

U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on the Judiciary

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Chairman Bob Goodlatte
House Committee on the Judiciary
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chairman Goodlatte:

We write to request that you convene an emergency hearing on the wave of domestic terrorism now gripping our nation—as soon as possible. We will work with you to waive any relevant Committee rules in order to hold this hearing on short notice.

In the past week, our nation has borne witness to three acts of terror. This groundswell of violence includes both the largest attempted mass assassination of prominent political figures in American history and the deadliest attack on the Jewish community in American history. Each of these acts was carried out by an individual understood to espouse white supremacist views:

- On Wednesday, Gregory Bush attempted to enter a predominantly black church in Jeffersontown, Kentucky. When he failed, he entered a nearby supermarket and killed two African American individuals. He is reported to have told a bystander: “Don’t shoot me. I won’t shoot you. Whites don’t shoot whites.”¹ He is also reported to have a long history of domestic violence charges, and to have been previously barred from possessing a firearm under federal law.²
- On Friday, federal prosecutors charged Cesar Altieri Sayoc Jr. with sending explosive devices to at least a dozen public figures who have often been singled out by President

¹ Chris Kenning and Thomas Novelty, *Kroger shooting: Chaos, heroism, and the search for a scared young boy*, LOUISVILLE COURIER-JOURNAL, Oct. 27, 2018.

² Karen Zraick and Matt Stevens, *Kroger Shooting Suspect Tried to Enter Black Church before Killing Two*, Police Say, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 26, 2018.

Trump.³ Savoc identified himself to coworkers as a white supremacist who “dislikes gays, African-Americans, Jews, and anybody who isn’t white.”⁴

- On Saturday, Robert Bowers shot and killed 11 people gathered to worship at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He made his motive clear to the SWAT team that captured him: “I just want to kill Jews.”⁵

We should not waste time trying to discern the minor differences in these small but dangerous worldviews. Whether it manifests itself as racism or anti-Semitism or xenophobia, white supremacy is white supremacy. In its modern form, it motivates a fluid and particularly virulent form of domestic terrorism. It must be stopped.

Mr. Chairman, like you, we are proud of the law enforcement officers who tracked and captured these dangerous suspects. Like you, we will stand behind the state and federal prosecutors who will now seek justice for these crimes in due course. But it falls to us to begin the hard work of answering the questions left in the wake of this violence. The House Judiciary Committee is charged with confronting the causes of racial and religious violence, assessing the adequacy of federal hate crimes statutes, and protecting the civil liberties of *all* Americans—whether they are gathered to worship or speaking out against this or any other administration. It also falls to our Committee to address gun violence in all its forms—a subject we have ignored for far too long, at the cost of far too many lives.

In August 2017, we wrote to you to ask for hearings in the aftermath of the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia—a tragic event featuring “the open display of firearms, swastikas, and other flags and symbols associated with racial hatred and white supremacy,” “punctuated by chants of ‘Jews will not replace us,’” and “culminating in the killing of Heather Heyer, a counter-protestor, and the accidental deaths of Lt. H. Jay Cullen and Trooper-Pilot Berke M. Bates of the Virginia State Police.”⁶

You never responded to this request. There is a cost to this inaction as well. The Anti-Defamation League reports that incidents of antisemitism in the United States rose 57% in 2017,

³ William K. Rashbaum, et al., *Outspoken Trump Supporter in Florida Charged in Attempted Bombing Spree*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 26, 2018.

⁴ Nicole Chavez, *Cesar Sayoc was a DJ, bodybuilder and pizza delivery man before he became a bomb suspect*, CNN, Oct. 27, 2018.

⁵ Avi Selk, et al., *“I just want to kill Jews:” Documents detail the Pittsburg synagogue massacre and name the dead*, WASH. POST, Oct. 28, 2018.

⁶ Letter to Chairman Bob Goodlatte, H. Comm. on the Judiciary, from Ranking Member John Conyers, Jr., et al., Aug. 23, 2017.

the largest increase on record since the organization started tracking this data in 1979.⁷ White supremacists were responsible for 18 of the 34 deaths linked to domestic extremism last year.⁸ Must we let this violence play out another year before the Committee takes action? It is our responsibility to respond to this madness, and to do so without delay.

You have already set the precedent for interrupting this recess for Committee business. Since the House adjourned in September, the Committee has conducted several transcribed interviews, convened one formal deposition, and scheduled (but not actually held) an important meeting with the Deputy Attorney General. Each of these events serves your ongoing and open-ended investigation into “decisions made and not made” at the FBI and the Department of Justice in the lead up to the 2016 election. If this work—which does not, by any stretch, involve the safety of our communities—merits a break from the campaign trail, surely the emergency now before us deserves our immediate attention as well.

Please, let us set aside the politics for however long it takes for us to address this extraordinary threat. We thank you for your prompt consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Jerrold Nadler
Ranking Member
House Committee on the Judiciary



Sheila Jackson Lee
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism,
Homeland Security, and Investigations



Steve Cohen
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Constitution and
Civil Justice

⁷ Harriet Sherwood, *Rising antisemitism worldwide boils over at Pittsburgh synagogue*, GUARDIAN, Oct. 28, 2018.

⁸ Jonathan Greenblatt, *The Resurgent Threat of White-Supremacist Violence*, ATLANTIC, Jan. 17, 2018.