



Testimony of

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ExitUSA™

On Confronting White Supremacy (Part II):
Adequacy of the Federal Response

Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (116th Congress)
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Chairman Raskin, Ranking Member Roy, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

Introduction

Life After Hate was founded in the summer of 2011 by former members of violent white supremacist organizations and other violent groups in North America. Our mission was to help people who were caught in the destructive cycle of hate from which we were able to free ourselves.

Our core foundation was built on compassion and forgiveness. And that is what has informed our work ever since.

Within a year of our founding, a former U.S. Army soldier with ties to white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups killed seven people and injured four others at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin.

A little less than three years later, another white supremacist walked into the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina with the same goal. He was heavily armed and primed for murder. He killed nine people that day.

That same year, Life After Hate answered the call of a troubled vet. He had fought in Iraq and Afghanistan and now back home was becoming preoccupied with the local Muslim community.

Thankfully, before he acted on this aggression, he called us for help. Within 24 hours we had two senior team members fly out to meet with this individual and they spent the next 72 hours with him, eventually taking him to meet the Imam of the local Muslim center and they had a very powerful meeting.

To this day, he remains engaged with his local Muslim community and it is now much safer.

Fast forward to August 2017— nearly five years to the day of the Oak Creek temple massacre — a white supremacy rally draws a who's who of violent racist groups to Charlottesville, Virginia. The congregation of the KKK, white nationalists and neo-Nazis — and the violence that ensued — deeply shook this nation.

What we are dealing with is violent extremism in the name of white supremacy. It is deadly and its threat is growing.

We saw it in October at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. Nine more people died there. We saw in April at the Chabad of Poway. One more person died there.

And we are not alone. In March, a white supremacist attacked two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, killing 51 innocent people.

These terror attacks aren't slowing down. They're accelerating. And we must recognize today that if left unchecked, white supremacist ideology always expresses itself in murder.

“No one is irredeemable”¹

A few weeks ago I was in Paris with the Prime Minister of New Zealand for a summit on the Christchurch call to eliminate terrorist and violent extremist content online.

While the internet and social media certainly emboldens domestic extremists, and enhances their ability to reach vulnerable populations, what we are confronting predates the digital world.

For violent white nationalist and extremist content to become harmful it must first prey upon vulnerable people.

As one of our members, a former neo-Nazi recruiter who today is earning a degree in criminology, says: “I was just looking for an identity. It could have been anything.”

It's a common sentiment.

Thomas, another member of Life After Hate, was a longtime member of the Aryan Brotherhood of Mississippi.

Like other formers, Thomas reached a breaking point, realizing he was headed either to a life sentence or the grave. When he disengaged there was an attempt on his life. He was shot in the face, permanently blinding him in one eye, severely damaging his sight in the other.

We asked Thomas what he feels is the biggest misconception about hate groups.

“Most people seem to think that everyone in a hate group is in it to hate another person,” he said. “It usually doesn't start out that way. A lot of people that are involved are doing so because they want the community and belonging that comes with being part of selective groups. The groups teach hate by playing on the members' fear of losing that community structure.”²

We must approach this problem holistically using a public health model. There needs to be cooperation between all levels of government and that co-operation is properly resourced. We are prepared to continue our work. And we are committed to sharing our unique understanding and knowledge that we've developed working with the nearly 400

¹ Jewels McClure, “No More Hate,” The Observer, March 6, 2018. <https://cwu-observer.com/11781/news/no-more-hate/>

² Life After Hate, “A former member of the Aryan Brotherhood talks about why he joined, and how he finally got out,” Nov. 21, 2018. <https://www.lifeafterhate.org/blog/2018/11/21/qampa-break-away-at-any-cost-a-former-member-of-the-aryan-brotherhood-talks-about-why-he-joined-and-how-he-finally-got-out>

people we have already helped.

Who We Are

As the only organization in North America founded and led by formers (meaning former violent extremists) Life After Hate understands that deradicalization is a lifelong process. We've augmented decades of personal experience and growth with extensive formalized training and academic instruction in social work, mental health, and other related fields.

We've enhanced our work through strategic partnerships with the leading subject matter experts and organizations focused on understanding and addressing violent extremism.

