

September 12, 2022

The Honorable Susan Rice
Director
Domestic Policy Council
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Ambassador Rice,

The United We Stand national summit represents a pivotal step in addressing hate, violence, and extremism in this country. This conversation is timely in light of the recent tragedies affecting minority communities across the country. We hope the summit will provide an opportunity for elected officials and faith, business, philanthropic, and community leaders to come together to identify best practices to address the hate-fueled rhetoric and violence that seek to divide our nation. We are encouraged by the administration's commitment to confront hate and extremism and urge you to continue community-centered efforts to address these issues nationally.

We look forward to participating in this important meeting and welcome the opportunity to share several policy recommendations and actions that can be taken in partnership with communities as a follow up to the summit.

Set Clear Expectations for the Summit & Highlight Solutions

The administration has a unique ability to convene a diverse set of stakeholders. During last week's roundtable meetings, experts and advocates shared that for this summit to be most successful, it would be helpful for the administration to focus our collective efforts, define the terms and goals of our continued collaboration, and help advocates, experts, and communities set clear and achievable goals for long-term solutions. The administration can also highlight the diversity and creativity being deployed to find solutions to the pressing issue of hate-fueled violence and inspire and invite Americans to harness their own power and responsibility in this effort.

Improve Hate Crime Data Collection

Data drives policy. It is impossible to address our nation's hate crime problem without measuring it accurately. The FBI has designated civil rights and hate crime as one of its highest national threat priorities, yet reporting hate crimes is voluntary. Though the FBI has been collecting hate crime data from the nation's 18,000 federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies since 1991, too many agencies – including dozens of departments in cities over 100,000 in population – still do not provide their data to the FBI. The federal government should promote compliance incentives and announce that going forward, it will condition federal funding for law enforcement agencies on credible reporting of hate crimes and hate crime prevention initiatives in that jurisdiction.

Enforce and Implement Existing Hate Crime Laws

Attorney General Merrick Garland, Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta, and Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Kristen Clarke have demonstrated a deep commitment to effective enforcement of our nation's hate crime laws. We appreciate the initial steps the Department of Justice has taken to implement the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act, which included the provisions of the Khalid Jabara and Heather Heyer National Opposition to Hate, Assault, and Threats to Equality Act (NO HATE Act). We also applaud the series of initiatives Attorney General Garland announced

on the anniversary of the Act to better coordinate a more interagency, holistic federal response to hate violence – especially the community-based guidance publication prepared jointly by the Justice Department and the Department of Health and Human Services

Enforcing existing laws and replicating best community intervention and deterrence practices is necessary but insufficient. We must acknowledge that hate-fueled violence and the harms they cause cannot be solved by law enforcement alone. Simply put, we cannot legislate, regulate, tabulate, or prosecute racism, hatred, or extremism out of existence.

Complement Department of Homeland Security Nonprofit Security Grants with Prevention Initiatives

When religious communities, houses of worship, HBCUs, retail stores, schools, and other institutions working to serve and uplift distinct communities are targeted for violence and vandalism, it is understandable that one instinct is to increase physical security for our houses of worship and community institutions – higher walls, more cameras, more bulletproof glass, and even armed guards. The most recent congressional proposals for these programs is \$360 million for FY23.

But this cannot be our only response. Houses of worship and our community institutions are different from airports – and they cannot become armed fortresses isolated and segregated from the broader society. To maintain the essence of our communal institutions, we must look beyond security measures and address the root causes of extremism and hate violence.

Address Root Causes of Hate and Extremism

We deeply appreciate the fourth pillar of the administration’s trailblazing June 2021 National Strategy to Confront Domestic Terrorism, which outlined the essential need to confront long-term contributors to domestic terrorism:

That means tackling racism in America. It means protecting Americans from gun violence and mass murders. It means ensuring that we provide early intervention and appropriate care for those who pose a danger to themselves or others. It means ensuring that Americans receive the type of civics education that promotes tolerance and respect for all and investing in policies and programs that foster civic engagement and inspire a shared commitment to American democracy, all the while acknowledging when racism and bigotry have meant that the country fell short of living up to its founding principles.We are, therefore, prioritizing efforts to ensure that every component of the government has a role to play in rooting out racism and advancing equity for underserved communities that have far too often been the targets of discrimination and violence. This approach must apply to our efforts to counter domestic terrorism by addressing underlying racism and bigotry.

To fulfill the promise of Pillar Four, the summit must center the victims and survivors of hate crimes, extremism, and gun violence. Moreover, more must be done to promote shared democratic values, confront long-term contributors to hate-fueled violence and extremism and build community trust and resilience. The Justice Department’s Community Relations Service is poised to play a key role in this essential work. The Department of Education and the Department of Justice should fund programs aimed at preventing extremism and promoting deradicalization – and move from punishment models to restorative justice initiatives that build community resilience. For example, during the roundtable on prevention, experts and advocates discussed the lack of mental health practitioners that can provide interventions, support families and communities, and guide those who reject hate back into society. As communities work to build firewalls against hate, extremism, and political violence, we must find ways to incentivize the recruitment and growth of those sectors that can provide individualized care to prevent people from falling into, or remaining in, cycles of radicalization.

