



March 11, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairwoman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chairwoman
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: FY25 Appropriations Priorities

Dear Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Collins, Chairwoman Granger, and Ranking Member DeLauro,

On behalf of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and the SPLC Action Fund, we write to share our funding recommendations for the FY 2025 budget and to strongly urge your support for their inclusion. Our recommendations are informed by data and years of experience working with impacted communities throughout the South, which provide us with a keen understanding of the tremendous needs and challenges arising from insufficient resources and lack of accountability.

Established in 1971, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) is a nonprofit organization founded in Montgomery, Alabama, to help ensure the promise of the Civil Rights Movement became a reality for all, particularly for Black communities in the South, who are all too often the victims of discriminatory policies and who experience targeted violence at the hands of white supremacists. The SPLC continues to safeguard civil rights gains and fights to secure a more equitable and just society. In partnership with communities of color, we work to dismantle white supremacy, strengthen intersectional movements through transformative policies and initiatives, and advance the human rights of all people.

Our sister organization, the SPLC Action Fund, established in 2018, advocates for the implementation of policies and laws to eliminate the structural racism and inequalities that fuel the oppression of people of color, immigrants, young people, women, low-income people, and the LGBTQ+ community. The Action Fund's policy experts lead advocacy at every level of government—and through ballot initiatives—to advance inclusive legislative and administrative

policy change and defend against harmful policies. Our goal is to ensure justice, equity and opportunity for all.

The federal budget is among our nation's most important legislation, year after year. Beyond the numbers are people—children, women, the elderly, communities of color, individuals of diverse faith traditions, and the LGBTQ people—whose lives will be greatly impacted by funding decisions. This letter details several areas of opportunity for meaningful federal investments in impacted communities. These priorities include five key areas of focus:

- Strengthen Democracy
- Combat Hate, Extremism, and White Supremacy
- Eliminate Reliance on Criminalization and Incarceration as a Public Safety and Immigration Solution
- Eradicate Poverty
- Promote International Human Rights

The funding priorities outlined below reflect our belief that a diverse, equitable, and inclusive democracy and strong civil rights protections for Black, Brown, and Indigenous people, and all people of color—those too often left behind—will foster a society where people from all walks of life can thrive.

Strengthen Democracy

The SPLC and SPLC Action Fund are working tirelessly to make the promises of our democracy real for all people. Yet the progress our nation has made toward a multiracial, inclusive democracy is under significant threat. The fundamental right to vote is at risk, especially for the Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities who fought long and hard to secure it. No longer subject to federal preclearance, [legislatures in the Deep South](#) and across the country are passing laws that make it harder to register to vote and to cast a ballot, make it a crime to assist people with voting, subvert the electoral process by refusing to certify election results, and, ultimately, undermine the public's faith in elections. These states have also engaged in discriminatory gerrymandering, leaving Black, Brown, and Indigenous voters without fair representation. And aging—in some cases crumbling—election infrastructure makes it ever harder for local election administrators to run safe, secure, accessible elections, which, in turn, makes it more likely that voters will face disenfranchisement that will diminish their opportunity to participate in the political process.

FY25 Priorities for Strengthening Democracy

- Increase funding for the Department of Justice to aggressively enforce federal voting and civil rights laws like the Voting Rights Act, the National Voter Registration Act, the Help America Vote Act, Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Civil Rights Act.
- Allocate sufficient funding, at or above the President's requested FY24 levels, to states and localities for election administration. Further, we urge the administration to implement safeguards to ensure that funding for election administration improvements is allocated based on need and population. Robust, predictable federal funding will allow localities to purchase new voting machines, address staffing shortages, reduce long lines

and waiting times at polls, and increase the number of polling place locations, among other necessary accessibility and security improvements, to ensure all eligible voters have a meaningful opportunity to make their voices heard.

Combat Hate, Extremism, and White Supremacy

Our nation is at an inflection point. For more than half a century, the SPLC has tracked extremist groups, publishing an annual census of U.S. hate and extremist groups in our seminal report, [Year in Hate and Extremism](#). The 2022 report documented that the line between extremism and mainstream politics is disappearing. Far-right lawmakers are pushing legislation straight from the scripts of hate groups, including measures that seek to control the bodies of women and those who can give birth, erase and whitewash the teaching of history in schools, including Black history, and criminalize LGBTQ people.

At the same time, [the most recent FBI Hate Crime Statistic Act \(HCSA\) report](#) documented the highest number of reported hate crimes since the Bureau began keeping this data in 1991 – including the highest number of reported crimes based on race, religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Yet, thousands of law enforcement agencies across the country did not report any 2022 data to the FBI, and 79% of all the others affirmatively reported zero (0) hate crimes, including dozens of agencies over 100,000 in population. It has become abundantly clear that more must be done to eliminate hate and extremism in our society – and to root it out from the start through increased prevention focused initiatives. The federal government must continue to play a central role in combating hate and extremism in our society.

FY25 Priorities for Combatting Hate, Extremism, and White Supremacy

- Increase funding for Department of Justice community-based hate crime prevention initiatives by [an additional \\$30 million dollars](#). In these unsettling times, there is substantial evidence that community tensions, targeted harassment, and bias-motivated violence are increasing. We must complement increased funding for security for at-risk community institutions with increased funds to address root causes of this hate and extremism, including funding for government and academic research on the best evidenced-based responses to political violence and white supremacist extremism. Local communities and community-based organizations know best how to address their specific needs in this arena..
- Increase funding for the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights above the FY24 request to [\\$280 million dollars](#). Support long-term anti-racism education initiatives, as well as federal, state, and local initiatives to promote democracy and civics education, digital and media literacy initiatives, and teaching accurate history through inclusive education. We cannot legislate, regulate, or tabulate racism or hatred out of existence. Prevention is the key.
- Designate \$10 million to fund [the continued implementation](#) of initiatives, programs, and commitments made at the [September 2022 White House United We Stand Summit](#). The administration should provide periodic reports on progress made to carry out these welcome, ambitious commitments.