Tony McAleer, Co-founder & Board Chair. I was born and raised in Vancouver, British Columbia. I was a disaffected youth who found power and acceptance in the white supremacy movement at a time in my life when I felt powerless and alone.³

I ascended the ranks to become an organizer and recruiter for the White Aryan Resistance. After launching Canadian Liberty Net (a computer operated voice messaging center), I was charged with violating the Canadian Human Rights Act that prohibits the dissemination of hateful messages.⁴

My children led me on a spiritual journey of personal transformation. Over 1000 hours of counselling, group work and facilitating change in others (before joining LAH) brought me to a place of compassion and forgiveness for all people including myself. Before becoming chairman of Life After Hate's board of director's I was its executive director.

That is a role held by my colleague and fellow co-founder, Sammy Rangel.

Sammy Rangel, Co-founder & Executive Director. Sammy is an author, social worker, peace activist, speaker, trainer and father. His autobiography, "Fourbears: The Myths of Forgiveness," chronicles his life from the physical and sexual abuse he endured as a child to his path of self-destruction that culminated in a 15 1/2-year prison sentence.

In 2012, Sammy founded Formers Anonymous, a national self-help group based on the 12-step model for people addicted to street life and violence. In 2017, he was honored in a special tribute to Everyday Heroes in the Global Campaign Against Violent Extremism and accepted the award on behalf of Life After Hate.⁵

³ Jason Wilson, "Life after white supremacy: the former neo-fascist now working to fight hate," The Guardian, April 4, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/04/life-after-hate-groups-neo-fascism-racism>

⁴ Canada (Human Rights Commission) v. Canadian Liberty Net, [1998] 1 S.C.R. 626.

⁵ Global Hope Coalition. <http://globalhopecoalition.org/everyday-heroes/>

Sammy holds a Master of Social Work from Loyola University-Chicago. He previously served as a program director for a youth outreach program in his hometown of Racine for 16 years.

There are two additional members of Life After Hate who are integral to the intervention and outreach work we do.

Angela King, Co-founder & Programs Director. Angela's expertise in disengagement and de-radicalization from violent extremism stems from her personal experience as a disenfranchised, bullied youth who was recruited by neo-Nazi skinheads.

She quickly ascended in leadership within the violent far-right extremist movement, where she developed woman-centric propaganda and forged ties to some of the world's most violent far-right extremist organizations.

Following her arrest and incarceration in 1998 for her part in an armed robbery of a Jewish-owned store, Angela earned an early release from prison and rejected her former life of hate.

For nearly two decades, she has been a prominent public speaker and consultant who has received recognition and awards from the Holocaust Documentation and Education Center and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), among others, for her tireless work to counter violent extremism, reduce prejudice and build communities of justice.

She received a Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies with a focus on inequality in U.S. social systems from the University of Central Florida in 2009.

Last year, Angela was the focus of a virtual reality film, "Meeting a Monster," which was an official selection in the Tribeca Film Festival. This project was part of the Oculus VR for Good Creators Lab.⁶⁷

Robert Örell, ExitUSA™ Program Director. ExitUSA™ is our core program that provides support to individuals who are looking to leave racism and violence behind. The organization uses a variety of strategies, including public awareness campaigns, individualized education and job training programs, and leveraging community partnerships to help individuals get their life back on track.

Robert has spent more than 15 years with ExitSweden, helping people disengage from political extremism and criminal gangs. He is also a social worker, speaker, and expert on radicalization, disengagement, and intervention.

⁶ VR For Good. <https://www.oculus.com/vr-for-good/creators-lab/>

⁷ Life After Hate, Watch "Meeting a Monster," Aug. 30, 2018. <https://www.lifeafter-hate.org/blog/2018/8/30/watch-meeting-a-monster>

Robert has organized international conferences and workshops, and has been an adviser on setting up Exit organizations in several countries. He is a member of the European Commission's Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN), where he co-chairs the working group

RAN

Exit.

In April 2016, Robert was a guest speaker at a TEDx event, where he presented, "A Way Out From Violent Extremism."⁸

What we do

Violent extremism is a whole-of-society problem that requires a whole-of-society solution, and Life After Hate stands at the ready. Since Charlottesville, Life After Hate has received more than 240 requests for help from individuals and families. This is almost two-and-a-half times the number of people we helped in the six years prior. In the last two months alone we have opened 45 new cases.

