

United States Senate

March 20, 2024

The Honorable Merrick Garland
Attorney General
Department of Justice
950 Constitution Ave, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Attorney General Garland:

I write today to urge the Department of Justice (DOJ) to do a better job funding small and rural law enforcement agencies to ensure they have the resources they need to do their job. Smaller law enforcement agencies and those in rural areas face unique challenges as they work hard every day on the critically important mission of keeping communities safe. I believe the DOJ must do more to cut unnecessary red tape that is making it too difficult for smaller departments to access federal resources.

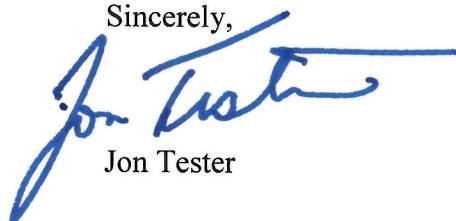
I recently sat down with law enforcement officials from northwest Montana to discuss the public safety issues facing our state. Like most law enforcement agencies, these folks are facing tightening budgets, chronic understaffing, and a growing fentanyl epidemic. On top of that, law enforcement agencies in Montana are also being asked to cover large areas and combat a growing cartel presence without a significant increase in assistance or resources from their federal partners.

One issue they stressed was how difficult and expensive it can be to apply for and utilize federal funding. They specifically raised concerns about the difficulty of participating in the COPS Hiring Program. This program is meant to provide funding directly to state and local law enforcement agencies to help them hire more officers. However, because it requires a lengthy and technical application that can take months to complete and comes with overburdensome reporting requirements, some departments are opting not to apply at all. I support accountability, especially when it comes to spending taxpayer dollars, but it's critical that agencies with fewer officers are not excluded from these programs because of unnecessary red tape.

I urge the DOJ to take actions to improve the solicitation, application, and allocation processes for the COPS Hiring Program and other public safety grants that provide funding to law enforcement agencies. Specifically, I urge you to review these policies and make improvement aimed at ensuring that law enforcement agencies with under 200 officers and those in rural and underserved communities are able to successfully apply for and utilize these critical funds.

Across Montana and in rural America, our men and women in uniform put their lives on the line every day to keep their communities safe. I urge the DOJ to do everything it can to ensure they have the funding and tools they need to do their job.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester