

United States Senate

November 16, 2016

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Loretta Lynch
Attorney General
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20530

The Honorable James Comey
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
935 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20535

Dear Attorney General Lynch and Director Comey:

I write to urge the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to thoroughly investigate the recent wave of press-reported hate crimes occurring throughout our nation. I request that the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the FBI each respond to me in writing by December 14, 2016, detailing your plans to combat the rising number of hate crimes occurring nationwide.

Our national charter embodies the ideal that all Americans are entitled to equal rights under law. That is why protecting all Americans from crimes committed against people because of who they are—crimes based on race, color, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation—is important. When we vigorously protect Americans from hate crimes, we promote civil rights, protect the safety of vulnerable communities, and uphold the rule of law.

I am deeply troubled by the latest findings in the FBI's 2015 Hate Crime Statistics report that show a spike in hate crimes against Muslim Americans, and recent news stories that have detailed numerous hateful acts since Election Day targeting certain minority populations in the United States, namely Jews, Muslims, Latinos, African Americans, and LGBT people. These acts of violence and terror cannot be tolerated and they deserve the utmost scrutiny by our nation's federal law enforcement officials.

The FBI defines a "hate crime" as a "criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender's bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity." These acts are particularly dangerous because their impact is felt by entire communities, the emotional toll on victims is often extraordinary, and they run counter to our nation's foundational pledges of inclusion. The DOJ and FBI have a critical role in combatting discrimination and the horrible violence that all too often accompanies it.

This week, the FBI released its annual report detailing the number of hate crimes committed over the last year across the United States. The FBI's data showed a 6.8 percent overall increase in hate crime incidents over the last year, up from 5,479 incidents in 2014 to 5,850 incidents in

2015. Perhaps most alarmingly, hate crimes against Muslims rose by 67 percent in 2015, which is the second highest percentage increase since the FBI started collecting this data in 1992. The largest increase occurred in 2001 following the September 11 attacks—that year anti-Muslim hate crimes surged a stunning 1,618 percent.

Muslims were not the only group to see the number of hate crimes committed against them increase in 2015. Anti-Jewish hate crimes increased 9 percent, anti-LGBT hate crimes increased by 5 percent, and anti-black hate crimes spiked by almost 8 percent respectively.

In addition, recent news stories have highlighted troubling incidents of hate crimes committed across the United States against racial, ethnic, and religious minorities since the November 8, 2016, election concluded. In South Philadelphia, swastikas and the phrase “Seig Heil” were drawn on storefronts and private property. In New York, a swastika and the words “Make America White Again” were spray painted on a baseball field dugout 80 miles southeast of Buffalo. And in Durham, North Carolina someone wrote the racist message “Black lives don’t matter and neither does your votes” on a wall next to a family-owned restaurant.

These incidents are just a few examples of the detestable behavior that has taken place in the last week alone. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, more than 300 reported cases of hateful harassment or intimidation have taken place across the United States since Election Day. These developments are troubling and underscore the need for the DOJ and the FBI to investigate this matter thoroughly.

Hate crimes tear at the very fabric of our great nation. While Americans have the right under the First Amendment to express their opinions—even hateful and hurtful ones—violence, vandalism, and harassment accompanied by such hateful rhetoric have no place in our society.

I appreciate your attention to this matter. I look forward to receiving your response no later than December 14, 2016.

Sincerely,



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

cc: Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Vanita Gupta
Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General
Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division
950 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20530