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**Testimony of**

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to the

**Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship**  
**U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary**

regarding

**The Oversight of the Trump Administration's Border Policies and the  
Relationship Between Anti-Immigrant Rhetoric and Domestic  
Terrorism**

September 6, 2019

Chairman Nadler and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of YWCA USA and speak about the critical issue of anti-immigrant rhetoric and its link to domestic terrorism. YWCA appreciates the Committee's commitment to addressing the ongoing humanitarian crisis at the southern border and the confluence of hate and violence that currently plagues our nation.

Each day across this great nation, YWCAs get up and do the work of leading in our communities, collaborating with partners, and supporting those most impacted by racial and gender-based violence. Our communities are reeling from the trauma inflicted by an epidemic of gun violence, racist rhetoric, misogyny, and gender-based violence that lies at the heart of America's surge in domestic terrorism. Our extensive work in providing trauma-services and our perspective as a community-based organization enable YWCA to provide critical insights into the growing hate and violence throughout our nation--and the solutions that this committee must act upon immediately.



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### **YWCA's History and Expertise**

My testimony today is informed by YWCA's nation-wide network of direct service providers. YWCA is on the ground in El Paso, Texas, in Dayton, Ohio, and in some 1300 communities across the nation. YWCA is one of the oldest and largest women's organizations in the country, serving over 2 million women, girls, and their families. We have been at the forefront of the most pressing social movements for more than 160 years - from voting rights to civil rights, from affordable housing to pay equity, from violence prevention to health care reform. Today, we combine programming and advocacy in order to generate institutional change in three key areas: racial justice and civil rights, women's empowerment and economic advancement, and health and safety of women and girls.

YWCA's significant expertise in working with children, survivors of domestic and sexual violence, as well as immigrant communities, is of particular relevance to my testimony today. Each year, across our vibrant network of more than 200 local associations, YWCA is proud to provide:

- 535,000 women, children, and families with gender-based violence support services that are trauma-informed, and which include domestic violence and sexual assault programs and services (such as: emergency shelter, crisis hotlines, counseling and court assistance, and other community safety programs)
- More than 170,000 children and parents with child care, teen, and parenting programs, which include programs that specifically integrate trauma-informed practices to meet the needs of homeless



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children, and children who have witnessed and experienced domestic violence and other trauma

- 145,000 women, children, and families with housing, food assistance, and immigrant assistance programs
- Since 1906, YWCA has provided health and wellness programs to promote and protect women’s health

Moreover, YWCA has a long history of providing support and services to immigrant women, children, and families, dating back to 1885, when YWCA provided safe haven, shelter, and employment services for immigrant women arriving on Ellis Island. Today, YWCAs serve more than 40,000 immigrants and refugees across the U.S. annually through the following<sup>1</sup>:

- 37 YWCAs have dedicated immigrant and refugee service programs, while more than a quarter of YWCAs have specific immigrant and refugee services, a coordinated response to the community’s need for immigrant and refugee services, or report serving a significant group of immigrants and refugees.<sup>2</sup>
- YWCAs in 27 states support programming and services for immigrants and refugees. These states are in all 4 Census Bureau-designated regions and all 10 standard federal regions, spanning the United States of America and serving diverse communities and populations across the county.<sup>3</sup>
- YWCAs provide domestic violence and sexual assault services specifically tailored to the needs and vulnerabilities of immigrant and refugee survivors. For example, YWCA Greater Cincinnati’s Immigrant Survivors of Partner Violence program (ISPV) provides specialized services, including connection to legal assistance.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, YWCA Tulsa’s legal services program staff includes a full-time immigration attorney and bilingual Department of Justice-accredited immigration representatives.<sup>5</sup> They specialize in naturalization and family-based cases, and offer assistance with adjustment of status, Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) self-petitions, U and T visas, and many other legal issues faced by immigrant survivors.

