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Submitted to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary

**In connection with its June 9, 2026, hearing entitled
“The Southern Poverty Law Center: Manufacturing Hate Part II”**

Submitted June 8, 2026



Good morning, Chairman Jordan, Ranking Member Raskin, and Members of the Committee.

Last July, I took a one-year leave from my university professorship to become the interim head of the Southern Poverty Law Center. So, my testimony today will be one of my last official acts before returning to teaching.

It has been one of the greatest honors of my life to work alongside and to represent the talented, dedicated, and principled SPLC staff.

For fifty-five storied years, with the support of generous donors who respect and appreciate our work, the SPLC has fought racial terror, white supremacy, and other forms of discrimination and hate, seeking to build and defend a multiracial democracy where we can all thrive. That was the goal of the Civil Rights Movement, and it is our mission.

We are best known for our work exposing and dismantling extremist hate groups. We took on the United Klans of America, the group whose hateful violence killed four little girls in the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing, and we sued them out of existence.

In the decades since our founding, hate has continued but so have our efforts to expose it through litigation, policy, research, and education. We fight for the underdog: the poor, the unhoused, the hungry, the incarcerated, the disenfranchised, the immigrant, the outcast, the hated and vilified.

Many groups and some in this room have misrepresented our work, including our confidential informant program, regularly repeating false allegations. Some say we've lost our way. But we have never lost our north star – a fair and just society for every person. All our programs advance that mission.

Our work saves lives, but it comes at a price. Since the SPLC's earliest days, we have been a target of those who oppose our mission. Our office was firebombed; our staff were threatened; our leaders were the target of assassination. We know political violence. We unequivocally condemn it. And we will not stop exposing hate and working to prevent it.



So, I am not surprised that the SPLC and our allies (many in the room here today) find ourselves again under attack from those whose hateful statements and activities we continue to challenge.

The forces turning back hard-won progress against discrimination are unrelenting and unashamed. The SPLC, alongside many civil rights groups and democracy defenders, is resisting them. To American people of good will, especially those left out of the American promise, your civic participation matters *now* more than any time since the Civil Rights Movement.

I am joined today by several people who inspire our work. First, Ms. Karen Finn and her son, Eron. He faced expulsion from school for alleged conduct that was a manifestation of his disability. Eron lives with autism, and federal law prohibits schools from excluding students like Eron for behaviors associated with their disabilities. We sued to protect Eron, and with his mother's courage and dedication, and his perseverance, he not only stayed in that school, but he graduated in 2023.

Ms. Tanya Gersh is also here today. A Jewish Montana mom, Gersh and her family became the target of relentless antisemitic harassment from white nationalists, including threatening phone calls where all that could be heard was the sound of gunshots. With the Center's help, Gersh won a \$14 million judgment against a Neo-Nazi who incited her harassers. We stand with Karen, Eron, Tanya, and the thousands of people we work to protect every day.

Fannie Lou Hamer once said, "Nobody's free, until everybody's free." The SPLC will continue our constitutionally protected work to ensure that everyone in this country is treated with dignity, free from discrimination, and with real liberty and opportunity to thrive. These promises of democracy are not self-executing. They require our collective vigilance. We will continue to defend them when they come under attack.

Finally, I must note that I am constrained in answering some questions today because they may touch on matters involving the pending criminal case against the SPLC or conversations with the SPLC's lawyers within the attorney-client privilege. In that regard, our counsel is here to advise me. Thank you.