Promote Inclusive Education and Teaching Truth

The summit can help ignite a long-term national commitment to promote appreciation for our nation's multiracial democracy and the urgent need to teach critical thinking skills and digital literacy to equip the next generation to reject hate, online conspiracy theories, and disinformation. Especially in these divided and polarized times, every elementary and secondary school should promote an inclusive school climate and activities that celebrate our nation's diversity.

However, too many states, particularly in the South, are currently passing laws restricting teaching about racism and other painful truths about our national history. Concealing the truth about our history does not protect our youth; it makes them susceptible to misinformation and fails to equip them with the critical thinking skills and education they need to navigate a new age where disinformation and manipulation are spreading on the internet. It is clear that much more needs to be done to teach young people the unvarnished truth about American history – both good and bad – so that we can learn lessons from the past to shape a better future.

Address White Supremacy and Extremism in the Military and in Policing

Law enforcement officials and military personnel are high-value targets for extremist groups, providing legitimacy and specialized training – including weapons training. In light of the fact that ten percent of those arrested for the deadly January 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol were veterans, the administration and the Department of Defense must continue their commitment to address extremism and white supremacy in the military at every stage: recruitment, expanding and clarifying prohibitions against advocating for, or involvement in, supremacist or extremist activity for active-duty personnel, and more extensive efforts to help veterans transition into civilian life, including counseling, mental health, and social welfare services. The Department of Defense *Report on Countering Extremist Activity Within the Department of Defense* should be fully implemented. In addition, the nine Army bases named for Confederate leaders should be promptly renamed, in accordance with the recommendations of the Department of Defense Naming Commission.

Increase Accountability and Transparency for Tech Platforms to Address Online Hate

It is frighteningly simple for racists and extremists to disseminate propaganda, recruit followers, generate profits, and spread intimidation on the major social media platforms. We must incentivize tech companies to create and enforce policies and terms of service to ensure that social media networks, payment service providers, and other internet-based services do not provide platforms where hateful activities and extremism can grow. Consistent with the First Amendment and privacy considerations, the administration should promote rules and regulations and create incentives to ensure that tech companies comply with civil rights laws prohibiting discrimination. Extremists often weaponize the concept of free speech for their own gains, but we must do more to tell the stories of those impacted and silenced by hate and extremism. Free speech does not mean that we cannot act in the face of recklessness. Americans need to understand that transparency and accountability will *promote* free speech rather than suppress it.

Incorporate Applicable International Human Rights Treaty Obligations

The US has ratified United Nations human rights treaties that are relevant to combatting hate and extremism, but historically has made little effort to implement them. During its recently concluded review of US implementation, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination noted the absence of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination from relevant domestic policy. The Committee also expressed its concerns about hate crimes and extremism and made specific recommendations for combatting them in line with US treaty obligations. We applaud President Biden's recognition that global leadership on human rights depends on the strength of US commitment to human rights at home and urge the administration to take this opportunity to demonstrate that we take our international commitments seriously by expressly addressing and incorporating implementation of the UN Committee's recommendations in the work that will follow this summit.

Promote and Support State Level Initiatives

SPLC's state teams often hear from a bipartisan set of elected officials, law enforcement, and community partners that they need additional support and resources in order to mitigate hate-fueled violence. In SPLC's five focus states, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, and Georgia, we would be pleased to help organize a listening tour or field hearings for the administration and other stakeholders to hear from those working at the state and local levels to mitigate violence and find bipartisan solutions and best practices to build resilience and promote democratic values. During the prevention roundtable, for example, our Georgia team gave a short presentation about the state's anti-political violence and threat mitigation table hosted by SPLC, including some of the recent events and planning that we have organized in Georgia's pro-democracy space. These are efforts that could be replicated across other states with additional resources and support.

Continue this Work

The United We Stand Summit cannot be a one-time event. We agree with the administration's roundtable hosts and moderators that addressing hate, violence, and extremism must become a routine part of a pro-democracy movement that outlives any single presidency. We strongly support a relaunch of the Domestic Policy Council-led Obama-era periodic interagency meeting with key stakeholders on these issues. And we very much hope the summit will help launch a long-term commitment to continue this work, including community-based follow-up field hearings and roundtables – hosted by administration and federal agency officials – to highlight evidence-based best practices, public-private partnerships, restorative justice initiatives, and effective law enforcement and community response to hate crimes and extremism that can be replicated and scaled.

Again, thank you for using your unique public platform to speak out loudly against hate and extremism. SPLC stands ready to assist you in this important work.

Sincerely,



Margaret Huang
President and Chief Executive Officer



LaShawn Warren
Chief Policy Officer