

D.C. Police Chief Retains Control Under Trump Administration Agreement

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Washington, D.C. faces an unusual legal and political standoff. Police Chief Pamela Smith remains in command of the Metropolitan Police Department under a revised federal agreement, following a rollback of the Trump administration's attempted takeover, ending a tense dispute over local and federal authority.

Washington, D.C., faces an unusual legal and political standoff as Chief Pamela Smith remains in command of the city's police force under a federal agreement with the Trump administration. The arrangement comes after D.C. Attorney General Brian Schwalb challenged the federal intervention, arguing that it violated the 1973 Home Rule Act, which grants the city autonomy over local governance.

Earlier this month, U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi appointed Drug Enforcement Administration Administrator Terry Cole as "emergency police commissioner" of the Metropolitan Police Department, granting him full authority over daily operations. The order required all MPD leadership to seek Cole's approval before issuing directives and suspended existing city policies, including limitations on cooperation with federal immigration enforcement.

The federal move drew immediate criticism from D.C. officials. Schwalb filed a lawsuit calling the intervention unlawful and an overreach of executive power. City leaders warned that federal control of local police would undermine the Home Rule Act, weakening the city's ability to govern its own law enforcement.

During emergency court proceedings, U.S. District Judge Ana C. Reyes challenged the legal basis for full federal control. Following mediation, the Justice Department agreed to scale back its plan. Under the compromise, Chief Smith retains full operational command, while Cole is designated as a federal designee for coordinating specific federal law enforcement efforts, particularly related to immigration enforcement.

The revised order clarifies that Cole's role is limited to requesting MPD assistance for federal priorities, preventing a complete takeover while still

allowing federal law enforcement coordination. This arrangement allows federal authorities to address immigration concerns without assuming full control of city policing. D.C. officials consider the compromise a victory for local governance while accommodating necessary federal oversight.

The case highlights the tension between federal authority and home-rule protections. While the Trump administration characterized the intervention as necessary to address a law enforcement emergency, city officials and legal experts argued it represented an unprecedented federal intrusion into local control. Observers note the outcome could influence similar jurisdictional conflicts elsewhere.

The dispute also brought attention to coordination challenges between local and federal law enforcement. Lawmakers stressed that retaining Chief Smith ensures continuity, preserves institutional knowledge, and maintains morale within the police force, while still allowing federal priorities to be implemented in a structured way.

The agreement also highlights the importance of judicial oversight in maintaining local authority. By limiting the federal role to a designated liaison, the compromise safeguards home-rule principles while enabling federal coordination on national security and immigration matters.

As both city and federal agencies adjust to the arrangement, they face the task of clarifying responsibilities and reporting structures. Chief Smith's continued leadership ensures operational stability, while Cole's oversight provides a formal channel for federal involvement. Legal analysts suggest this resolution may serve as a precedent for managing future conflicts over jurisdiction and home-rule protections.

The deal resolves an immediate dispute but leaves broader questions about the interplay between federal authority and local governance in Washington, D.C., under close scrutiny.