June 11, 2018

The Honorable Jeff Sessions
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Sessions

On behalf of 19,000 cities and towns represented by the National League of Cities, I am writing to express our disappointment that the Department of Justice (DOJ) continues to delay the disbursement of Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (Byrne JAG) funds for the Fiscal Year 2017 (FY17). We urge you to release these funds as soon possible to support our brave local law enforcement officers in their fight to reduce crime and keep our communities safe.

It is our understanding that the DOJ is delaying the release of the FY17 funding awards because of current litigation that questions the legality of the new “access” and “notification” requirements the DOJ placed on the Byrne JAG award recipients.

When the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals issued an opinion affirming the nationwide preliminary injunction on the imposition of new conditions on the Byrne JAG grant program, we had hoped the DOJ would release the FY 17 Byrne JAG awards immediately. While there is nothing in the ruling that would prevent the DOJ from releasing the funds, we are concerned that DOJ’s refusal to release the grants puts the safety of local law enforcement officers at risk.

City leaders know that Byrne JAG is an essential federal program that helps law enforcement officers keep their citizens safe, prevents crime and victimization, and provides lifesaving tools to their officers. Byrne JAG touches nearly every city and town in America through projects funded and investments made in the state and local justice system.

Local governments use these funds to address needs and fill gaps across their entire criminal and juvenile justice systems – in prevention, enforcement, courts, prosecution, indigent defense, corrections, crisis intervention and behavioral health services for justice-involved persons, victim assistance, and other community supports. Byrne JAG gives local governments the ability to
leverage federal dollars to build evidence-based comprehensive programs that would not otherwise be possible.

The grants are also a catalyst for collaboration within communities, across states and with the federal government, including the critical role multijurisdictional drug task forces play in targeting regional drug trafficking organizations. Drug trafficking organizations respect no boundaries, a fact that makes the multijurisdictional task force model supported by Byrne JAG essential to combatting these criminal groups. States and local law enforcement agencies are replicating the multijurisdictional models to tackle other cross-boundary crimes, such as human trafficking and cyber-crime while saving money and increasing efficiency in the process.

We strongly believe that any further delay by the DOJ in awarding the funds undermines local law enforcement’s efforts to keep our communities safe. We look forward to working with the DOJ to support our local law enforcement officers and ensure they have the resources needed to keep all of us safe — but the current state of affairs is not sustainable.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Yucel Ors, NLC’s Federal Program Director for Public Safety at 202-626-3124 or ors@nlc.org.

Sincerely,

Clarence E. Anthony
CEO and Executive Director