YWCA’s recent travels to the U.S. / Mexico border have deepened our understanding of the on-going humanitarian crisis, and the ways in which anti-immigrant rhetoric impact communities as well as individuals who are seeking safety and asylum in the U.S. Over the past 15 months, YWCA has:

- Led a delegation to visit McAllen, Texas, where we observed and interacted with families and children immediately after their release from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) detention, and with community service providers who are tending to their



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- medical, emotional, housing, nutrition, and other needs such as the work done by Catholic Charities through Sister Norma Pimentel (June 2018)
- Visited the border crossing where the Tornillo tent city is located and marched to call for an end to family separation and better conditions for children detained in tent facilities (June 2018)
  - Participated in a delegation visit to San Diego, California led by Hispanics in Philanthropy where we spoke with service providers who work with migrant children and families, and where we observed “Operation Streamline” detention proceedings at the U.S. District Court, and asylum claim proceedings at Otay Mesa Detention Center (August 2018)
  - Participated in a delegation to El Paso, Texas with Hispanics in Philanthropy where, just 36 hours before a lone gunman began yet another mass shooting, YWCA CEOs and staff joined other nonprofit advocates and philanthropic leaders in a site visit to El Paso and Juarez, Mexico. We observed first-hand the implementation of the Administration’s new “remain in Mexico” policy and heard from advocates and service providers about the impact of the crisis on individuals seeking refuge in the U.S. as well as on the broader El Paso community. (August 2019)
  - Hosted Congressional briefings along with other community-based organizations to share our observations and findings (June 2018 and April 2019)

### **Overcoming Our Nation’s History of Racial Violence**

As many have noted in recent days, words and acts of hate, terror, and dehumanization fuel an epidemic of domestic terrorism which we cannot separate from our nation’s long history of racial fear and violence. The recent manifestations of hate and violence in our communities -- particularly those fueled by anti-immigrant rhetoric-- are yet another chapter in a history of political, cultural, and economic assaults on people of color, women, and other marginalized groups. From the colonization of indigenous peoples to the arrival of the first ship of enslaved Africans, our country’s history is rooted in systemic acts of racial discrimination, fear, and racist rhetoric. Throughout its ascendance, our nation has perpetuated state-sanctioned hate and violence: from Jim Crow to the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II to emboldened white supremacists rallying in Charlottesville, Virginia. The social fabric of our nation is torn and tainted by systematic attempts at silencing, suppressing, and victimizing underrepresented communities.

Today, vitriolic anti-immigrant rhetoric as well as acts of violence motivated by hate continue this troubled history. The humanitarian crisis that continues to unfold here in El Paso, as well as the mass shootings that

are emblematic of the domestic terrorism that is on the rise in the U.S., build upon this tainted history of racism, bias, and bigotry. Any meaningful attempt by this Congress to address these current domestic crises requires an introspective look at our country's historical evolution of hate and its dehumanization of people of color.

### **Current Manifestations of Hate-Inspired Violence**

El Paso and Dayton have joined Sandy Hook, Orlando, Stoneman Douglas, Las Vegas, Oak Creek, Pittsburgh, Charleston, and a litany of cities, schools, and churches as scenes of mass violence in America. Make no mistake: these are acts of domestic terrorism propelled by racism, misogyny, and easy access to weapons of war, and they have come to define this moment in our nation's history.

The statistics are alarming. According to recent FBI reports, the United States has seen a 30% increase in hate crimes in the three-year period ending in 2017.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center's 2019 *Intelligence Report*, the number of hate groups operating across America rose to a record high 1,020 in 2018, a 7% increase over the 954 counted in 2017.<sup>7</sup> This measurement tops the previous high of 1018 hate groups reached in 2011. Currently, the federal government as well as 45 states and the District of Columbia have enacted hate crime laws.<sup>8</sup> While considerable progress has been made, hate-motivated violence in our nation still exists.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the rise in hate crimes, there has also been a rise in the frequency and deadliness of public mass shootings like those that occurred in El Paso and Dayton on August 3rd and 4th. An analysis of public mass shootings over the past 50 years, funded by the National Institute of Justice, found that eight of the 20 most deadly mass shootings have occurred in the last five years, and 2017 and 2018 were the deadliest years, with 2019 on track to overtake both those years.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, it is not uncommon for mass shooters to have experienced childhood trauma (including domestic violence).

