



**Written Testimony of  
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**Hearing on  
The Rise in Violence Against Minority Institutions**

**United States House of Representatives  
Committee on the Judiciary  
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security**

*Thursday, February 17, 2022*

## I. Introduction

On behalf of Muslim Advocates, we welcome the opportunity to submit this testimony on the rise in violence against minority institutions. We will focus on attacks against Muslim institutions, and on the particular phenomena that enable and lead to these attacks. Muslim Advocates is a national civil rights organization working to ensure that American Muslims and all Americans may live free from hate and discrimination. To that end, we monitor anti-Muslim hate attacks, provide support to affected communities, and pursue solutions to promote community safety and hold perpetrators accountable.

## II. Attacks on Muslim Institutions

According to FBI data, which is notoriously underreported, hate crimes are at a 12-year high.<sup>1</sup> (The total number is higher than we can measure, as these crimes are notoriously underreported.) Many factors contribute to this, including attacks against minority communities by public officials,<sup>2</sup> racial scapegoating vis-a-vis COVID-19, backlash and misinformation about the national movement for racial justice, fear-mongering about Afghan

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<sup>1</sup> Reuters, "Hate Crimes Hit 12-Year High in United States in 2020," August 30, 2021, <https://www.usnews.com/news/top-news/articles/2021-08-30/hate-crimes-hit-12-year-high-in-united-states-in-2020-fbi>.

<sup>2</sup> William Cummings, "Trump tells congresswomen to 'go back' to the 'crime infested places from which they came,'" July 14, 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2019/07/14/trump-tells-congresswomen-go-back-counties-they-came/1728253001/>.

refugees following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, and encouragement of white nationalism, which federal officials acknowledge is the greatest domestic terror threat to Americans today.<sup>3</sup> White nationalist messaging reverberates throughout our country now, manifesting in hate crimes and bigotry targeted at many marginalized groups, including American Muslims: a recent survey found that 50 percent of Muslims in the United States experienced anti-Muslim bias in the past 12 months.<sup>4</sup>

In such a climate, it is no surprise that Muslim institutions have experienced increased attacks, often correlated to foreign policy events or anniversaries of terror attacks. Mosque incidents over the past 12 months include:

- A bloody pig's head mask was placed at an Austin mosque on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11, alongside a sign proclaiming, "Muslims: you are as unclean to God as a pig is to you. Have your idolatry washed clean by the blood of Jesus Christ."
- "Death to Palestine" was found spray painted on a Brooklyn mosque on Eid, presumably in reference to Israeli attacks on Muslim worshippers on the night before Eid in Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup>
- A religious flag was burned and "Trump" was spray painted at a mosque in Long Island, NY.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to these incidents, mosques and Muslim institutions are often targeted before they've even broken ground, due to a long history of public opposition to Muslim spaces.<sup>7</sup> For example, Muslim Advocates has represented Muslim groups facing bigoted community opposition for building mosques and cemeteries.<sup>8</sup>

III. Anti-Muslim rhetoric from public officials contributes to a climate of hate which can result in physical attacks.

Given the venue for this testimony, we would be remiss not to mention the crucial role that elected officials play to alleviate or exacerbate this problem. Our representatives in Congress

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<sup>3</sup> Eileen Sullivan and Katie Benner, "Top law enforcement officials say the biggest domestic terror threat comes from white supremacists," May 12, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/12/us/politics/domestic-terror-white-supremacists.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Othering & Belonging Institute, Islamophobia Through the Eyes of Muslims, September 2021, <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/2021-10/Islamophobia%20Through%20the%20Eyes%20of%20Muslims.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> WABC-TV, "'Death to Palestine' spray painted on Brooklyn mosque," May 13, 2021, <https://abc7ny.com/tayba-islamic-center-mosque-vandalism-ramadan-eid-al-fitr/10626345/>.

<sup>6</sup> WABC, "Long Island mosque vandalism: Religious flag burned, base spray painted with pro-Trump graffiti," May 20, 2021, [https://abc7ny.com/islamic-center-of-suffolk-county-shah-e-najaf-mosque-vandalized-hate-crime/10667203/#:~:text=BRENTWOOD%2C%20Long%20Island%20\(WABC\),graffiti%20on%20the%20marble%20base.&text=%22They%20also%20had%20to%20bring,upsetting%20hate%20crime%20to%20us.%22](https://abc7ny.com/islamic-center-of-suffolk-county-shah-e-najaf-mosque-vandalized-hate-crime/10667203/#:~:text=BRENTWOOD%2C%20Long%20Island%20(WABC),graffiti%20on%20the%20marble%20base.&text=%22They%20also%20had%20to%20bring,upsetting%20hate%20crime%20to%20us.%22).

