

June 24 2016

Dear Senator,

In advance of the Senate vote on the Mikulski-Leahy-Baldwin-Nelson Amendment to the FY 2017 Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, the undersigned civil rights, religious, education, and professional organizations write in support of the Amendment's provisions which would add necessary funds for the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division (CRT) and its Community Relations Service (CRS) to prevent hate crimes and to effectively investigate and prosecute them when they occur.

The Amendment would provide an additional \$30 million for CRT to support their efforts to protect Americans from discrimination, including the investigation and prosecution of hate crimes. This funding would allow for the hiring of an additional 100 attorneys focused on enforcing federal civil rights and hate crime laws.

The Amendment also provides an additional \$11 million for CRS, the Department's "peacemaker" for community conflicts and tensions arising from differences of race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and disability. This amount would include funding for the hiring of ten new mediation specialists to help mediate, train, and facilitate in places across the country where these tensions exist or hate crimes have occurred.

This week, just as we were preparing to commemorate the June 17 anniversary of the murders of nine parishioners by a white supremacist at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, the nation was stunned by the horrific mass murders targeting the LGBTQ communities at The Pulse nightclub in Orlando. We certainly did not need another reminder of how hate violence can devastate families and communities.

It is critically important to stand together in solidarity and to comfort those who mourn. But we are capable of doing that and so much more—and we should.

According to the FBI, race-based crimes are the most numerous hate crimes, with crimes targeting individuals because of their sexual orientation second, and religion-based crimes – primarily Jews and Muslims – very closely behind. Although the FBI has only recently started collecting statistics on hate crimes targeting individuals because of their gender identity, news reports over the past several years have highlighted an epidemic of anti-transgender homicides, especially against transgender people of color.

In recent years, the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division has made significant progress in training and outreach – and in investigating and prosecuting a wide range of hate crimes under federal criminal civil rights statutes and the 2009 Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act. But CRT has been hampered by insufficient funds to fulfill its increased responsibilities in the most effective way. And in these times, the role of CRS—the unique and essential mediation and conciliation arm of the Justice Department—has grown increasingly important to defuse racial, religious, and ethnic community tensions.

We grieve for the victims of the heartless white supremacist who murdered nine people in Charleston who had welcomed him into prayer, communion, and fellowship. And we mourn the victims in Orlando and extend our deepest condolences to the families and friends of those lost.

Congress now has an opportunity to act to prevent future hate violence, and to make sure that, when hate crimes occur, the Justice Department has sufficient funding to effectively respond. In the wake of the tragedy that just occurred in Orlando and the many acts of senseless violence that have targeted minority communities over the course of our nation's history, we urge you to support additional hate crime prevention funding for the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division and Community Relations Service.

Sincerely,

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
American Jewish Committee (AJC)
American Association of University Women
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO
Anti-Defamation League
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC
Asian American Psychological Association
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations
Bend the Arc Jewish Action
B'nai B'rith International
Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism-California State University, San Bernardino
GLSEN
Hindu American Foundation
Human Rights Campaign
Interfaith Alliance
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Lambda Legal
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
Matthew Shepard Foundation
Muslim Advocates
NAACP
National Asian Pacific American Families Against Substance Abuse
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of La Raza
National Disability Rights Network
National Korean American Service and Education Consortium
National Organization for Women
National Urban League
OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates
People For the American Way
PFLAG National
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF)
Sikh Coalition
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
Southern Poverty Law Center
Union for Reform Judaism
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
Women's League for Conservative Judaism