



**One Hundred Fifteenth Congress  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20515**

March 15, 2017

The Honorable Michael McCaul  
Chairman  
Committee on Homeland Security  
H2-176 Ford House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman McCaul:

I am pleased to learn of our Committee's plans to address the growing domestic threats to our Nation's religious facilities by holding a "compelling" oversight hearing.<sup>1</sup> I am writing to request that the Committee immediately take action to address these ongoing domestic terrorist threats to American religious institutions and facilities by not only scheduling an oversight hearing but also by conducting briefings, site visits, and a legislative markup of H.R. 1486, "Securing American Non-Profit Organizations Against Terrorism Act of 2017". As you know, the Committee on Homeland Security's bipartisan Oversight plan for the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress calls for The Committee to "continue to conduct rigorous oversight of the Federal government's counterterrorism efforts, including monitoring ongoing and emerging terror threats to the United States...."<sup>2</sup>

Last Congress, in the wake of the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church massacre in Charleston, South Carolina, in which nine victims were killed while exercising their religious freedoms, I wrote to you requesting a hearing on the threat of domestic terrorism. Unfortunately, your response and the Committee's oversight activities showed a lack of willingness to address all forms of violent extremists, especially from terrorist groups founded on racist, anti-semitic, and anti-Muslim principals who have all targeted our Nation's religious facilities. Nevertheless, your announcement that the Committee will take action in the wake of the threats and attacks against Jewish Community Centers is welcomed, and I look forward to working with you to conduct necessary oversight and consider legislation.

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<sup>1</sup> Tilove, Jonathan, McCaul fears ISIS encouraging attacks on Jewish communities in West, Statesman, (March 8, 2017), <http://www.statesman.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/mccaul-fears-isis-encouraging-attacks-jewish-communities-west/aIFM8QskSocLBVhS8dxReP/>.

<sup>2</sup> House Committee on Homeland Security. 115<sup>th</sup> Congress. Authorization and Oversight Plan. Submitted to the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and the Committee on the Budget on March 3, 2017.

Furthermore, an issue that must also be addressed is the availability of grant funding to harden non-profit organizations against terrorist threats. As you may know, I recently introduced H.R. 1486, the “Securing American Non-Profit Organizations Against Terrorism Act of 2017.” The legislation would authorize the Non-Profit Security Grant Program at the Federal Emergency Management Agency at a level of \$30 million a year from Fiscal Year 2018 through Fiscal Year 2022. To ensure that non-profits across America are eligible for funding, the program would not exclude non-profit organizations outside Urban Area Security Initiative jurisdictions from eligibility. I hope you will join me in this effort to secure non-profit organizations in our communities.

In recent years, many domestic terrorist attacks and threats to United States have targeted our religious facilities and institutions and have extended to churches, mosques, and other religious centers. For example:

- In February and January 2017, a series of bomb threats were called into Jewish Community Centers across the country in 26 states;<sup>4</sup>
- In January 2017, a mosque burning in Victoria, TX. The current suspect reportedly has an apparent hatred of Muslims;<sup>5</sup>
- In January 2017, an armed masked man was arrested after protesting outside a Bozeman Islamic Center;<sup>6</sup>
- In October 2016, Wooddale United Methodist Church in Monroe Co., PA saw their church damaged by vandals with displays of anti-Semitic, political, and sexually explicit messages;<sup>7</sup>
- In October 2016, authorities in California arrested an individual with an arsenal of firearms who had previously made terror threats against the Islamic Center of Southern California;<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Camila Domonoske, “Wave of Bomb Threats Targets Jewish Centers, Again,” National Public Radio: The Two-Way (Jan. 19, 2017), <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/01/19/510548864/wave-of-bomb-threats-targets-jewish-centers-again>.

<sup>5</sup> Wilcox, Jon, “Victoria man, 25, accused of burning mosque,” Victoria Advocate, (March 10, 2017), <https://www.victoriaadvocate.com/news/2017/mar/10/victoria-man-25-accused-of-burning-mosque/>

<sup>6</sup> Chronicle Staff, “Armed Masked Man Detained While Protesting In Front of Bozeman Islamic Center,” Bozeman Daily Chronicle (Jan. 9, 2017), [http://www.bozemandailychronicle.com/news/crime/armed-masked-man-detained-while-protesting-in-front-of-bozeman/article\\_f598a364-906e-540c-aa23-30e08e16d9cf.html](http://www.bozemandailychronicle.com/news/crime/armed-masked-man-detained-while-protesting-in-front-of-bozeman/article_f598a364-906e-540c-aa23-30e08e16d9cf.html).

