

**Testimony of Eric Fingerhut
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**Before the Committee on Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs
U.S. Senate**

***Domestic Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Examining the
Threat of Racially, Ethnically, Religiously, and Politically Motivated Attacks***

August 3, 2021

Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman, and members of this esteemed Committee, thank you for convening this hearing on the rise of domestic and violent extremism, a pernicious threat to racial, ethnic, and religious communities that requires a compelling and timely Congressional response.

My name is Eric Fingerhut. I am a former Member of Congress from Ohio. I now serve as President and CEO of the Jewish Federations of North America, the umbrella organization for 146 Jewish Federations and over 300 smaller “networked” communities. The Jewish Federation system represents and speaks for essentially every organized Jewish community in the United States.

Jewish Federations are the engines that build and sustain flourishing Jewish communities – communities that are healthy, safe, caring, welcoming and inclusive, educated and engaged, involved in their broader communities, and connected to Israel and the global Jewish people. To accomplish this work, we raise the necessary funds to support social services, educational and cultural programming of all kinds, and we are proud to partner with our

local, state, and federal representatives to help meet the vital needs of our own Jewish community and our neighbors. We know that the distinguished members of this committee are familiar with the work of the Jewish Federations and with our volunteer and professional leadership in your respective states, and we thank you for all the many ways that you have each supported our mission across the full spectrum of communal life.

Security has always been a core concern of Jewish Federations. We know that the ability and confidence of our community to participate fully in Jewish religious and cultural life depends on feeling safe – safe to attend synagogue, safe to drop our children off at the Jewish Community Center for pre-school or day camp, safe to walk down the street wearing visibly Jewish head coverings and clothing, safe to gather in groups to celebrate, to mourn, to support our brothers and sisters in the State of Israel, and to be active in the life of our communities, our campuses, and our civic associations.

The United States of America has been the most welcoming nation in history with respect to the protection and safety of the Jewish people. Nevertheless, we Americans are not immune to the viruses of hate that remain in the world, and that are plainly on the rise at this very moment at home and abroad. And so we are grateful that this Committee is meeting to ensure that we take the necessary and appropriate steps to respond to the threats we now face.

Jewish Federations' current era of security investments began immediately post-9/11. Recognizing that the violent extremism that reached American shores that infamous day

would certainly have consequences for our Jewish communities, many Jewish Federations began organizing local Community Security Initiatives, led by experienced and trained local Community Security Directors, to work with each of the synagogues and Jewish institutions in their communities. Today, roughly 45 Jewish Federations have such initiatives and are currently allocating approximately \$30M per year to this effort, above and beyond what each school, synagogue, Jewish community center, and social services agency must spend on its own security. We are in the middle of an extensive national effort – called LiveSecure - to ensure every Jewish Federation has such a system in place for its community.

At the national level, the Jewish Federations of North America helped create the Secure Community Network to offer the support our communities needed to establish and maintain these initiatives, as well as to provide communications links to and liaison with national law enforcement. We have been proud to work with the Department of Homeland Security since its creation to advance this work.

The Committee's leadership and commitment to addressing the growing and changing issues of homeland defense that impact the local communities we serve is clear in your decision to convene this hearing, which comes at a time of immense concern. Real, reported threats motivated by racial, ethnic, and religious bias have dramatically increased. This surge in hate crimes has created much fear and trepidation in our community. We welcomed the recent passage of the Jabara-Heyer NO HATE bill, which promotes enhanced data collection and tracking of these heinous offenses.

In April, Jill Sanborn, FBI Executive Assistant Director, National Security Branch, and Brad Wiegmann, Deputy Assistant Attorney General, National Security Division, warned of the continued challenges law enforcement face in detecting and disrupting Domestic Violent Extremist (DVE) attacks because of “their unpredictable target selection,” which includes soft civilian targets and places of worship. These attacks have included:

- The murders of nine African-American parishioners engaged in religious worship and Bible study at Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, in June 2015.
- The bomb plot against a mosque used by Somali immigrants in Garden City, Kansas, in October 2016.
- The killing of eleven Jewish congregants who were praying at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in October 2018.
- The bomb plot against the Temple Emanuel Synagogue in Pueblo, Colorado, in November 2019.¹

For the Jewish community, the rising threat includes the mass shootings at a synagogue in Poway, California in December 2018 and at a kosher market in Jersey City, New Jersey in December 2019, the deadly machete attack at a Chanukah celebration in Monsey, New York also in December 2019, the numerous physical attacks on the streets of Brooklyn and other communities that appear related to the clothing and appearance of the Jewish victims,² and

¹ House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, “Violent Extremism and Domestic Terrorism in America: The Role and Response of DOJ,” April 29, 2021

² Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens et al., “Antisemitism as an Underlying Precursor to Violent Extremism in American Far-right and Islamist Contexts,” Program on Extremism, The George Washington University, October 2020.

now the most recent multiple stabbing of a rabbi in Boston this summer in front of the synagogue where he works.³ And, of course, these are further exacerbated by the appearance of too many instances of antisemitic arson, vandalism and disrupted plots⁴ and online hate that contain implicit threats of violence to come.⁵ To say that the Jewish community regards physical safety as today's highest priority and as a matter of great urgency is not an overstatement.

