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DEA Chief Named D.C. Emergency Police Commissioner

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On August 14, 2025, U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi appointed Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Administrator Terry Cole as Washington, D.C. 's “emergency police commissioner,” granting him authority over the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD).

The directive transfers the powers of the police chief to Cole, requiring existing MPD leadership, including the current chief and bureau heads, to obtain his approval before issuing any orders.

Mayor Muriel Bowser rejected the move, stating there is no legal provision allowing municipal personnel authority to be transferred to a federal official. District Attorney General Brian Schwalb also criticized the directive as “unlawful,” citing Section 740 of the Home Rule Act, which limits federal authority from replacing the D.C. police chief or altering the MPD chain of command.

President Donald Trump labeled the situation in the capital a “crime emergency.” The federal response includes deploying National Guard troops and additional federal reinforcements, despite crime statistics showing a decline in violent crime in recent years.

Bondi revoked city restrictions on immigration enforcement policies that limited cooperation with federal authorities, effectively ending D.C.'s sanctuary protections, and rescinded earlier orders from Police Chief Pamela Smith that had curtailed immigration-related inquiries.

Local authorities view the federal intervention as a serious overreach, triggering concerns about the erosion of local autonomy.

Bowser and Schwalb have vowed not to comply, insisting that police directives must originate from officials appointed by the mayor, not the Justice Department.

The unfolding legal clash raises important constitutional questions about federalism and the unique governance structure of the nation's capital.

As this standoff continues, it marks one of the most significant assertions of federal authority over local law enforcement in recent U.S. history.