Further, the connections between domestic violence, misogyny, and mass shootings are alarming. Most mass shootings in the U.S. are related to domestic or family violence. In a review of 22 mass shootings between 2011 and 2019, 86% of shooters had a history of domestic abuse, 32% had a history of stalking and harassment, and 50% specifically targeted women.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, in more than 40% of mass shootings between 2009 and 2017, the shooter exhibited warning signs that they posed a danger to themselves or others, and one-third of mass shooters were prohibited from possessing a firearm.<sup>12</sup> Among these gender-based violence massacres are the mass shootings in Orlando, Florida in 2016; Sutherland Springs, Texas



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in 2017; and Dayton, Ohio in 2019. In Orlando, the shooter’s wife shared that he had repeatedly beaten her, including while she was pregnant;<sup>13</sup> in Sutherland Springs, the shooter was court-martialed over charges he assaulted his then-wife and hit her child hard enough to fracture the child’s skull;<sup>14</sup> and in Dayton, classmates of the gunman who killed nine people say he was suspended for compiling a “hit list” of people he wanted to kill and “rape list” of girls he wanted to sexually assault.<sup>15</sup> With one in three women estimated to experience domestic violence and more than three women murdered by their partners each day,<sup>16</sup> the implications of these intersections between gender-based violence and mass shootings are particularly alarming.

Recent hate-motivated violence has further illuminated the tragic consequences that result when misogyny intertwines with racist rhetoric. Some shooters explicitly describe their hatred for women in their manifestos; others describe discontentment arising from male entitlement. Particularly important to note is how often this is interwoven with racism and white supremacy. For instance, on the day of the shooting in Gilroy, California, the shooter posted on Instagram recommending a 19-century book called, “*Might is Right*,” filled with racist and misogynistic rhetoric.<sup>17</sup> In Tallahassee, Florida, the shooter posted online videos and songs proclaiming himself to be a misogynist and highlighting a hatred for women, Black people, and immigrants.<sup>18</sup> Several shooters have actively linked their hatred for women to racist sentiments,<sup>19</sup> including in El Paso, Texas, where the shooter’s racist manifesto suggested that “race mixing” was destroying the nation.<sup>20</sup> Though not all misogynists are racist and not every white supremacist is misogynistic, a thread of hatred and disdain for women connects many white supremacists.

### **The Imperative of Community Healing**

Incidents of hate and violence have a long-lasting and intergenerational impact on people and communities. Particularly when communities are already grappling with racist rhetoric, acts of violence both cause and compound trauma. Personal stories from El Paso and Dayton make clear the depth of trauma that these communities are dealing with:

- “Jane Doe” is a single mother of two young children who was recently diagnosed with breast cancer. Undocumented, afraid of deportation, and afraid for the well-being of her children, she avoided seeking timely and critical cancer treatment. The growing anti-immigrant rhetoric and compounding fear also led “Jane” to resign from school related activities and community events, and to purchase groceries at off-peak hours to avoid the attention of immigration enforcement officials. Jane’s complex decision to forego medical treatment ultimately led her to receive a double mastectomy as the severity of her condition increased.



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- The increased anti-immigrant rhetoric and hate-filled climate has a direct effect on the Mexican-American children attending YWCA El Paso's after-school and early learning academies. The children, between the ages of 4-12 years old, recently expressed concerns and fears of going to jail or being killed because of their Mexican identities and the increased targeting of people of color at the Southwest border. Many children also expressed anxiety about the potential deportation of their parents.
- The August 4th shooting in Dayton, Ohio, took place in one of the few spaces that bridge long-standing racial divides, and compounded trauma the community was already experiencing from a series of events in the preceding months, including: the KKK publicly choosing Dayton as the site of a Klan rally; a major hospital closing down and being demolished, leaving a medical and physical hole in the community; the economic reality of redlining by banks, high eviction rates, and food and book deserts across Black neighborhoods; and a Memorial Day tornado which demolished thousands of low and moderate income homes.