Within our milieu, the experts at Life After Hate are commonly referred to as "formers." But we are much more than that.

We are professionals whose expertise is uniquely informed by both our individual experience and our collective experience working with men and women who were able to successfully exit the white power movement and build more positive lives. Together our staff has three decades of professional counseling experience.

Our evidence-based approach has three components.

1. We provide direct interventions and outreach.
2. We educate; partner with researchers; and train other professionals to deal with the growing number of people in need. And
3. We help communities prepare and respond to the day when domestic extremism knocks on their door.

ExitUSA™

Disengagement and deradicalization are complex, lifelong processes that require individualized approaches and support. Operated by highly developed and empathic formers, Life After Hate's ExitUSA™ program provides around the clock tailored support, education, and referral services - things needed to ensure people can build a new, more fulfilling life, free from hate.

⁸ Robert Örell, "A Way Out From Violent Extremism," TEDxVilnius.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CNlgKsb1QbA>.

Life After Hate's team of formers is able to conduct interventions in spaces that are often off-limits to other professionals. Our voices are authentic and credible. And that offers us access to the people who are most in-risk and vulnerable.

We offer support to those who make the decision to walk away from the violent far-right extremist movement as well as to people who want to help a friend or family member needing help breaking away or those who just seek more information.

ExitUSA™ is a voluntary program and our level of involvement is predicated by the potential former's needs and goals. The majority of cases we see are from individuals in crisis and concerned family members, and their numbers unfortunately grow daily.

We also launched an online forum so formers at different stages in their deradicalization can join conversations about all aspects of reintegration into society.

Education

&

Engagement

Life After Hate conducts numerous education and engagement activities to inform the public, communities, academics, policymakers, non-governmental organizations, and law enforcement, among others.

We tailor our efforts to meet the specific needs of the community; for example, we conduct consultations on a variety of topics, including but not limited to, on what to do when a hate group comes to town, how to support disengagement and deradicalization, and how to create grassroots partnerships to counter local violent extremist efforts and propaganda.

We also engage in strategic partnerships to counter hate; for example, last year Life After Hate partnered with POSSIBLE, a creative agency based in Seattle, to launch [#WeCounterHate](#), a social media campaign that combats hate speech on Twitter using artificial intelligence to tag, and track tweets that use dehumanizing language to attack people. Since launching the campaign:

- Overall tweet impressions are down by more than 12.1 million. Essentially, 12.1 million fewer people have been exposed to hate speech because of this platform.
- “Countered” tweets — tweets that #WeCounterHate recognized as hate speech — were retweeted at a reduced rate of 65 percent.
- 16 percent of “countered” tweets were ultimately deleted by the user.
- 33.5 percent of offending accounts were suspended after a tweet was countered.

In November 2018, POSSIBLE and Life After Hate were awarded a Shorty Social Good Award for #WeCounterHate. On May 30, the campaign was awarded a Gold Effie award

in the Positive Change: Social Good — Nonprofit category. We were also Grand Effie finalists, an award that honors the most effective work in marketing and advertising.

Academic Research. Given our unique mission and work in this space, Life After Hate regularly partners with academic researchers studying what drives men and women to join hate groups, and what individual and collective efforts can help lead them out.

There is no other organization that is doing what we do. While we find ourselves stretched to our limit to answer the call, we maintain that we simply cannot do this alone.

Building a national network. That's why Life After Hate has developed a research-informed, evidence-based cultural competency training for law enforcement, mental health providers, religious groups, formers, and nonprofits, among others who will work with de-radicalized men and women.

Using an interactive approach, training participants build their core expertise in how to identify violent far-right extremism and conduct successful interventions using the motivational interviewing (MI) counseling approach with deradicalized individuals across multiple sectors and jurisdictions. This innovative approach will ultimately create a nationwide network of "co-responders."

Thank you for the opportunity to include our voice into these very important and timely hearings on white supremacy and violent extremism. Now more than ever we must make sure that while we do not concede we must not condemn. We must make sure that we are willing to listen. We must afford people the opportunity to change their identity. For we are testament to the power of that type of change. And no one is irredeemable.