In May, Attorney General Merrick Garland and Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas warned that Domestic Violent Extremists pose one of the gravest threats to our homeland and that Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists, a subset of DVEs, present the most lethal terrorist threats and are most likely to conduct mass-casualty attacks against civilians.⁶ Attorney General Garland further described the deadly consequences when DVEs act to include "the burning and bombing of places of worship throughout the country, as well as other acts of hate-fueled violence that...terrorize entire communities."⁷

These assessments underscore the present and persistent threat of lethal violence targeting synagogues, Black churches, mosques, and other faith- and community-based institutions in the United States, which have been threatened, burned, bombed, and hit with

³ NBC-10 Boston, July 8, 2021

⁴ FBI, DHS, NCTC National Intelligence Bulletin, "Continued Interest in Targeting Jewish Communities in the Homeland by Domestic Violent Extremists," 3 January 2020 (IA-41058-20)

⁵ United States Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center, "Mass Attacks in Public Places -- 2019," August 2020

⁶ Senate Appropriations Committee, "Domestic Violent Extremism in America," May 12, 2021

⁷ Ibid.

gunfire.⁸ These incidents provide a compelling public interest (at all levels of government) in protecting against attacks on the nonprofit sector that would disrupt the vital health, human, social, cultural, religious, and other services they provide to communities, and which threaten the lives and well-being of millions of Americans who live and work in close proximity to them. In this environment, the Jewish Federations of North America has redoubled its efforts to respond to the rise of antisemitism, domestic extremism, hate crimes, and terrorism.

Twenty years ago this December, this Committee held a hearing on “The Role Communities Play in Homeland Security,” the first of its kind in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks.⁹ At that time, national security agencies warned that unspecified future attacks against the Jewish community were imminent,¹⁰ and we shared with the Committee our insights and recommendations from a faith and charitable point of view and urged Congress to consider the security needs of the nonprofit sector and the related costs it was projected to incur in order to protect itself.¹¹

Congress listened, and in 2004 it established the Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP).¹² NSGP is a coordinated, centralized program that promotes meaningful engagement of at-risk nonprofits with federal, state, or local homeland security officials

⁸ The Washington Post, “The Rise of Domestic Extremism in America,” April 12, 2021

⁹ Senate Government Affairs Committee, S. Hrg. 107 – 310, The Role Communities Play in Homeland Security,” December 11, 2001; Link: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-107shrg78046/pdf/CHRG-107shrg78046.pdf>

¹⁰ Washington Post, “FBI Warns Terrorists May Attack With Fuel Trucks,” June 22, 2002; Jewish Journal, “Fuel for Fear,” July 4, 2002

¹¹ Ibid. at p. 165.

¹² Conference Report 108–774 to accompany H.R. 4567, “Appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security for Fiscal year 2005,” October 9, 2004; Link: <https://www.congress.gov/108/crpt/hrpt774/CRPT-108hrpt774.pdf>

and provides critical resources to carry out preparedness planning and training, as well as the acquisition of target hardening investments.

The program is groundbreaking but tiny by federal standards. In its 17 years, it has assisted between 140 and 1,500 nonprofits annually, at an average yearly appropriation of \$35 million.¹³ Beginning in fiscal year 2018, the Jewish Federations of North America worked closely with Congress to substantially increase the NSGP program's reach, by making its resources available to faith and charitable organizations located in all communities throughout the country and by substantially increasing the program's annual appropriation. This year (FY 2021), Congress appropriated \$180 million for NSGP, which supported more than 1,500 awards, the most in the program's history.

Unfortunately, the growth in need for security assistance has drastically outpaced the available resources that Congress appropriated, so that only about 45% of the nearly 3,400 eligible applicants who applied in FY2021 were approved and only 45% of the \$400 million in total security investments requested were funded.¹⁴ Since the program began, it has served approximately 6,500 nonprofits, constituting a very small percentage of the approximately 350,000 to 400,000 individual congregations within the United States¹⁵ and the 1.3 million charitable nonprofits serving communities throughout the country.¹⁶

¹³ FEMA/DHS

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ US Religion Census, "2010 U.S. Religion Census," May 1, 2012

¹⁶ National Counsel of Nonprofits, "Nonprofit Impact Matters," Fall 2019

The good news is that, as a result of the increasingly sophisticated and collaborative public/private partnership that exists between our Jewish Federations and the Congress, we can move quickly to address this challenge. Our community is committed to investing in the security assessments and training needed to make sure that all our synagogues and nonprofit entities can take advantage of the federal resources, and that we share our expertise and knowledge with all our neighbors and fellow faith-based communities. We respectfully request that the Congress ensure that the resources are there to fulfill all the legitimate and documented applications that are made.

