

Statement for the Record of Senator Richard J. Durbin
Hearing of the Senate Judiciary Committee
“Oversight of the Federal Bureau of Investigation”
May 3, 2017

I regret that I am unable to attend today’s hearing due to a medical procedure. I look forward to submitting questions in writing to Director Comey regarding Russia’s campaign of cyber warfare against our democracy, the need for a meaningful federal-state-local partnership to address gun violence in the Chicagoland area, and other important matters involving the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

It is imperative that we get to the bottom of what happened with Russia’s interference in our election and make sure that it can never happen again. That’s why I have repeatedly called for an independent bipartisan commission to investigate Russia’s election interference. Republicans in Congress instead have referred this matter to the Senate and House Intelligence Committees, perhaps hoping that the issue will fade away behind the closed doors of those committees. But this issue must not, and will not, fade away.

Director Comey has confirmed that the FBI is investigating the Russian government’s efforts to interfere in last year’s election. This investigation is looking at links between individuals associated with the Trump campaign and the Russian government, and whether there was any coordination between the campaign and Russia’s efforts. We need to ensure that career professionals at the FBI are permitted to pursue this investigation without interference. If evidence that crimes were committed comes to light, a decision about whether to indict the perpetrators needs to be made by an independent and impartial prosecutor based on an objective consideration of the facts and the law. This investigation is too important to be subject to partisan influence.

There are also important questions that need to be answered about the FBI’s handling and disclosure of its investigation into Secretary Clinton’s emails, especially when contrasted with the FBI’s handling and disclosure of its investigation into links between the Trump campaign and Russian interests. I understand that this matter is under review by the Justice Department’s Inspector General, but I hope today’s hearing will further shed light on the matter.

Additionally, it is critical that the FBI and the Department of Justice maintain federal funding and support for local violence prevention efforts in Chicago and in communities throughout America. As the International Association of Chiefs of Police has noted, “penalizing communities by withholding assistance funding to law enforcement agencies and other critical programs is counter-productive to our shared mission of reducing violent crime and keeping our communities safe.” I hope Director Comey will publicly affirm that cutting off federal violence prevention funding to communities will hurt the cause of violence prevention.

I thank the Chairman and the Ranking Member for holding this hearing and including this statement in the record.