

Statement of Anquan Boldin to House Judiciary Forum “NFL Players Speak Up: First-Hand Experiences and Building Trust Between Communities and Police.”

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2154 Rayburn House Office Building

Mr. Cummings, Mr. Conyers, Ms. Jackson-Lee, and Mr. Richmond, thank you for inviting me to this forum today. I believe that the issues we will discuss here are critically important to communities across our country. I also believe that they can be solved. These issues, which include building trust between police and communities, ending the era of mass incarceration, and promoting the successful re-entry of the formerly incarcerated into communities, are vital components of criminal justice reform that benefits from consistent, broad bipartisan support - but it is also consistently pushed to the political back burner. I believe that working together, we can not only move it to the political forefront but we can make measurable, meaningful, and sustainable change in our communities.

I want you to understand that criminal justice reform, and in particular police and community relations, is an issue that I come to very personally. In October of 2015 my cousin Corey Jones was driving home from a show with his church band. Around 2 a.m. his car broke down on the side of the highway. While he was waiting for help a white cargo van, not a police car, pulled up. I want to emphasize two important points. First, it was a white van, not a police car. Second, the man who stepped out of that van, Officer Nouman Raja, was not wearing a uniform. He was wearing blue jeans, sneakers, a tan T-shirt, and a baseball hat. My cousin had no way of immediately knowing he was talking to a police officer.

Moments later Corey was dead. The official report from the state attorney’s office said that Mr. Raja fired six shots. His final three shots were fired “more deliberately” according to the report. One shot. Every three seconds.

Corey was a good kid. His granddad and my granddad are brothers and I’ve known him my whole life. Every Sunday you would find him in church playing the drums. But his faith couldn’t keep him alive. How do you go from spending all your Sundays playing in your church band,, working hard to support your family, and waiting for help on the side of the road, to dead? It doesn’t add up.

I wish I could tell you Corey’s story was unique. I wish I could tell you that now, over a year later, we know exactly what happened and that the issue was resolved. I wish I could tell you Corey didn’t die in the first place. And I wish I wasn’t here at all talking about my dead cousin, but I am.

One of the hardest parts of this whole experience has been the lack of understanding about what happened, why it happened, and what is happening in the legal process. The lack of transparency is only hurting any trust that remains between police and the community where I am from, and it is a problem facing so many other communities.

The community I come from wants and needs to know that that they are being heard. We want to make sure that you, that those in the position to bring about positive change, understand the things that we, as an African-American community, are going through. We certainly do not feel that way right now, especially when it comes to law enforcement and the way we are being policed. Our neighborhoods are feeling hurt and they want to see change. This is where you

come in. We want to see changes in policy, in terms how we train and support our police officers. And we also want to see accountability. We want to know that justice will be served for all – to make sure that the relationship between the African-American community and police can be better. There is work to be done on both sides because there is a huge gap of mistrust. I am here today because I want to help close that gap.

Specifically, I am here today asking for your support on two key issues.

First, we need judiciary hearings on criminal justice reform. It is not surprising that criminal justice reform has received consistent bipartisan support over the past several years. Legislation like the reauthorization of the Second Chance Act, the Fair Chance Act, and the Law Enforcement Trust and Integrity Act.

Legislation like the Law Enforcement Trust and Integrity Act takes a comprehensive approach at addressing police accountability and building trust between police departments and their communities. The legislation provides incentives for local police organizations to voluntarily adopt performance-based standards. These standards would ensure that the number of incidents of misconduct will be minimized and that any incidents that do happen, like in the case of my cousin Corey, will be properly investigated.

These important pieces of legislation also ensure that police officers, the vast majority of whom are caring, committed, and compassionate individuals dedicated to the communities they serve – with the tools necessary to do their jobs well. There are several members of my family in law enforcement and over the years I have gotten to know many more who are role models for their profession and their communities. We need to make sure that these tremendous individuals are supported and equipped to perform to the best of their abilities.

Secondly, existing successful initiatives like Community Oriented Policing Services must not only be preserved, but expanded. The COPS program has done so much to support efforts to build bridges and restore hope in our communities that the program's elimination or significant reduction would be an enormous step backward into a bygone era of police and community relations.

The programs funded by the COPS Office are critical to saving police officer lives and protecting our communities. These COPS programs that specifically support community policing efforts and that are geared toward hiring trained community-policing officers are seeing results. Communities that receive these grants are seeing measurable reductions in crime and arrest rates and, though harder to measure, an increase in trust. Police supported by COPS programs are getting out of their vehicles, meeting their communities, and building lasting and real relationships that make a long-term difference.

These are exactly the kind of programs that can make a difference, that you can help move forward, and that can help us leave a legacy that we are all proud of. I came to Washington in November of last year to learn about what is being done to support criminal justice reform and, importantly, what role I can play to support reform efforts. I am here again today to continue this work and to let you know that I am committed to using my platform to do whatever I can to help improve our neighborhoods for police and the communities that live in them.

Thank you for your time and commitment to this important issue.