

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
MINORITY (202) 225-5051

<http://oversight.house.gov>

Opening Statement

Ranking Member Val Demings

**Hearing on “Unfunded Mandates: Examining Federally Imposed
Burdens on State and Local Governments”**

April 26, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me start by saying I am very pleased to join you as Ranking Member of this Subcommittee. We have had one joint subcommittee hearing but this is our first hearing of just the Intergovernmental Subcommittee. I look forward to working with you in a bipartisan manner to conduct rigorous and effective oversight.

I’m glad we’re having today’s hearing to examine the impact of unfunded mandates on state and local governments by the federal government.

As a former chief of police for the City of Orlando, Florida, I am keenly aware of the challenges state and local governments face in managing their local budget and implementing federal mandates.

Right now, the single biggest threat to state and local funding is President Trump’s proposed budget. It slashes hundreds of billions of dollars from programs that American families rely on, and if these draconian cuts go through, the burden will fall on cities, counties, and states.

Here’s a brief list of the programs set for elimination.

President Trump’s budget would eliminate funding for the Community Development Block Grant. It would eliminate funding for the Home Investments Partnerships Program. It would eliminate the Community Services Block Grant. And it would even eliminate the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program.

The President of the National League of Cities said President Trump’s proposed budget “threatens the safety and prosperity of cities across the country.” I could not agree more.

What does this all mean?

It means low-income American families may go without heat in the winter and air conditioning in the summer.

It means that the elderly, children, and people with disabilities will not receive funding that is critical to those vulnerable populations.

It means funding for after-school programs will disappear.

And it means that counties and cities will have to divert funds as they are forced to do more with less.

It will negatively impact public health and safety across the country, and it will negatively impact local budgets nationwide. Regardless of whether you're in a rural area or urban city, you will be hurt by this budget.

When these cuts to vital programs are proposed, they are packaged as cost-saving efforts. This isn't true. This is cost-shifting to someone else, and the "someone else" is the most vulnerable families in our communities and state and local governments.

I look forward to hearing about unfunded mandates facing local governments, but as part of this conversation, we must reject the President's massive budget cuts and the burden they impose on local and state governments.

I understand as well as anyone how federal mandates can pass costs down to state and local governments that impact the outlook for their budgets. We must distinguish between mandates that assure basic rights and protections and mandates that impose a burden.

For example, there are mandates that ensure clean water. All we have to do is look at the crisis in Flint, Michigan to understand what would happen if those protections were eliminated. As this Committee found, the problem in Flint was not federal overreach, it was that the federal government did not step in sooner to protect the citizens of Flint. And now an entire generation of children will be paying the price as they deal with the consequences of lead poisoning.

The solution there is not just to eliminate the mandate—it's to provide adequate funding to comply with it.

Then there are examples of mandates that burden state governments.

It's no secret President Trump wants local governments to help with immigration enforcement. At the same time, however, his proposed budget looks to eliminate the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program, which provides reimbursements to state and local governments for incarcerating undocumented immigrants. This is a prime example of states being asked to do the federal government's job at their own expense.

We cannot lose sight of why we're concerned about the burdens to state and local governments in the first place. It's about doing what is best for Americans everywhere. The funds at that level and the services provided are crucial to Americans across this country. We cannot tolerate irresponsible cuts to these needed programs.

Thank you.

Contact: Jennifer Werner, Communications Director, (202) 226-5181.