



NAACP

March 8, 2019

The Honorable Jerrold Nadler
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bennie Thompson
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: REQUEST FOR A JOINT HEARING ON DOMESTIC TERRORISM

Dear Chairman Thompson and Chairman Nadler:

On behalf of the NAACP, our nation's oldest, largest and most widely-recognized grassroots-based civil rights organization, I strongly urge you to use your prerogatives as the Chairmen of the committees of jurisdiction to investigate and hold hearings on terrorism within the United States; especially domestic terrorism, in which both the assailant(s) and the victim(s) reside on American soil. As the nation's foremost civil rights organization, we are concerned about the safety and well-being of the people, the families, the neighborhoods, and the communities we serve and represent. As Americans' basic civil and human rights are at the forefront of our concerns as well, we are also concerned about reports of people and organizations being singled out for investigation and surveillance because of their activism.

Recent incidents, including the recent arrest of an active duty member of the US Coast Guard who was found guilty of stashing weapons with the intent of targeting a number of African American elected officials and progressive leaders, and the series of pipe bombs targeting African American legislators and outspoken opponents of the current presidential administration have all Americans on edge. Add to this recent stories in the New York Times and elsewhere that in 2017, hate crimes increased by about 17 percent nationally, to 7,175 from 6,121 (the number of police agencies reporting crimes also rose, by about 6 percent). Hate crimes, as we all know, are generally defined as criminal acts motivated by the victim's race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation / identification, or gender and are intended to frighten or intimidate an entire sector of people. To add to our concern about hate crimes, we are also quite aware that these numbers are under-reported.

The NAACP therefore urges an investigation, using the resources of both committees, to look deeper into this very serious concern to ensure there is transparency regarding the nature of and potential threats for domestic terrorism against the African American community. We would also urge you to review and report on any Federal investigations or studies which appear

to be targeting certain groups, including African American activists in response to violence against us, our children, and our neighbors.

Numerous news stories and documents released last year through a Freedom of Information Act Lawsuit by Color of Change and the Center for Constitutional Rights confirm reports of alleged surveillance of Black activists due to their involvement in high-profile protests against police brutality associated with the police killings of Michael Brown, Jr., in Ferguson, Missouri; and Freddie Gray in Baltimore. This lawsuit also revealed the existence of a “race paper,” which was nearly completely redacted. The first draft version was entitled “(U//FOUO) Race-Related Domestic Terrorism Incidents Likely to Continue in 2017” and the subsequent seven versions were entitled “(U//FOUO) Growing Frequency of Race-Related Domestic Terrorist Violence.”

For the communities we serve, domestic terrorism has a long and brutal history. The images associated with blackface, the Ku Klux Klan, the Nazi party and Confederate memorabilia represent symbols of hate, brutality, lynching, murder, and domestic terrorism. Hateful symbols like nooses, swastikas, burning crosses, and other extremist symbols are intended to scare and intimidate African Americans as well as Jewish people, Muslims, and anyone who is perceived as “different.” The NAACP, our members, and our supporters are concerned regarding any possible infringement on the rights of activists to protest issues like police misconduct and seek transparency and clarity regarding any surveillance, actions or strategies which links or defines protesting with terrorism. Many African Americans familiar with previous government surveillance of Black activists, including the nefarious COINTELLPRO are extremely wary of any activities which mirror the wrongs done in the past.

Furthermore, curbs on our political power – real or perceived – such as voter intimidation and voter suppression must be investigated. If nothing else, the disparate treatment of African Americans by changes in voting laws should be addressed.

Thus, I reiterate my respectful request for a joint investigation and hearings by your two committees on the issues of domestic terrorism and the issue of government surveillance of African American social justice activists. I look forward to hearing from you soon. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact Mr. Hilary O. Shelton, the Director of the NAACP Washington Bureau and the Senior Vice President for Policy and Advocacy at (202) 463-2940.

Sincerely,

Derrick Johnson
President and CEO