

NAACP

Derrick Johnson
*President and
Chief Executive Officer*

April 7, 2022

The Honorable Merrick B. Garland
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Re: Widespread fraud, waste, and abuse of federal funds in Mississippi

Dear Attorney General Garland:

I write on behalf of the NAACP, the oldest civil rights organization in the United States, to urge the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) to aggressively investigate and prosecute those responsible for the massive theft of federal funds that apparently took place in Mississippi in fiscal years 2017 through 2019. These apparent crimes were ignored by DOJ under your predecessor Attorney General, and we are calling on you to take action that is long overdue.

As you likely know, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program provides grants to states and territories to fund financial assistance and related support services, such as childcare assistance, job preparation, and work support, to families in need. Title XX of the Social Security Act establishes the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), which must be used for preventing or remedying neglect, abuse, or exploitations of children and adults unable to protect their own interest or preserving, rehabilitating, or reuniting families. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides nutrition benefits to supplement the food budget of needy families so they can purchase healthy food and move towards self-sufficiency. The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) provides assistance to low-income families who need child care due to work, work-related training and/or attending school. In short, the funds from these programs are to be used for the neediest and most vulnerable in our society.

An April 30, 2020 audit report of Mississippi's use of these federal funds provides in summary:

Due to the **widespread fraud, waste, and abuse** uncovered during the audit, and the **lack of any appropriate underlying methodology** for the allocation of shared costs in both MCEC [Mississippi Community Education Center] and FRC [Family Resource Center of North Mississippi], the **overall lack of documentation** to establish reasonableness and necessity of costs, **the lack of integrity in documents** obtained from MCEC due to known instances of **forgery, misdirection, document modification**, etc., the **direct involvement of MDHS personnel in the fraud, waste, and abuse**, and the **likelihood of additional fraud, waste, and abuse**

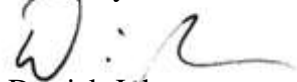
existing in the actions of these subrecipients, auditor cannot state, with reasonable assurances, the amount of grant costs for the TANF grant were used appropriately.

The Mississippi Office of the State Auditor determined that more than \$94 million in federal funds were used for “questionable” expenditures in 2017, 2018, and 2019. The audit report noted that its findings and all related information had been referred to the U.S. Department of Justice. However, nearly two years later, despite the overwhelming documentary evidence of fraud, forgery, and abuse in this matter, DOJ has not yet launched a criminal investigation.

Not only is it imperative that DOJ take prompt and aggressive action to protect the Mississippi residents who were and continue to be harmed by the wrongful actions of state officials, failure to investigate may lead to the impression that DOJ is continuing the previous administration’s pattern of looking the other way when laws are broken by white state officials, especially when the wrongdoing disproportionately harms minorities.

We urge you in the strongest possible terms to take immediate action to investigate and prosecute those involved in this massive theft of federal funds.

Sincerely,



Derrick Johnson
President and CEO
NAACP

cc: Lisa Monaco
Vanita Gupta