

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-1304

January 10, 2020

The Honorable William P. Barr
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530

The Honorable Christopher Wray
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20535

Dear Attorney General Barr and Director Wray:

Eight months ago, I sent a letter with several of my colleagues asking what the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) are doing to combat the growing domestic terrorism threat. Senator Booker and I sent a follow-up letter three months after that. We have not received responses to either of these letters.

Unfortunately, the threat of domestic terrorism and hate crimes continues to loom over communities across the United States. In the midst of Hanukah celebrations last month, a man who had expressed anti-Semitic views allegedly entered a rabbi's home with a machete and attacked and stabbed several Hasidic Jews who had gathered for the holiday.

Earlier in December, three people were killed in an attack at a Kosher supermarket in Jersey City, New Jersey by two men with anti-Semitic views who had also killed a law enforcement officer in an earlier encounter. These attacks followed the devastating shootings at the Chabad of Poway synagogue in California in April 2019 and the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in October 2018, along with countless other incidents of anti-Semitism around the country and the world.

In addition to these horrifying attacks, we have seen a disturbing increase in domestic terrorism and hate crimes targeting other religious minorities and communities of color. Many of these incidents have been committed by violent white supremacists, who represent the most significant domestic terrorism threat facing the country today. After attacks like those at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and the Sikh gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, far too many Americans worry whether their community will be the next devastated by such a tragedy.

It is imperative that DOJ and the FBI lead a coordinated nationwide effort by federal, state, and local law enforcement and intelligence to disrupt and prevent these domestic terrorism

will be necessary to track these incidents and better understand the threat. Unfortunately, we learned last year that the Trump Administration made the inexplicable and irresponsible decision to stop tracking violent white supremacist incidents as a separate category of domestic terrorism, instead creating a new category for “racially-motivated violent extremism.” This reclassification downplays the significance of the violent white supremacist threat, ultimately preventing us from understanding the scope of the problem and effectively addressing it.

Members of Congress have repeatedly asked for specific, precise data on domestic terrorism threats and have been rebuffed. We have also requested that DOJ and the FBI provide insight into what Congress can do to help your agencies more effectively combat these threats. Specifically, we have asked you for your views on the Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act, which I introduced last year to address the violent white supremacist threat. This bill would establish offices to combat domestic terrorism at DOJ, the FBI, and the Department of Homeland Security. The bill also would require federal law enforcement to regularly assess domestic terrorism threats, focus limited resources on the most significant threats, and provide training and resources to assist state, local, and tribal law enforcement in addressing these threats.

Far too many communities across the nation have been touched by domestic terrorism and hate crimes. The Federal government must step up to address these threats and ensure that more Americans are not violently attacked because of what they believe or who they are.

I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
U.S. Senator