

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 18, 2017

The Honorable Elaine Duke
Acting Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Duke:

The alleged attack that killed one innocent person and injured at least nineteen others in Charlottesville, Virginia, last weekend was seemingly not just an ugly display of racist violence, it was likely also an incident of domestic terrorism. Yet as our nation confronts the problem of growing racial, religious and even political hatred, we are concerned that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) may not be adequately addressing one of the most significant threats of domestic terrorism.

On January 13, 2017, then-Secretary Johnson announced the first round of DHS grant awards as part of the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Grant Program established under the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2016. Grantees included groups combating radicalization inspired by foreign terrorist organizations and a group called Life After Hate, an organization devoted to the rehabilitation of former neo-Nazis and other domestic extremists.¹ These selections reflected the fact that the terrorism threat ranges from ISIS-inspired extremism to far-right extremism.² Moreover, officials from both parties have acknowledged the importance of community partnerships as critical to the federal government's broader efforts to counter these threats.

However, the incoming administration of President Trump froze the grant awards while it reviewed the program. On February 9, 2017, twelve United States Senators wrote to then-Secretary Kelly expressing concerns regarding press reports that the Trump Administration planned to restructure CVE efforts to focus solely on one ethnic or religious group. When the final grantees were announced by then-Secretary Kelly on June 23, 2017, Life After Hate was not among them.³ Several new grantees were added, but it now appears the focus on far-right extremism has been significantly reduced, if not completely eliminated. This is particularly troubling in light of long-standing concerns that the CVE program is almost exclusively focusing on the Muslim-American community. The Administration's proposed 2018 budget would further cut the CVE Grant Program in its entirety.⁴

¹ <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2017/01/13/statement-secretary-jeh-johnson-announcing-first-round-dhss-countering-violent>.

² Indeed, the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing was the deadliest terrorist attack on American soil until September 11, 2001.

³ <https://www.dhs.gov/cvegrants>.

⁴ https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/download/fighting-terror_-_administrations-budget-slashes-counterterrorism-programs.

Unfortunately, the troubling indications of this Administration's priorities are not limited to these developments. President Trump kept silent after the August 5, 2017, bombing of the Dar Al-Farooq mosque in Bloomington, Minnesota.⁵ And the President faced two days of mounting pressure before finally denouncing far-right groups after the Charlottesville attack, while declaring the next day that "I think there's blame on both sides." Far-right extremist groups, including neo-Nazis, the Ku Klux Klan, white supremacists, and other groups motivated by racial and ethnic hatred, present a significant risk of violence and domestic terrorism. It is critical that the Administration's policies and priorities reflect this risk, and protect all Americans from violence and domestic terrorism. Accordingly, please provide the following information:⁶

1. What factors did DHS consider in the decision to reverse the CVE grant to Life After Hate? Why was no CVE grant apparently given to any *other* group focusing on combating far-right violence, even though other grantees focused on other specific threats?
 - a. What White House personnel, if any, were involved in this decision or were otherwise in communication with DHS about it?
 - b. It has been reported that Katharine Gorka may have played a role in the decisions about which groups would and would not receive CVE grants. What role did Ms. Gorka play in the decision with respect to Life After Hate? What is Ms. Gorka's formal position within DHS? If none, in what capacity was she acting?
2. DHS states that sixteen current CVE grantees "have applicability to mitigating all forms of violent extremism, including violent white supremacists."⁷ Which, if any, of these grantees have represented to DHS that they actually conduct programs intended to combat far-right violence?
3. Why does the Administration propose eliminating CVE grants in their entirety for Fiscal Year 2018?
4. How does DHS currently plan to "provide state, local and tribal partners and community groups . . . with the ability to build prevention programs that address the root causes of violent extremism and deter individuals who may already be radicalizing to violence?"⁸
5. DHS states that countering violent extremism is "a key focus of DHS's work to secure the homeland," and that its efforts seek "to address the root causes of violent extremism by providing resources to communities to build and sustain local prevention efforts and promote the use of counter-narratives."⁹
 - a. Please describe in detail DHS's work to counter violent extremism in this way among far right-wing groups and individuals radicalized by them.
 - b. Please describe in particular the work in this regard by the Office for Community Partnerships and the Office of Intelligence and Analysis. Please include funding

⁵ The latest FBI annual hate crime report shows sharp spikes in hate crimes nationwide; in one year, anti-Muslim hate crimes rose 67%, from 154 incidents in 2014 to 257 in 2015. See <https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2015/tables-and-data-declarations/1tabledatadecpdf>.

⁶ If any part of your response to these questions requires the dissemination of classified information, please so indicate and we will make the appropriate arrangements.

⁷ <https://www.dhs.gov/blog/2017/08/16/did-you-know-four-ways-dhs-working-prevent-terrorism-home>.

⁸ <https://www.dhs.gov/countering-violent-extremism>.