Where communities are traumatized by the racist rhetoric and violence of domestic terrorism, community healing is imperative. YWCA stands in lock-step with so many of our partners across the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors: we are all bringing our collective resources and expertise to bear to promote community healing. As many of the witnesses the Committee hears from today will share, there is much to be done and no one group can do this alone.

The ongoing humanitarian crisis at the southern border as well as the recent shootings in El Paso and Dayton have served as pivotal moments for YWCA leadership across the country. YWCAs are part of the fabric of communities hardest hit by domestic terrorism, and we are committed to the hard work of community healing:

- YWCA El Paso collected clothes and toiletry items for refugees and migrants, provided showers, and garnered a volunteer coalition that has provided on-site support at makeshift shelters, made and delivered food, and other supportive services--joining with partners to serve thousands of women, children, and families in need
- YWCA Northwest Ohio recently organized and directed a community drive, collecting over 250 pounds of toiletries, gift cards, and other non-perishable goods that were later delivered to migrants in El Paso
- Just last night, YWCA El Paso in conjunction with The El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center and City of El Paso's Office of Resilience and Sustainability, hosted a healing round-table discussion to focus on El Pasoans' response to the recent terrorist



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attack on the city and the language of hate and its impact. The event focused on hearing individual voices, to share experiences, to explore how our community can heal, and discuss how we can counter systemic racism as well as dangerous and negative language and narratives.

- Earlier this week, the CEO of YWCA Dayton joined the Dayton police chief, the Dayton mayor, and the Ohio governor in a community forum, where she specifically addressed the correlations and intersections between domestic violence, misogyny, racist rhetoric, and gun violence

## YWCA Urges Action

Just as the current situation was not created by one policy or one act but by the cumulative effect of many actors and many actions, so too the solution will require multi-prong approaches that reflect the complexity anti-immigrant rhetoric, gender-based violence and acts of domestic terror in our communities. YWCA USA urges Members of Congress to take swift action on the following recommendations:

### 1. Stand Against Racism:

YWCA urges Members of Congress to cosponsor the bipartisan National Opposition to Hate, Assault, and Threats to Equality (NO HATE) Act (S. 2043/H.R. 3545). This bill would take important steps to improve reporting and expanding assistance by closing gaps in existing hate crime reporting laws and strengthen national response. YWCA is committed to standing in solidarity with communities of color and all immigrants, regardless of status, who face the very real threat of hate crimes as well as racist and xenophobic attacks. YWCA urges Representatives to co-sponsor this important bill and combat hate speech, threats, and attacks.

### 2. End Gender-based Violence:

YWCA urges Members to take action to prevent gender-based violence and support survivors. While the House has already passed the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act (VAWA) of 2019 (H.R. 1585), the Senate has not yet taken action on this bill. The women and families we serve cannot wait any more. Gender-based violence occurs across all races, ages, classes, and ethnic background. However, increasing evidence also indicates that growing numbers of immigrant and refugee women are trapped in violent relationships or lack the ability to leave an abuser or perpetrator because of immigration laws, language barriers, social isolation, and lack of financial resources. Current VAWA protections apply to immigrant women and refugees who are victims of violence. The VAWA reauthorization bill passed by the House includes critical additions to prevent firearm-related domestic violence homicide. YWCA strongly supports the full reauthorization of VAWA.





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At the same time that we are experiencing an increase in racially charged, violent hate crimes, the Administration has made it dangerous for non-citizen abuse victims to seek legal protection from their abusers, the exact opposite intention of VAWA. We urge Congress to review and pass legislation to reverse all executive orders and regulatory changes that impede the ability of non-citizens who have experienced gender-based violence to secure legal protection from their abusers.

In addition, YWCA also urges Congress to pass the reauthorization of the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) (S.2259). Since it was enacted in 1984, FVPSA has addressed domestic violence through community-driven solutions and a network of programs and services to respond to domestic violence across the country. FVPSA remains the primary source of federal funding to support emergency shelter and related assistance for victims of domestic and dating violence, their families as well as individuals at risk of victimization. YWCA urges Congress to pass S. 2259 to reauthorize FVPSA and maintain practical solutions to protect survivors (including migrant women and girls), hold perpetrators accountable, and eradicate all forms of gender-based violence.

