

# Our testimony to the House Judiciary Committee



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*In anticipation of an April 9, 2019 hearing in the United States House Committee on the Judiciary regarding hate crimes and the rise of white nationalism, Western States Center submitted for consideration the following written testimony.*



U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary  
Hearing on “Hate Crimes and the Rise of White Nationalism”

Written Testimony Submitted for the Record by  
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## **Introduction**

Chairman Nadler and members of the Committee, thank you for your investigation of the urgent threat to democratic institutions and values posed by hate crimes and the rise of white nationalism. On behalf of Western States Center, a civil rights organization with 30 years of experience addressing hate violence and white supremacy in the Pacific Northwest and Mountain States, we appreciate the opportunity to submit this written testimony. In it we will present some of the data and

examples on the ground that illustrate the problem. We will close by offering three clear paths for Congressional action to counter this serious and growing threat.

### **Hate Crimes & the Rise of White Nationalism: A National and International Crisis**

Last Thursday, FBI Director Christopher Wray described white supremacist extremism as “a persistent, pervasive threat.”[1] Reporting on his assessment, CNN noted that white supremacist incidents increased 182% from 2017 to 2018.[2] Just the day before, *The New York Times* reported, “Attacks by White Extremists Are Growing. So Are Their Connections,” documenting international links among white extremist killers and “highlight[ing] how the internet and social media have facilitated the spread of white extremist ideology and violence.”[3] Despite these dangerous developments, it was reported last week that the Department of Homeland Security has disbanded their Domestic Terror Intelligence Unit, raising alarm among intelligence analysts, and comment from a Los Angeles Sheriff’s Sergeant that communication from DHS’s Office of Intelligence and Analysis has “been very quiet lately... It doesn’t seem like engagement, outreach, and prevention are seen as a priority as we used to see in the past.”[4]

### **White Nationalism: A Social Movement Rooted in White Supremacy and Anti-Semitism**

*White supremacy* is a system of subjugation of people of color to preserve privilege and power for white people, dating back to our nation’s founding with the genocide and forced removal of Native Americans and the shameful institution of slavery, which helped build the U.S. economy into a global powerhouse. Operating within our institutions and prevalent in everyday life in the United States, white supremacy creates inequities that provide a breeding ground for white nationalism.

*White nationalism* is a bigoted social movement that seeks to create a white-only ethnostate. Its supporters seek to build political power to achieve that ideological vision by implementing extreme racist, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, homophobic and transphobic policies. White nationalists and the closely-aligned “alt-right” often have deeply anti-

government ideologies, making them a threat both to vulnerable communities and to our democratic institutions. While 58% of Americans reject white nationalism[5], 31% agree with a core tenet of its ideology, that: “America should protect and preserve its white European heritage.”[6] Eighteen percent of Americans say that only people of European heritage should be considered “truly American.”[7]

White nationalism is also deeply rooted in historic and contemporary anti-Semitism and misogyny. It falsely promotes the conspiracy theory that Jews, people of color, women and immigrants are responsible for perceived threats to white demographic, cultural, and political dominance.

Where white nationalist rhetoric is allowed to be pushed into the mainstream, hate violence follows. FBI data for 2017 shows that hate crimes spiked 23% nationally, marking a rise for the third year in a row (and typically hate crimes are underreported). According to the Anti-Defamation League, far-right extremists were responsible for every extremist killing in the U.S. last year.[8] Seventy-one percent of the extremist-related fatalities in the U.S. between 2008 and 2017 were committed by members of far-right or white supremacist movements. [9]

Far-right anti-government groups can be dangerous for law enforcement as well as for communities. Fifty-one police officers have been killed by far-right extremist groups since 1990, in contrast to eleven officers killed by those claiming far-left or black nationalist beliefs.[10] The potent combination of bigotry and violence central to the white nationalist movement is a serious threat to community safety.

### **White Nationalist Organizing on the Ground in the Pacific Northwest & Mountain States**

Part of our work at Western States Center is to monitor white nationalist and other racist and sexist extremist movements, and to work with community leaders to find effective solutions to address the threat that these social movements pose to vulnerable communities and to our democracy itself.