<sup>7</sup> Jennifer Merolla, "Freedom from Religion? Public Opposition to Mosques," August 20, 2010, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/freedom-from-religion-pub\\_b\\_687554](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/freedom-from-religion-pub_b_687554)

<sup>8</sup> <https://muslimadvocates.org/2020/10/victory-after-lawsuit-va-county-lifts-block-on-muslim-cemetery/>

can choose to promote hate, or to promote respect, truth, freedom and fairness. This is not about “political correctness” or free speech; it is about the responsibility of elected officials to uphold the Constitution, respect the dignity of their office, and to promote unity and social cohesion.

Sadly, Representatives Lauren Boebert (R-CO) and Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) have chosen hate. Recently, they have taken to referring to their Muslim colleagues in Congress as the “Jihad Squad,” cracking jokes about suicide bombers,<sup>9</sup> and accusing Muslim Representative Ilhan Omar (D-MN) of wanting to “force the entire world to submit to Islam.”<sup>10</sup> While these actions were met with condemnation from Democratic leaders, Republican leadership was silent, and no official sanctions have been pursued to date.

Evidence shows that these kinds of actions (and failure to act) by Congress have real-world consequences. Hateful comments from elected officials have been found to directly connect to incidents of hate speech.<sup>11</sup> When members of Congress use their platforms to encourage hate and fear of an entire religion, their supporters listen and send hate and threats to Muslim members of Congress, to their staff and to all American Muslims. For years, Representatives Omar and Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) have regularly received death threats specifically singling them out and targeting them because they are Muslim. When Congressional leaders fail to hold fellow members of Congress accountable for hate-mongering, those members will only double down on their bigotry. By doing so, they normalize and encourage anti-Muslim hate among their supporters.

Lonnie Coffman’s actions are a chilling example of the harms that hateful rhetoric can cause. On the day of the January 6, 2021 insurrection, Coffman drove to Washington, D.C. with bombs, guns and a list that [singled out Rep. André Carson \(D-IN\) as a Muslim](#).<sup>12</sup> He was arrested before he was able to achieve any of his apparent plans, but he was permitted to plead to relatively minor charges that carry a maximum penalty of less than nine years.<sup>13</sup>

IV. Mistrust of law enforcement is a barrier to solutions that rely on law enforcement.

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<sup>9</sup> Jason Lemon, “Marjorie Taylor Greene Attacks Ilhan Omar, 'Jihad Squad' After Boebert Apology,” November 27, 2021, <https://www.newsweek.com/marjorie-taylor-greene-attacks-ilhan-omar-jihad-squad-after-boebert-apology-1653686>.

<sup>10</sup> Muslim Advocates, Screenshot of @Mtgreeene Twitter account posting, December 14, 2021, <https://muslimadvocates.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Greene-Screenshot.png>.

<sup>11</sup> Liz Zhou, “There need to be consequences for Rep. Lauren Boebert’s Islamophobic comments,” December 4, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/22814386/lauren-boebert-islamophobic-comments-omar-house-republicans>.

<sup>12</sup> Lawrence Andrea, “Man arrested in D.C. with explosives had threatening note mentioning Rep. André Carson,” January 12, 2021, <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/crime/2021/01/12/lonnie-coffman-included-rep-andre-carson-threatening-note/6644525002/>.

<sup>13</sup> Carol Robinson, “Lonnie Coffman pleads guilty in Jan. 6 riots: Says Molotov cocktails were old; complains about jail conditions,” November 12, 2021, <https://www.al.com/news/2021/11/lonnie-coffman-pleads-guilty-in-jan-6-riots-says-molotov-cocktails-were-old-complains-about-jail-conditions.html>.

While American Muslims, particularly Black Muslims, have been targeted by law enforcement long before 9/11, the legal legacy of 9/11 has been a dramatic increase in massive, dragnet surveillance and large-scale spying operations on Muslim communities. We have been mapped, entrapped, infiltrated, and routinely monitored. Muslims all over the country have been targeted by law enforcement, not based on wrongdoing, but simply because their religion, ethnicity, and/or national origin has been used as a proxy for criminal activity.<sup>14</sup> The FBI's own training materials, produced in 2011 in response to Freedom of Information Act requests, demonstrate that its actions were guided by false stereotypes rather than sound policing: counterterrorism training materials about Muslims and Islam were rife with grossly inaccurate, inflammatory, and highly offensive assertions.<sup>15</sup>

It should therefore not be surprising that the vast majority—87.5 percent—of Muslims who experience anti-Muslim hate do not report it.<sup>16</sup> When Muslims are attacked by civilians who hold the same biases underpinning the laws and policies that hold all Muslims presumptively suspect, it stands to reason that Muslims will be wary of approaching law enforcement for solutions. For Black Muslims, who make up one-fifth to one-third of all American Muslims, the ongoing reality of unjustified police violence is a longstanding barrier to approaching law enforcement.<sup>17</sup> In addition, Muslims of all races may believe that inviting law enforcement's attention will result in increased investigations or surveillance; they may face language barriers, fear public retaliation, and/or believe that law enforcement will not take their concerns seriously, or be able to help even if they do.<sup>18</sup>

## V. Conclusion and Recommendations

Anti-Muslim fear-mongering and bigotry has been on the rise in America. Public officials are increasingly fanning the flames of hate, abandoning their responsibility to promote freedom, truth and fairness. As a result, today, it is becoming increasingly acceptable to demonize Muslims and vandalize mosques. American Muslims are hesitant to rely on law enforcement approaches to protect their communities and institutions.