<sup>7</sup> Allen Vickers, “Church Vandalized with Racist, Obscene Symbols,” WNEP 16 (30 October 2016), <http://wnep.com/2016/10/30/church-vandalized-with-racist-obscene-symbols/>.

<sup>8</sup> Jovana Lara, “Man with arsenal threatens Islamic Center of Southern California,” LAPD says,” ABC 7 (25 October 2016), <http://abc7.com/news/man-with-arsenal-threatens-islamic-center-of-socal-lapd-says/1573493/>.

- In October 2016, Trinity Lutheran Church and St. Rose Catholic Church in Longview, WA saw their properties damaged with images of swastikas and other anti-Semitic and racist graffiti;<sup>9</sup>
- In August 2016, a Charleston, South Carolina woman received a letter that said “Charleston – The Sequel – coming soon to a mosque near you [u]nless Roff [sic] is released,”;<sup>10</sup>
- In July 2016, the Islamic Community of Bryan-College mosque in Station, TX was targeted and hit with repeated gunfire;<sup>11</sup>
- In December 2016, individuals dropped a dead pig at the Islamic Center of Lawton, Oklahoma;<sup>12</sup>
- In October 2016, a Tucson man inspired by ISIS pled guilty to charges related to a conspiracy targeting the Tucson Jewish Community Center;<sup>13</sup>
- In November 2016, “Heil Trump,” a swastika, and a gay slur were spray-painted on a wall of St. David’s Episcopal Church in Bean Blossom, Indiana;<sup>14</sup>
- May 2016 bombing plot on an Aventura, Florida synagogue;<sup>15</sup>
- In 2015, there was a record number of threats, harassment, and vandalism at mosques, including three incidents of vandalism in Omaha, Nebraska, two incidents of vandalism in Spokane, Washington, two incidents of vandalism and one incident of harassment in Oklahoma, and one incident of vandalism in Rochester, New York, among many others.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Denver Pratt, “Two suspects sought in racial vandalism of local churches,” *The Daily News* (1 November 2016), [http://tdn.com/news/local/two-suspects-sought-in-racial-vandalism-of-local-churches/article\\_3be75760-8561-57b3-964d-b10b082c9c65.html](http://tdn.com/news/local/two-suspects-sought-in-racial-vandalism-of-local-churches/article_3be75760-8561-57b3-964d-b10b082c9c65.html)

<sup>10</sup> Associated Press, “Charleston Police Investigate Suspicious Letter with Apparent Threat to Mosque,” *Live5News* (Aug. 4, 2016), <http://www.live5news.com/story/32689930/charleston-police-investigate-suspicious-letter-with-apparent-threat-to-mosque> (last visited Feb. 15, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Christopher Mathias, “Someone Shot At A Texas Mosque In The Latest Attempt To Terrorize the Muslim Community,” *The Huffington Post* (7 July 2016), [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/gunshots-texas-mosque-college-station\\_us\\_577ea921e4b0c590f7e87eef](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/gunshots-texas-mosque-college-station_us_577ea921e4b0c590f7e87eef).

<sup>12</sup> Dallas Franklin, “Police Investigating Possible Hate Crime After Dead Pig Was Dumped at Oklahoma Mosque,” *KFOR.com* (Dec. 9, 2016), <http://kfor.com/2016/12/09/police-investigating-possible-hate-crime-after-dead-pig-was-dumped-at-oklahoma-mosque/> (last visited Feb. 15, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> ADI News Services, “Phoenix Man Hoped to Attack Midnight Mass, Jewish Community Center for ISIS,” *Arizona Daily Independent* (Dec. 31, 2016), <https://arizonadailyindependent.com/2016/12/31/phoenix-man-hoped-to-attack-midnight-mass-jewish-community-center-for-isis/>.

<sup>14</sup> Fox59 Web Staff, “Vandals Spray Paint ‘Heil Trump,’ Swastika, Gay Slur on Brown Country Church,” *FOX59Web* (Nov. 13, 2016), <http://fox59.com/2016/11/13/vandals-spray-paint-heil-trump-swastika-gay-slur-on-brown-county-church/> (last visited Feb. 15, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> McMcMahon, Paula, Hollywood man accused of plot to blow up Aventura synagogue,” *Sun Sentinel* (May 2, 2016), <http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/crime/fl-aventura-synagogue-attack-medina-20160502-story.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Burke, “Threats, Harassment, Vandalism at Mosques Reach Record High,” *CNN.com* (Dec. 11, 2015), <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/10/living/mosques-attack-study-2015/> (last visited Feb. 15, 2017). See Bob Glissmann, “Islamic Center of Omaha Targeted By Vandals,” *Omaha World-Herald* (Nov. 16, 2016),