Throughout the last two decades, the Jewish Federations of North America have worked with this Committee, and for many of those years, with you Chairman Peters, and Ranking Member Portman, as well as Senators Lankford, Rosen, Hassan and other Committee members, to advance additional faith-based and nonprofit communal security initiatives. These include the “Protecting Faith-Based and Nonprofit Organizations From Terrorism Act,” which authorizes the Nonprofit Security Grant Program for an additional 5-years, as well as the pending bipartisan Pray Safe Act, to establish a federal clearinghouse to ensure that faith-based organizations have full access to existing safety and security best practices, grant opportunities, and training.

These new pieces of legislation in the realm of nonprofit safety and security coincide with Department of Homeland Security recommendations released in December 2020 on mitigating attacks on houses of worship and other communal soft targets, such as

community centers, social services providers, childcare, daycare, and schools.¹⁷ It recommends that they conduct vulnerability assessments, institute security measures, and implement emergency action and incident response plans. These are the very types of investments required, supported, and funded through the Nonprofit Security Grant Program. In fact, the guidance highlights the NSGP as a resource to acquiring such investments.

Nevertheless, the Nonprofit Security Grant Program, simply cannot, in and of itself, adequately mitigate the risks to the charitable sector from Foreign Terrorist Organizations, Homegrown Violent Extremists, Domestic Violent Extremists, and especially Racially- and Ethnically-Motivated Violent Extremists.

We, therefore, respectfully request that Congress:

- Designate the charitable sector as a critical part of the nation's infrastructure, supported by a comprehensive plan and the necessary resources to manage its risks, resilience, and security outcomes, as is afforded the 16 currently designated sectors which are considered so vital to the United States that their incapacitation or destruction would have a debilitating effect on security, national economic security, national public health or safety, or any combination thereof. The charitable sector has not yet received such a designation, and we urge you to give it one.

¹⁷ Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency Security Guide, "Mitigating Attacks on Houses of Worship," December 18, 2020

- Substantially increase the funding to the Nonprofit Security Grant Program. Since the program's inception, the Department of Homeland Security has considered more than 17,000 NSGP applications totaling more than \$1.5 billion in mitigation investments, but with available funding of less than \$600 million in appropriations (between FY 2005 – FY 2021), has awarded only about 6,500 grants. Further, to ensure the integrity of the program, including the quality of its oversight and technical assistance to its stakeholders, we ask that Congress provide additional and specified resources to the NSGP Program Office located within FEMA's Grant Programs Directorate, and that Congress allow the State Administrative Agencies to withhold up to 5% of the NSGP awards to cover their management and administrative costs.

- Increase access to DHS' Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency's Protective Security Advisors (PSAs) and Cybersecurity Advisors (CSAs). Already, PSAs and CSAs are providing invaluable, but limited, assistance to jurisdictions promulgating the NSGP program and nonprofits struggling to navigate the grant opportunity. Additional resources would improve upon current efforts by fostering a more uniform approach and structure to advance important program guidance, best practices, and other essential content, especially for the benefit of newly eligible suburban and rural communities.

- Enact the Pray Safe Act to improve stakeholder outreach and engagement by establishing a federal clearinghouse through which faith-based organizations,

houses of worship, and other nonprofits can access centralized information on safety and security best practices, available federal grant programs, and training opportunities.

Since we first addressed this Committee in December 2001 on “The Role Communities Play in Homeland Security,” Congress has maintained strong bi-partisan support to address the homeland security concerns of faith-based organizations and the charitable sector. This has been especially true of the NSGP program, which has been described as an efficient and effective means to accomplish community-based security enhancement and preparedness through very modest resources,¹⁸ and expressly supported by Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell in their respective confirmation hearings before this Committee.¹⁹ Unfortunately, in today’s perilous environment, an even more comprehensive and robust response is required.

Chairman Peters and Ranking Member Portman, thank you for holding today’s hearing to explore what compelling steps the Committee and Congress should take to ensure the safety and security of nonprofit organizations. I welcome any questions you may have.

¹⁸ Testimony of FEMA Grant Programs Directorate Assistant Administrator Thomas DiNanno, House Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response & Communications hearing, “Securing Our Communities: Federal Support to High-Risk Urban Areas,” April 23, 2018; Link: <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2018/04/23/written-testimony-fema-house-homeland-security-subcommittee-emergency-preparedness>; The Times of Israel, “US Jewish organizations get \$9m. for ‘homeland security’,” August 30, 2013; Link: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-jewish-organizations-get-9m-for-homeland-security/>

¹⁹ Senate HSGAC, “Nomination of the Honorable Alejandro N. Mayorkas to be Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security,” January 19, 2021; and “Nomination of Deanne B. Criswell to be Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Department of Homeland Security,” March 25, 2021