



**STATEMENT OF MAYA WILEY, PRESIDENT AND CEO  
THE LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

**UNITED STATES HOUSE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY**

**HEARING ON THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER**

**MAY 20, 2026**

Thank you, Chairman Jordan and Ranking Member Raskin. My name is Maya Wiley. I am the daughter of civil rights leaders, and I am president and CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, the nation's oldest and largest civil rights coalition, founded in 1950. Today, more than 240 organizations sit at our table fighting to protect and advance civil rights, one of which is the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC).

I'd like to get right to the point: we are experiencing a coordinated attack on civil rights non-profits that work to ensure voters can vote, children can learn history, and unions can protect workers. First the Trump administration attacked law firms that provided pro bono services to civil rights and civil liberties groups, foundations that support civil rights work, and colleges and universities working to advance civil rights principles.

Now the administration is going after SPLC. It is impossible to separate this dangerous attack on SPLC from the attacks that have preceded this illegitimate indictment. SPLC is one of the lead organizations standing in the way of the efforts to roll back civil rights in this country. The administration has already wiped out much of our federal government's civil rights enforcement offices and staff. It is trying to make it harder for voters to vote, especially people of color. It is making it harder for children to be safe from bullying and discrimination in schools, including students with disabilities and transgender students. And to make matters worse, the ideologically conservative Supreme Court majority gutted the crowning achievement of the civil rights movement, once again ignoring its own prior rulings and long-standing precedent on civil rights protections that, until recently, received strong bipartisan support: the Voting Rights Act.

Multi-racial democracy is something Americans value, and it is on the line. Civil rights organizations, including SPLC, have been fighting to protect all our rights.

For more than five decades, SPLC has provided free legal assistance, performed research to fight discrimination, protected voting rights, and engaged in public education to reduce hate and bias, including information for the public about hate and extremist movements.

Its record is not abstract. SPLC helped bankrupt violent white supremacist organizations, including through a historic verdict against the United Klans of America. It has brought major voting rights cases,

including litigation that helped secure fairer representation for Black voters in Alabama. It has worked to document threats from extremist movements before those threats turn into violence, and as I'll describe below, its work has also assisted law enforcement. Sadly, this work is imperative. We mourn for the families of the victims of the hate-motivated killings at a San Diego mosque on Monday. No one should fear violence in a place of worship.

SPLC is being targeted is not because it is dangerous, but because it is effective. It stands in the way of efforts to roll back civil rights, suppress voting rights, intimidate immigrants, and normalize hate.

Today it is SPLC. But in a sense, we are all the SPLC.

I won't spend much time picking apart the criminal charges, because I have complete confidence in SPLC's ability to do so in court. And if the DOJ's case wasn't so preposterous, I submit that it wouldn't need any help from allies in Congress.

After the Ku Klux Klan firebombed SPLC offices in 1983, it beefed up its work to expose and guard against dangerous extremists, in part – as has been reported – through a confidential informant program. Trying to distort this work into some claim that SPLC engaged in “manufacturing hate” is as nonsensical as saying that police departments that use informants are “manufacturing crime,” or financing criminal activities.

The government knew about SPLC's confidential informant program. The government used information gathered through SPLC's confidential informant program. And the government knows that lives were saved because of SPLC's confidential informant program.

For instance, SPLC's program helped lead to the conviction of a man who planned to bomb a synagogue in Las Vegas. It led to a criminal conviction of a member of the neo-Nazi extremist group Vanguard America, who sought a national security clearance in 2018 to work at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. And before the deadly Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville in 2017, the SPLC shared intelligence with the FBI on the potential for violence and that potential perpetrators may have weapons. And those are just the publicly reported examples shared with the government before it brought its indictment. SPLC's program helped to protect people from racism, antisemitism, and other forms of hate, violence, and discrimination.

But this case and today's hearing aren't about how to protect people from violent hate and extremist groups or better understand how we can prevent hate and bias. They are about using the powers of prosecution as a weapon, with the sole aim of stopping speech and activities that this administration dislikes and denying the real threats that we should all be concerned about. In the past year, we have seen countless examples of this weaponization. This administration is coercing law firms, universities, and media companies. It is threatening to brand advocates as “domestic terrorists.” It is cutting off billions in federal grants to non-profits that do important work to track and prevent hate and bias. It is letting law enforcement off the hook for systemic misconduct that violates rights of people who need protection. It is letting violence and even extrajudicial killings by federal agents go unpunished. In all of this and more, the President has not even tried to hide his motives. And for the past year, he has also been open about his

willingness to weaponize criminal law. So cases like this were inevitable. And our concern is that no organization seen as dissenting from administration policy, large or small, will ultimately be safe.

What is also alarming is the way some private financial companies, in this case Schwab, Fidelity, and Vanguard, have participated in the administration's efforts to cut off funds to civil rights organizations with which it disagrees. These institutions have stopped Americans who bank with them from giving charitable donations to the SPLC, on the basis of an indictment, not a conviction and, with no apparent transparency about their decision making. Over a dozen donors have said that SPLC spent their donations in ways they hoped it would. Former DOJ prosecutors and a whistleblower have flagged serious flaws in this indictment and the rush to get it. As in other politically motivated prosecutions, perhaps conviction is not its goal. Starving the SPLC of resources, tarnishing its reputation, and ultimately bullying it into compliance is more likely the point. Luckily, SPLC, along with many civil rights organizations and non-profit organizations, will not be intimidated into stopping our lawful and important work.

Instead, SPLC is continuing to fight against hate, and to stand up for people's rights.

In Nashville, SPLC filed two separate lawsuits in 2025 against a group called the "Goyim Defense League" for its targeting of Jewish and Black communities. This targeting included assaults on a Jewish man and a biracial man, and a ten-day "intimidation tour" throughout the city. The many targets of harassment included four Black children between the ages of 8 and 11.

In the 2024 election, SPLC and the ACLU sued Cobb County, Georgia because it failed – for the second election in a row – to timely send absentee ballots to thousands of citizens, jeopardizing their ability to return them by the statutory deadline.

This spring, SPLC was instrumental in waking people up to the disastrous SAVE Act, which would have kept millions of U.S. citizens from voting.

And earlier this year, Orange County, Florida tried to sell off to developers – illegally and behind closed doors – a property that served as the heart of the historic Black community of Eatonville. The SPLC sued on behalf of the residents there.

Each year, the SPLC issues a report on hate and extremism in our country. This report is so important because it tracks organizations promoting the ideologies that brought us the Charlottesville riot that left Heather Heyer dead, and the massacres at the Tree of Life synagogue, the Emanuel AME church, and the El Paso Walmart. It is sadly part of the reason SPLC is being targeted. It is uncomfortable for an administration that has backed away from and cut grants for tracking white nationalism, which the Department of Homeland Security in the first Trump administration defined as our greatest domestic threat.

The SPLC is far too busy fighting hate to "manufacture" it. You don't have to like or agree with all of its strategies for doing so. But the fact that SPLC is now being criminally charged for its work only shows how much more work it has to do.