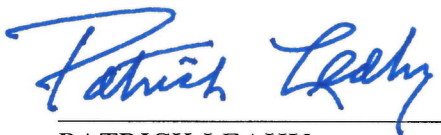
⁹ *Id.*

levels and the number of full-time employees committed, if any, to countering far-right extremist groups for each office.

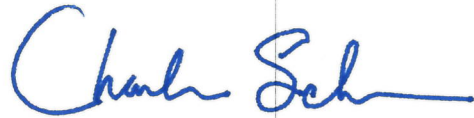
6. How does DHS define domestic terrorism? How does DHS consider domestic terrorism to differ from homegrown violent extremism? What is DHS's assessment of the scope of each threat?
7. What is DHS's assessment of the specific sub-categories of the domestic terrorism threat (e.g. religious extremist groups, anti-government militias, white supremacist groups, etc.)? As to each of these sub-categories:
 - a. How does DHS currently allocate its resources (in terms of budget and personnel, including intelligence analysts)?
 - b. What is DHS's assessment of the numbers of, and trends in relation to, incidents of domestic terrorism in 2017?
 - c. Please compare DHS's budget and personnel allocations for Fiscal Year 2018 as compared with Fiscal Years 2016 and 2017 with regard to countering the domestic terrorism threat.
8. In the six month period before last week's attack in Charlottesville, what assessments had DHS made – jointly or with other agencies – about the threat of violence posed by white supremacists and other far-right extremist groups or individuals? Please provide any finished reports, bulletins, or other written products.

Please provide complete details in response to each question no later than September 8, 2017. If you have any questions, please contact David Pendle at (202) 224-4242. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator



CHARLES E. SCHUMER
United States Senator



DIANNE FEINSTEIN
United States Senator



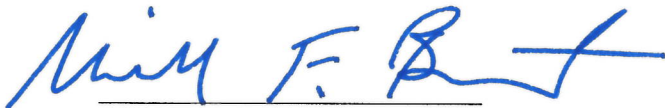
PATTY MURRAY
United States Senator



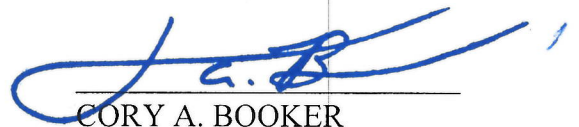
RICHARD DURBIN
United States Senator



AL FRANKEN
United States Senator



MICHAEL F. BENNET
United States Senator



CORY A. BOOKER
United States Senator



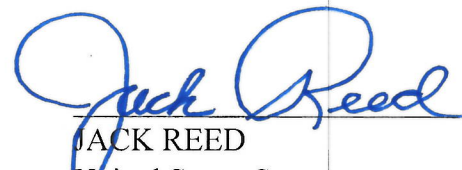
ROBERT P. CASEY, JR.
United States Senator



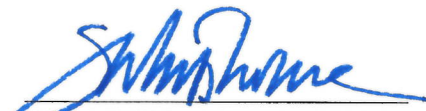
RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senator



AMY KLOBUCHAR
United States Senator



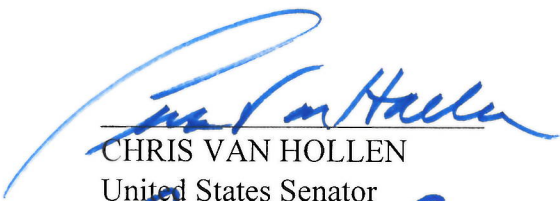
JACK REED
United States Senator



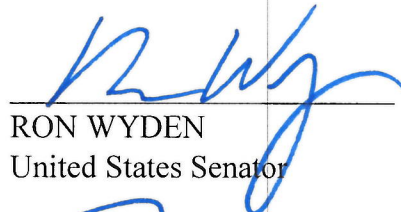
SHELDON WHITEHOUSE
United States Senator



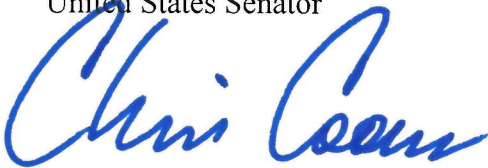
TAMMY BALDWIN
United States Senator



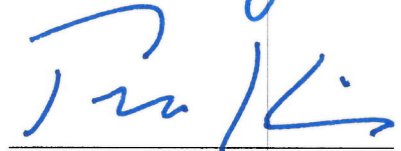
CHRIS VAN HOLLEN
United States Senator



RON WYDEN
United States Senator



CHRIS COONS
United States Senator



TIM KAINE
United States Senator



TOM UDALL
United States Senator



MAZIE K. HIRONO
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown

SHERROD BROWN
United States Senator

Jon Tester

JON TESTER
United States Senator

Tom Carper

TOM CARPER
United States Senator

Robert Menendez

ROBERT MENEDEZ
United States Senator