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<sup>14</sup> Muslim Advocates, "Losing Liberty, [https://muslimadvocates.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Losing\\_Liberty\\_The\\_State\\_of\\_Freedom\\_10\\_Years\\_After\\_the\\_PATRIOT\\_Act.pdf](https://muslimadvocates.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Losing_Liberty_The_State_of_Freedom_10_Years_After_the_PATRIOT_Act.pdf); see also <https://theintercept.com/2020/06/25/defund-police-dhs-cve-program/>.

<sup>15</sup> See Muslim Advocates, "Letter to DOJ Inspector General on Use of FBI Training Materials," September 15, 2011, <https://muslimadvocates.org/2011/09/letter-to-doj-inspector-general-on-use-of-fbi-training-materials/>.

<sup>16</sup> Othering & Belonging Institute, Islamophobia Through the Eyes of Muslims, September 2021, <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/2021-10/Islamophobia%20Through%20the%20Eyes%20of%20Muslims.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> <https://time.com/5884176/islam-black-lives-matter-policing-muslims/>; <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/02/25/516468604/black-muslims-face-double-jeopardy-anxiety-in-the-heartland>.

<sup>18</sup> Beverly McPhail, Hating Hate: Policy Implications of Hate Crime Legislation, 74 THE SOCIAL SERVICE REVIEW, 74(4), at 641 (Dec. 2000).

To combat rising anti-Muslim discrimination, harassment and hate incidents particularly targeting institutions, Muslim Advocates makes the following recommendations for members of Congress:

- 1) Refrain from engaging in hate speech about Islam and Muslims and be sure to condemn and hold accountable colleagues who do make such hateful comments. Rather than continuing to sow the division that threatens the very fabric of American society, members of Congress must foster unity to collectively address the many challenges we face.
- 2) Address the failures of past and present federal law enforcement programs that have mischaracterized and criminalized American Muslims' religious expression, perpetuated patently false stereotypes about Muslims, permitted racial and religious profiling, and ultimately resulted in bad federal policing. Specifically, we ask Congress to:
  - a. Request an audit of all federal law enforcement and intelligence gathering training and educational materials to identify information that is factually incorrect or exhibits bias against any race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin. Hold a hearing to share findings and examine the impacts of these materials.
  - b. Condition homeland security funding on a mandatory retraining program for all federal, state, and local law enforcement officials who have been subjected to biased and discriminatory training provided by the federal government or with federal funds.
  - c. Require that DHS condition law enforcement and homeland security funding for state and local governments (including TVTP grants) on carrying out training or otherwise using federal funds in a manner that upholds our nation's commitment to equal treatment and equal justice under the law and barring the use of trainers or materials that exhibit bias against any race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin.
  - d. Demand accountability of federal agencies for permitting racial and religious profiling in law enforcement intelligence activities.
  - e. Discontinue funding of, and demand transparency from, the Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention grant program, and Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships (CP3)
    - i. Aside from messaging, it is not clear to us whether either of these programs are anything but a reformulation of previous, flawed federal government countering violent extremism programs.
    - ii. There is no indication that current grantees are pursuing evidence-based approaches.

- iii. There are no publicly available assessments of the effectiveness of past grants and whether these experiences contain any lessons for future efforts.<sup>19</sup>
  - iv. CP3 must specifically address the concerns Muslim Advocates outlined in a [letter](#) to Acting DHS Secretary Chad Wolf on June 1, 2020.<sup>20</sup>
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- 3) To date, there still has not been a full, public, and independent accounting and review of the Patriot Act & other surveillance powers granted by Congress to the FBI and other institutions within the Executive branch. The Committee is well-positioned to initiate this public reckoning.
  - 4) Ensure that law enforcement resources are targeting the biggest domestic threat to Americans, which is white nationalism. Profiling and surveilling American Muslims not only violates our constitutional rights and liberties: it detracts from the real threat, stigmatizes our communities, and damages trust, all of which make our nation less safe.
  - 5) Direct federal resources to community approaches to safety: invest in our communities' self-determination by redirecting grants from Department of Homeland Security programs to community-based security approaches that do not rely on law enforcement.

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<sup>19</sup> In a February 2021 report, DHS concurred with a recommendation by the GAO that DHS implement evaluation measures for TVTP, stating that its Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Grant Program Evaluation Plan documents its planned evaluation method. Copies of this Plan are not readily available, and no results have been published. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/720/712452.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> <https://muslimadvocates.org/2020/06/civil-rights-and-community-groups-ask-dhs-to-halt-discriminatory-surveillance-grant-program/>