- In November 2015, a white supremacist plotted to attack synagogues and black churches in the Richmond, VA area before being arrested;<sup>17</sup>
- In July 2015, the New Shiloh Christian Church was set on fire and vandalized in Melbourne, Florida;<sup>18</sup>
- In June 2015, a 21-year-old white gunman hoping to start a “race war” shot and killed nine black churchgoers at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Charleston, South Carolina;<sup>19</sup>
- In April 2014, a white supremacist in Overland Park, Kansas targeted and murdered three individuals at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Kansas City;<sup>20</sup>
- In August 2012, a white supremacist murdered six individuals and wounded others at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin;<sup>21</sup> and
- In July 2009, a pipe-bomb was thrown inside the predominantly African American Redeeming Fire Fellowship Church in Buffalo, New York,<sup>22</sup> among others.

Rigorous oversight of the threat to our nation’s religious institutions and swift consideration of H.R. 1486 are imperative. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, the number of hate groups in the United States rose in 2016, bringing the number of active hate groups in the United States to 917.<sup>23</sup> That number includes 514 anti-Semitic groups, 547 White Nationalist Groups, and 605 anti-Muslim groups that foster ideologies that inspire violence toward religions, races, and ethnicities.

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[http://www.omaha.com/news/crime/islamic-center-of-omaha-targeted-by-vandals/article\\_7a69970a-8c8e-11e5-93eb-332b5764083f.html](http://www.omaha.com/news/crime/islamic-center-of-omaha-targeted-by-vandals/article_7a69970a-8c8e-11e5-93eb-332b5764083f.html) (a man sent white powder and threatening articles to a mosque in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma).

<sup>17</sup> Zapotosky, Matt, “Feds: White Supremacists plotted to attack synagogues, black churches,” Washington Post (November 10, 2015), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/feds-white-supremacists-plotted-to-shoot-or-bomb-black-churches-jewish-synagogues/2015/11/10/2aabbcc-87cf-11e5-be39-0034bb576eee\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.df1ce705d1cb](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/feds-white-supremacists-plotted-to-shoot-or-bomb-black-churches-jewish-synagogues/2015/11/10/2aabbcc-87cf-11e5-be39-0034bb576eee_story.html?utm_term=.df1ce705d1cb)

<sup>18</sup> J.D. Gallop, “Police: Church Vandalism is a Hate Crime,” Florida Today (July 12, 2015), <http://www.floridatoday.com/story/news/local/2015/07/12/police-investigate-church-vandalism/30047199/>.

<sup>19</sup> Polly Mendoza, “Dylann Roof Confesses, Says He Wanted to Start a Race War,” Newsweek (June 19, 2015), <http://www.newsweek.com/dylann-roof-confesses-church-shooting-says-he-wanted-start-race-war-344797>.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew Stucker & Catherine E. Shoichet, “3 Killed in shootings at Kansas area Jewish centers,” CNN (14 April 2014), <http://www.cnn.com/2014/04/13/us/kansas-jewish-center-shooting/>

<sup>21</sup> Steven Yaccino & Michael Schwirtz & Marc Santora, “Gunman Kills 6 at a Sikh Temple Near Milwaukee,” New York Times (5 August 2012), <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/06/us/shooting-reported-at-temple-in-wisconsin.html>

<sup>22</sup> Press Release, Federal Bureau of Investigation: Buffalo Division, U.S. Attorney’s Office, Man Pleads Guilty to Manufacturing a Pipe Bomb and Placing the Lit Pipe Bomb in a Church, (Mar. 29, 2010), <https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/buffalo/press-releases/2010/bffo032910.htm>

<sup>23</sup> “Hate Map,” Southern Poverty Law Center. Web. March 10 2017. <https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map>.

The threat posed by violent extremism is not limited to a single ideology and that groups and individuals inspired by a wide range of religious, political, or other ideological beliefs have promoted and used violence against the United States. There are no easy solutions to this security challenge, as the paths to terrorism are as diverse as the perpetrators. Nonetheless, our committee has a moral obligation and a Congressional responsibility to ask the tough questions and move forward legislation in an effort to protect our Nation from terrorism – no matter the source. I look forward to our upcoming hearing and to working with you to address the growing threats to our religious facilities.

Thank you for your timely attention to this matter. If you have any further questions, please contact Hope Goins, Staff Director, at 6-2616.

Sincerely,



BENNIE G. THOMPSON  
Ranking Member