

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 13, 2016

The Honorable Loretta Lynch
Attorney General of the United States
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Lynch:

We, the undersigned Members of Congress, write to request that the Department of Justice (DOJ), pursuant to its authority under law, conduct investigations into the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) and Waller County jail, as well as take appropriate investigative action in connection with the death of Sandra Bland, a 28-year old African American female who was arrested after a traffic stop just outside of Houston, Texas, and found dead in a Waller County jail cell three days later.

This past summer, our nation was awakened to the tragic and disturbing facts that surrounded the arrest and suspicious death of Ms. Bland. The fateful stop on July 10, 2015, by a Texas State Trooper with a history of misconduct raised many questions and concerns about our nation's failure to appropriately respond to police misconduct and accountability. The violent verbal and physical assaults Ms. Bland endured have been met with little action and slow responses by DPS and the Waller County District Attorney's Office.

Despite clear findings that, at a minimum, the trooper violated policies and procedures of DPS when conducting the stop, the trooper was merely put on desk duty and then temporary administrative leave, and only after the death of Ms. Bland and the release of dash-cam footage unveiling the abusive and unlawful arrest. And it is only now, six months later, and after a grand jury has indicted the trooper for perjury that DPS acted to terminate the trooper, despite being in possession of the same set of facts provided from the trooper's stop on the day Ms. Bland was arrested. It is further disconcerting that the District Attorney took more than a month after Ms. Bland's death to empanel a grand jury to investigate the circumstances of her arrest and death at Waller County jail, and only at the heels of swelling public outrage and calls for action.

In a community with deeply rooted racial divides and a history of racially discriminatory practices, many residents of Waller County are deeply disturbed about the lack of both

transparency and impartiality in the investigative and prosecutorial practices and processes employed in Ms. Bland's case. Further undermining the public's trust in the investigatory process, the Waller County grand jury failed to return indictments against anyone connected to the arrest and death of Ms. Bland.

This is very troubling, considering the Waller County Jail has previously been cited for violating state rules for failing to properly and adequately train guards and personnel, particularly when interacting with inmates who are mentally disabled or potentially suicidal. Where suicide is the leading and steadily increasing cause of death in local jails across the country, this failure is simply unacceptable. Sadly, Ms. Bland is not the only person who has died mysteriously at the hands of a broken jail system. The practices and policies that have led to the deaths of multiple persons in custody at Waller County Jail call for immediate review and thorough corrective action by the Department of Justice.

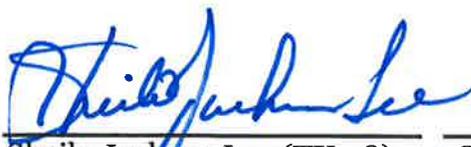
At a time when the nation is demanding heightened scrutiny of all too frequent cases of abuse, excessive force and deaths that occur while in police custody, every actor and agency of law enforcement must be held accountable for acts of misconduct and murder. The death of Ms. Bland requires heightened scrutiny and investigative action to address whether Ms. Bland's death resulted from acts that are part of an unconstitutional pattern or practice of policing by the Texas Department of Public Safety, or from unconstitutional conditions and practices within the Waller County Jail facility, or from some other criminal or civil rights violation.

For these reasons, we are calling upon the Department of Justice to conduct a comprehensive investigation, pursuant to its statutory authority, of the circumstances surrounding this tragedy, and to take appropriate action necessary to vindicate the federal interest in protecting the civil rights of all Americans and to ensure that all persons receive equal justice under law. We are all better off when the facts are discovered, the truth is discerned, and the families and the communities affected are at peace.

We look forward to meeting with you to discuss these matters and urgent appeal to appropriately respond.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Sheila Jackson Lee (TX-18)
Ranking Member of House
Judiciary Subcommittee on
Crime, Terrorism,
Homeland Security and
Investigations



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