

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 14, 2024

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro:

The Department of Justice (DOJ), through the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF); the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA); the FBI; and the U.S. Marshals Service (USMS), partners with state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement on hundreds of federal task forces throughout the nation. Together, these task forces work to combat violent crime, stem the flow of illegal narcotics, and arrest dangerous fugitives.

The law and policies governing these task forces are complicated, and conflicts can arise in their governance. State and local law enforcement members of the task forces are deputized as special federal officers and must follow the guidelines of the federal agencies they partner with. For example, prior to October 2020, state and local task force officers were not permitted to use body-worn cameras on federal task forces, even if their state or local police force allowed or called for the use of these cameras.¹ This policy prompted the Atlanta Police Department (APD) to withdraw from joint task forces with the DEA, FBI, and USMS for a time.² After DOJ changed its policy, APD resumed its participation in such task forces.³

To promote clarity regarding federal policies and practices surrounding these task forces, we ask that GAO review the following aspects of DOJ federal task forces:

1. Which DOJ federal task forces include state and local law enforcement officers who are deputized as federal officers?

¹ In October 2020, DOJ announced a policy that permits state and local officers on DOJ Task Forces to wear and activate body-worn cameras when the use of force is possible. In June 2021, the Deputy Attorney General directed DOJ law enforcement components to develop policies that require agents to wear and activate body-worn camera recording equipment for purposes of recording their actions during: (1) a pre-planned attempt to serve an arrest warrant or other pre-planned arrest, including the apprehension of fugitives sought on state and local warrants; or (2) the execution of a search or seizure warrant or order.

² Tom Jackman, *Federal task forces ban body cameras, so Atlanta police pull out. Others may follow.*, Wash. Post. (Jun. 14, 2019), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/crime-law/2019/06/14/federal-task-forces-ban-body-cameras-so-atlanta-police-pull-out-others-may-follow/>.

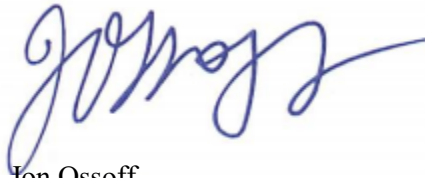
³ Shaddi Abusaid, *Former Atlanta police officer pleads not guilty in task force killing*, Atl. J. Const. (Oct. 6, 2023), <https://www.ajc.com/news/crime/former-atlanta-police-officer-pleads-not-guilty-in-task-force-killing/2BZ5BAUPSNAHLEKYKGWCUFYM4/>.

2. How does DOJ provide oversight of these task forces?
3. What accountability measures and mechanisms apply to state and local law enforcement officers deputized as special federal officers while working on federal task forces?
4. What is known about the extent to which state and local law enforcement practices are disallowed while these enforcement officers are participating in federal task forces?
5. How, and to what extent, do DOJ components examine and address potential differences between the policies and procedures of state and local law enforcement who participate in federal task forces and federal law enforcement policies and procedures? What guidance or policies are in place regarding how such differences should be examined or addressed?

Please provide my office with regular updates regarding developments in your work. Should you have any questions about this request, please contact Brady Bender, Senior Counsel to Chair Jon Ossoff, U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law, at brady_bender@ossoff.senate.gov.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,



Jon Ossoff
U.S. Senator
Chair, Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law