Every day the reports we hear from around the region illustrate alarming trends. First, the unabated rise of localized white nationalist violence, consistent with the same trend nationally and internationally.

Second, the increase of white nationalist rhetoric and recruitment in junior high and high schools. And third, a spike in antigovernment activity that includes threats to public officials and attempts to circumvent democratic processes to achieve political goals.

The multiplying effect of the white nationalist violence we're seeing on the ground was apparent last December, when neo-Nazi skinheads assaulted an African American DJ at a bar in Lynnwood, Washington. The assailants, who are associated with the racist skinhead group Hammerskin Nation, were in town for an annual rally they call Martyr's Day, marking the 1984 death on nearby Whidbey Island of a neo-Nazi who led a domestic terrorist group. The attack came just hours after neo-Nazi James A. Fields was convicted of killing Heather Heyer when he drove his car through a crowd of human rights supporters in Charlottesville in August of 2017, and less than two weeks after the home of a Jewish family in West Seattle was targeted with anti-Semitic graffiti.[11] White nationalist recruitment and propagandizing efforts are apparent nationally, with nearly 1,300 documented instances of white nationalist or white supremacist flyering in 2018 alone (including a marked increase in the latter half of the year).[12] In January of 2019, nine Western Washington cities were targeted in one night of flyering by the white nationalist group Patriot Front, an offshoot of the neo-Nazi group Vanguard America.

Such activity is not isolated to bars, telephone poles, and the homes and businesses of the targets of hate, however. Increasingly, white nationalist rhetoric is spreading in junior high and high schools. *"Black lives only matter because if it weren't for them who would pick our cotton."* *"It's great to be straight, it's not ok to be gay."* *"Join the kkk (the confederate kid club)."* These messages appeared on flyers at a Cheyenne, Wyoming junior high school during the last week of March. A substitute teacher at the school who spoke out about it was barred from the campus where the flyers appeared.[13]

Violent rhetoric in our public institutions, and when directed towards vulnerable people, has a chilling effect. But when directed toward public officials based on their policy decisions, it must be seen as a direct threat to our democracy.

Leaders of the antigovernment paramilitary group Patriot Prayer, for example, called for harassment and threats against Prosecuting

Attorney Tony Golik of Clark County, Washington last August in retaliation for charges filed against a Patriot Prayer supporter. Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler has been similarly targeted: an associate of the group said in a video that Wheeler's days were "numbered." Washington Department of Justice employee Evelyn Fielding-Lopez was targeted for harassment in February after testifying at a hearing about enforcing I-1639, the gun safety ordinance approved by a majority of state voters in 2018.

And on February 16th, the "sovereign citizens" group Washington III% posted a "Wanted" poster with a picture of Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson on their Facebook page. The poster called for followers to conduct a "citizen's arrest." Another post by the Washington III% on its Facebook page the same day read: "*Bob Ferguson. We the PEOPLE are not afraid of you. We WILL fight you. We WILL win... or we will die. We are willing to give our lives for this cause. Bring it on!*"

White nationalists and neo-Nazis have been regular participants in Patriot Prayer rallies on an ongoing basis and despite group founder Joey Gibson's media-friendly denunciations of white supremacy, Patriot Prayer remains attractive to multiple known white nationalists. Many Three Percenters have aligned with white nationalism, attending events such as the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, VA, in 2017 despite official attempts to distance the group.[14]

### **A Call to Action: Three Steps for Congress to Take Now**

*First, speak out directly and specifically.* It's imperative that public leaders specifically name the threat posed by white nationalism and denounce its ideology of white supremacy and anti-Semitism. The rise in hate violence has occurred within a national narrative of intolerance that gives permission and cover for the mainstreaming of anti-democratic goals that were once confined to the fringes. When opposition to white nationalism is understood as a mainstream American value, local elected officials and law enforcement are compelled to take stronger, more vocal positions against this threat. Two examples of a vigorous public response illustrate the difference that speaking out can make:

The initial response to the escalation of violent encounters in Portland, OR among media and elected officials was to characterize white nationalist violence as a free speech issue, or as isolated outbreaks of street brawling. In the lead-up to a rally organized by Patriot Prayer and Proud Boys last August, we recruited nearly 40 cross-issue organizations, including a regional group representing over 50 Tribes, to call on elected officials to respond to the threat posed by Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys. The statement was cited in local and nationally syndicated stories. As a result, a city commissioner spoke out and attended the counter-rally against bigotry. The violence is now being addressed not just as a behavioral problem, but as one aspect of a larger political crisis. In February, the City Council of Portland unanimously approved a resolution denouncing white nationalism, white supremacy, and alt-right hate groups.

In Vancouver, WA, we connected with two victims of Proud Boys assaults, including an African-American teenager who was unjustly charged with felony assault while his attackers were not apprehended or investigated by police. We demanded the charges be dropped and publicized the case to the media. The prosecuting attorney dropped the charges, the story gained significant attention, and there was a noticeable shift in media coverage of the Proud Boys. Law enforcement in Vancouver also took the threat more seriously. The local sheriff dismissed a deputy sheriff who had been marketing Proud Boys clothing, and later released a joint statement with the prosecuting attorney denouncing bigotry.

As you have done in calling this hearing, please continue to speak *for* the values you stand for and your vision for your community's future. Unequivocally reject organized bigotry that seeks to exploit intolerance and undermine the safety and stability of our communities. Visibly support the public officials in your district who are being threatened with violence and death for speaking out, passing resolutions denouncing white nationalism, upholding inclusive democracy, and enforcing the law.

*Second, support community-driven responses to the rising threat posed by far-right extremist groups.* While national leadership plays an essential role in encouraging or discouraging the growth of intolerance, local opposition to white nationalism is also critical. White nationalist groups are organizing, recruiting, and building power in local

communities, and that is also where their growth must be stemmed. Courageous community leaders across the country are prepared to respond, and they could be better equipped with resources, support, and leadership from elected officials. Congress can empower communities at the local level by providing innovation grants and amplifying attention for local efforts that counter bigotry and white nationalism. For example, tools such as Western States Center's *Confronting White Nationalism in Schools Toolkit*, which provides resources to address racism and bigotry in middle and high schools, could be widely distributed with stronger funding and political backing.

*Third, improve mandatory data collection and analysis.* The United States currently lacks an accurate count of hate crimes and extremist violence. There is no mandatory reporting from the local to federal level (except for sheriffs). The Department of Homeland Security has dismantled its domestic terror intelligence unit. These alarming gaps in data collection and analysis must be addressed. Accurate and comprehensive data is essential in motivating and evaluating both law enforcement and community response.

### **Conclusion: A Matter of Moral Urgency and Political Will**

Eradicating white supremacist violence and protecting our democracy from the threat of white nationalism will take a long-term commitment of time and resources at every level of American governance. White nationalism and white supremacy have been allowed to flourish in our national climate of rancor and division. The rise in far-right extremist hate violence speaks to the urgent need for leaders to send a clear, resounding message that bigotry will not be tolerated in our democracy, that hateful ideologies have no place in mainstream political debate, and that the goals of white nationalists and other hate movements are incompatible with upholding inclusive democracy.

Western States Center commends the leadership and members of the Committee for focusing on this issue in today's hearing. We stand ready to partner with you in creating a more vigorous, unequivocal response to this crisis at the national and local levels. Thank you.

**About Western States Center**

Based in the Pacific Northwest and Mountain States, Western States Center works nationwide to strengthen inclusive democracy. For 30 years, our work has advanced gender, racial, and economic justice by convening, developing, organizing, and supporting the communities most affected by inequities. We are one of the nation's leading organizations working to combat white nationalism and authoritarianism and assist civil society to effectively respond to social movements that exploit bigotry and intolerance. Our *Confronting White Nationalism in Schools Toolkit*, which provides resources to address racism and bigotry in middle and high schools, has been requested by nearly 1,100 teachers, parents, and community leaders from nearly all U.S. states and seven countries in its first month of distribution.

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