Eliminate Reliance on Criminalization and Incarceration as a Public Safety and Immigration Solution

The heart of the SPLC's and SPLC Action Fund's decriminalization and decarceration goal lies in dismantling systems rooted in white supremacy and anti-Blackness. For far too long, our nation's laws and policies have relied heavily on increasing criminalization and mass incarceration to address issues of public safety, substance abuse, mental health, homelessness, and immigration, and this reliance has disproportionately harmed people and communities of color. Reforming the criminal legal system to focus on social service interventions and rehabilitation will lead to better and more equitable outcomes and provide life-affirming alternatives to incarceration. Ending immigration detention, particularly for-profit immigration detention centers, will allow the government to pivot to cost-effective, community-based case management for noncitizens in immigration proceedings.

FY25 Priorities for Eliminating Reliance on Criminalization and Incarceration as a Public Safety and Immigration Solution

- Support the reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, with increased juvenile justice funding above the requested FY24 levels.
- Support increased funding for Second Chance Act grant programs and Reentry Employment Opportunities grant programs to FY23 levels.
- Reduce ICE's Custody Operations budget by at least 75% to limit the average daily population (ADP) in immigration detention centers to no more than 8,500; prohibiting the use of any DHS funds for family detention; and prohibiting the use of any DHS funds for the detention of noncitizens who are seeking asylum, withholding of removal, or protection under the Convention Against Torture.

Eradicate Poverty

The SPLC and the SPLC Action Fund seek to eliminate poverty and wealth-based discrimination by expanding access to opportunities and eliminating racial and economic inequality in all facets of life – including access to food and water, healthy housing, high-quality health care, free education, safe working conditions, fair wages, and government support to meet their basic needs. Our communities in the Deep South are still grappling with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, a series of natural disasters, and state government failures such as the Jackson water crisis. We urge the Administration to marshal the full resources of the federal government to eradicate poverty in our nation.

FY25 Priorities for Eradicating Poverty

- Support robust funding levels consistent with FY24 funding levels to anti-poverty programs such as Medicaid, SNAP, TANF, WIC, HeadStart, Housing assistance, public education, childcare and other non-defense discretionary public services without dangerous poison pill policy riders.
- Support increased investments above the FY24 levels in the HHS Office of Civil Rights, HUD Office of Fair Housing Equal Opportunity, [Department of Education Office of Civil Rights](#), Equal Employment Opportunity, and Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division to ensure these offices have the resources necessary to enforce

antidiscrimination laws, including issuing and implementing guidance and regulations, collecting data, and investigating and responding to civil rights and labor complaints.

- Support tax fairness by ensuring the Internal Revenue Service has funding consistent with the President's FY24 budget proposal to enforce tax compliance on wealthy individuals and corporations to ensure they pay their fair share.

Promote International Human Rights

The U.S. is party to several important human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and the Convention Against Torture, all of which were ratified by Congress decades ago. The rights declared in and protected by these treaties are integral to the maintenance of a multiracial, inclusive democracy. Moreover, U.S. credibility on human rights issues abroad is tied to its fulfillment of its human rights commitments at home.

Unfortunately, implementation of these treaties remains unaddressed both by Congress and successive White House administrations, despite the welcome renewal of engagement with U.N. human rights bodies over the last few years. The absence of any infrastructure or administration guidance aimed at implementation of U.S. human rights treaty obligations is a significant obstacle that must be addressed. Despite recommendations from international human rights bodies, its allies, and fellow U.N. member states, the United States Congress has never established a national human rights institution (NHRI), nor has any similar coordinating mechanism been created to monitor and promote the implementation of its human rights obligations under ratified international treaties. The nation's failure to establish an NHRI is a global outlier, particularly among more developed, democratic nations and has greatly hindered implementation of treaty obligations.

FY25 Priorities for Promoting International Human Rights:

- Allocate funding for staff and other resources necessary to establish and effectively operate a Federal Advisory Committee, interagency coordinating council, or other similar mechanism to promote implementation and awareness of the requirements of international human rights treaties in domestic policy.

In addition to these important funding priorities, Congress must also reject inclusion of any dangerous anti-civil rights policy riders. Prioritization of the core issues outlined above will energize our nation's commitment to removing unjust barriers to fundamental voting rights; eliminating white nationalism, structural racism and historic inequalities; ensuring that people living in poverty across the United States and specifically in the Deep South—especially Black communities and other communities of color—are not exploited and receive access to life saving resources; expanding inclusive anti-discrimination protections; and reinvigorating our values as a diverse, welcoming and compassionate nation committed to the advancement of civil and human rights. We look forward to serving as a resource to your office. Please contact Federal Policy Director Sakira Cook, sakira.cook@splcenter.org or 202.679.0032, with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "LaShawn G. Warren". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

LaShawn Warren
Chief Policy Officer

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sakira Cook". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Sakira Cook
Federal Policy Director

cc: Members of Senate Appropriations Committee and House Appropriations Committee