**3. Protect Immigrant Women, Children, and Families:**

YWCA urges Members to cosponsor and pass the Humane Enforcement and Legal Protections (HELP) for Separated Children Act of 2019 (H.R.3451), the Help Separated Families Act of 2019 (H.R.3452), and the Dignity for Detained Immigrants Act (S.1242/H.R.2415) to help protect children and families impacted by immigration enforcement actions, and to set standards and guidelines for the facilities at which immigrants may be held in custody.

YWCA also urges Members to utilize their oversight powers to oppose the promulgation of the Joint U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) final rule. YWCA opposes this rule because it would amend regulations relating to the apprehension, processing, care, custody, and release of noncitizen minors, which intends to terminate the Flores Settlement Agreement. The standards set forth in the Flores Settlement Agreement are essential to the health and well-being of immigrant children in the custody of the DHS and the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), and comport with best practices in the treatment of children from medical and psychological perspectives.

**4. Support Funding for Trauma-Informed Care and Services:**

YWCA urges Congress to pass the bipartisan RISE from Trauma Act (H.R. 3180) to support community initiatives to prevent and address this trauma. When someone experiences a significant tragedy — whether in a

mass shooting, a child separated from their parent, exposure to domestic violence or other acts of violence and abuse — the ripple effects are long-term and devastating.

Congress must also fund programs authorized in the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act (P.L. 115-271) that focus on child trauma, such as the Mental Health in Schools program that would increase student access to trauma-informed mental health services through programs and partnerships, including with community-based providers. It is authorized at \$20 million but has not yet received any funding.

Finally, Congress can support national pilot programs that are based on innovative local initiatives like the successful Manchester, New Hampshire Adverse Childhood Experiences Response Team (ACERT) program to assist children who have been exposed to trauma. YWCA New Hampshire is a leading partner along with the local police department and children's hospital.

#### **5. Support Common-sense Gun-Safety Solutions:**

YWCA applauds the bipartisan passage of the Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019 (H.R. 8). This bill takes critical steps to require background checks on all firearm sales in the U.S. and closes loopholes in firearm sales that have previously been left open. It also begins an important movement towards protecting vulnerable communities across the country, including survivors of domestic violence, communities of color, and clients served by YWCAs everywhere. YWCA urges the Senate to follow in the leadership of the House of Representatives and swiftly take up and pass this important bill.

YWCA also urges immediate action on a range of common-sense gun safety solutions that directly relate to domestic terrorism, including: eliminating access to military style weapons and high-capacity ammunition; prohibiting those convicted of domestic violence and stalking from obtaining firearms, as well as those subject to domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking restraining orders; ensuring that abusers and stalkers subject to a restraining order relinquish all firearms once they are prohibited; establishing mandatory licensing requirements; opposing “concealed carry reciprocity” legislation, which would enable abusers to carry firearms across state lines into states that prohibit “concealed carry”; and removing restrictions on gun data collection. The rise of gun violence in our communities is an unspeakable tragedy that must be addressed.

#### **Conclusion**

We find ourselves at a pivotal juncture as we search to define and defend the values that constitute the soul of our nation. It is imperative that we



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live up to our highest ideals. Today our nation’s worst self has taken the lives of many and dehumanized countless others on account of their gender, sexual orientation, religion, and immigration status. Through education, accountability, and swift action by Congress, we can take steps toward ending these systemic acts of violence in our communities and give true meaning to our nation’s motto, E Pluribus Unum.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. We are pleased to continue working with you on these critical issues.



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<sup>1</sup> 2018 YWCA Metrics and Impact Report, "YWCA Performance Metrics: Immigrant and Refugee Services."

<sup>2</sup> 2019 YWCA Association Programs and Services Survey

<sup>3</sup> Id.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ywcacincinnati.org/what-we-do/safety/domestic-violence-sexual-assault-non-residential-services/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ywcatulsa.org/immigrant-and-refugee-services/>

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