

May 24th, 2022

Dear Senators,

As organizations dedicated to serving the Jewish community, including the security and protection of Jewish institutions, we urge you to vote yes on legislation to combat domestic terrorism and hate crimes, including the bipartisan Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act (S.964) which passed the House last week. The shooting by an alleged violent extremist in Buffalo, New York further amplifies our nation's need to address domestic terrorism while safeguarding civil liberties.

Fatal attacks targeting racial and religious minorities have occurred with horrifying frequency in recent years; the most recent attack this past weekend in Buffalo, NY; the violent attack at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; the spa shootings in Atlanta, Georgia targeting Asian-American women; the murder of congregants at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina; and the terrorist attack targeting Latinos at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas. The Jewish community in the United States is unfortunately not new to domestic terrorism and according to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Jews have been the targets of at least 21 extremist plots or credible threats since 2016. These are simply a few of the multitudinous and nefarious domestic terror attacks plotted and carried out by individuals who targeted and murdered innocent civilians on the basis of their race or religion.

According to ADL's Center on Extremism, the majority of murders by extremists are motivated by right-wing extremist causes, most commonly white supremacy. There has also been a terribly disturbing surge of extremist violence stemming from those on the political left-wing. American Jews have been assaulted on the streets of Brooklyn, Lakewood, and Los Angeles by such haters.

While giving testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee earlier this year, Matthew Olsen, the head of the Justice Department's National Security Division noted that, "the threat posed by domestic terrorism is on the rise...[and that] the number of FBI investigations of suspected violent extremists has more than doubled since the spring of 2020." According to the Department of Homeland Security 2020 Threat Assessment report, "among DVEs, racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists—specifically white supremacist extremists (WSEs)—will remain the most persistent and lethal threat in the Homeland."

We call on The Senate to pass the Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act.

This continuous rise in hate crimes is why we ask that Congress pass legislation that would effectively prevent and respond to these threats, including the Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act (DTPA). This bill is designed to combat the growing threat of domestic violent extremists. It

authorizes domestic terrorism offices within the Department of Justice Department (DOJ), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in order to create a better understanding of the domestic terrorist threat and separate that specialization from tangentially related threats. It would also establish an interagency task force to address the critical threat of white supremacist infiltration of law enforcement to ensure that those who enforce our nation's national security laws do not espouse the very views they are charged to investigate. The DTPA does not create new surveillance or investigative authorities for law enforcement, but would rely on existing authorities managed more efficiently through new offices. The bill would also authorize support to communities grappling with the aftermath of a hate-fueled terrorist incident, ensure hate crimes are reviewed for a nexus to terrorism, and create training both on the threat of domestic terrorism and on anti-bias. The rise in domestic violent extremist incidents, and violent rhetoric from the fringes of the far-right and far-left, in recent years is a threat to our nation's democratic values and to the innocent civilians affected by individuals fueled by extremist ideologies and a desire to cause harm.

While there is no silver bullet to address domestic terrorism, it is important that Congress pass legislation that will lay a critical foundation to better understand and address the targeted hate that threatens violence against our communities while ensuring key civil rights protections from government overreach.

We must also stress that legislation such as this, which is so critical to the security of so many Americans individually — and the fabric of our society. We urge Senators of both parties to discuss and resolve any concerns they have with the text of this legislation such that it can pass the Senate and serve our collective needs.

We thank you for your consideration of our views and stand as willing partners as we move forward in addressing hate together.

Respectfully,

ADL (Anti-Defamation League)
Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America
Jewish Federations of North America
Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America