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June 10, 2024

Detroit Board of Police Commissioners
1301 Third Street, Suite 767
Detroit, MI 48226
Via email bopc@detroitmi.gov

Dear Honorable Police Commissioners,

I am writing regarding community members who serve as legal observers with the Detroit and Michigan Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild (NLG) who have been targeted by the Detroit Police Department in recent months.

You may already be familiar with NLG legal observers, who are present at many protests and demonstrations in Detroit to monitor and document police abuse and rights violations in their distinctive neon green hats. For decades, our NLG chapter has played a key role in protecting the First Amendment rights of Michigan residents. Legal observers are on the front lines of our democracy, guarding against official abuses of power and supporting grassroots movements for social, economic, and environmental justice all across our city.

It has been brought to my attention that on March 2, 2024, Detroit Police Officer Andrei Pers stopped and issued tickets to three legal observers, allegedly for the civil offense of Impeding Traffic: Taylor Cole (Case No. SP15595931); Wendy Richardson (Case No. SP15595941); and Lisa Carlson (Case No. SP15595951). Then, on April 12, 2024, Detroit Police Officer David Hornshaw stopped and issued tickets to two legal observers, allegedly for the civil offense of Being a Pedestrian in the Street where a Sidewalk is Provided: Emily Nakisher (Case No. SP15251741) and Anna Stabnick (Case No. SP15249021).

These citations violate a longstanding norm, reinforced in 2020 by then-Deputy Police Chief Todd Bettison (now Deputy Mayor), that legal observers are not to be targeted or arrested by law enforcement for simply documenting police activity. I have been told that Deputy Mayor Bettison has reviewed the police footage of the above ticketed individuals, and does not believe

that the issuance of these tickets was appropriate. However, I understand that members of the staff of Detroit Corporation Counsel have been adamant that these legal observers should be prosecuted anyway, and that Corporation Counsel has been unwilling to issue a contrary directive.

I wanted to bring these disturbing developments to the attention of the Board of Police Commissioners, and I ask that you use your voices and power to stand up for the constitutional rights of our residents in light of these unprecedented prosecutions of legal observers in Detroit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rashida Tlaib". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress