress, and I know the same is true for each Member of Congress here today.

Finally, I would like to thank our players, Anquan Boldin and Malcom Jenkins, for being with us here today and for sharing their stories. I know you are preparing for spring practices, so I truly appreciate you taking the time out of your schedule to speak with us about these important criminal justice matters.

Also, Mr. Boldin, I would just like to say that I know you lost a loved one to a police encounter, and I want to extend my deepest condolences to you and your family for your loss. We cannot turn a blind eye to these incidents. We must bring communities together to seize the moment and restore the sacred trust between law enforcement officers and their communities.

Dr. Goff, I also want to thank you for being here. Your expertise on the area of policing in minority communities will add a great deal to this forum.

I appreciate the attendance of all our panelists, and I look forward to hearing your stories and discussing proposed solutions to these issues.

With that, let me turn to the very distinguished gentleman from Michigan, Ranking Member Conyers.

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