



House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Commerce Justice, Science, and Related Agencies, FY 2022 Public Witness Testimony

**Support Robust Funding to Community Relations Service at the Department of Justice**

**Submitted by**

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On behalf of the Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) and its nonpartisan network of 130+ organizations working in 181 countries, including the United States, I request robust funding to the **Department of Justice’s Community Relations Service (CRS) at no less than \$40 million in FY 2022.**

Known as “America’s peacemaker,” CRS is the only federal agency that is dedicated to working with community groups to resolve conflicts. At a time when our country is experiencing increasing levels of conflict, toxic polarization, and hate, Congress can step up and uphold our country’s commitment to building a more peaceful and just society.

While other democracies are seeing serious cracks in their institutions and heightened polarization, a recent study<sup>1</sup> found the U.S. is polarizing faster than other democracies, which is fueling a historic crisis in our country. While every country has conflict driven by real and perceived grievances, it is the legitimacy and effectiveness of informal and formal institutions—and the leaders of those institutions—that dictate governments’ ability to manage grievances in a way that prevents groups from resorting to violence. The U.S. government must address worsening conflict dynamics by developing a bold and coordinated multi-sectoral, evidence-based strategy to prevent and reduce the drivers of violent conflict and extremism. Providing robust funding to CRS is one way in which Congress can act to prevent and reduce violent conflict in our country.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 established CRS to assist communities that are shaken by violence and hate based on race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, or disability. CRS staff have deployed in response to some of the toughest incidents our country has faced such as the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014 to assisting Asian American community groups that are currently facing increasing levels of anti-Asian hate.

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<sup>1</sup> Boxell, Levi and Gentzkow, Matthew and Shapiro, Jesse M., Cross-Country Trends in Affective Polarization (January 2020). NBER Working Paper No. w26669, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3522318>

Over the past several years as tension and polarization has increased, CRS' role as a peacemaker has been diminished and its staffing capacity has been cut by more than half. It is time for Congress to rebuild the federal government's capacity to address and prevent violence and instability in our country. Additionally, a revitalized CRS would ensure that the federal government builds effective partnerships with community based organizations that are working at the local-level to mediate conflict. For example, the National Association for Community Mediation (NAFCM) is an organization that represents more than 300 community-level dispute resolution organizations in the United States and abroad. CRS, if it is fully and robustly funded, can work in partnership with groups such as NAFCM to multiply its peacemaking impact.

We are at perilous moment in our country and it is time for Congress to step up and take bold action. I urge the subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies to revitalize and rebuild America's domestic peacemaking capacity by providing at least \$40 million to Community Relations Service.