

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205

May 25, 2022

The Honorable Merrick Garland
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

The Honorable Christopher Wray
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20535-0001

Dear Attorney General Garland and Director Wray,

In light of the terrorist attack against the East Side of Buffalo's Black community on May 14, I write to urge the Department of Justice (DOJ) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to make the threat that white supremacists and adherents to racist ideologies pose to Americans its highest priority. I also request the FBI's Assistant Director to the Counterterrorism Division and the Department of Justice's Assistant Director for Civil Rights to brief me on how highly it is prioritizing each of the *National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism's* pillars and strategic goals, and what concrete steps the Bureau will take to elevate its efforts against domestic terrorism.

Earlier this month, a terrorist – immersed in an echo chamber of racist, anti-Semitic, and other white supremacist messages – decided to target Black New Yorkers in Buffalo and cruelly take the lives of innocents. In his online activity, he parroted the disturbing “great replacement” conspiracy theory of a purposeful attempt to replace white Americans with people of color, and drew inspiration from other attacks on minority communities. These views and actions, however despicable, are not unique, and speak to a history of racist and white supremacist terrorism that endangers all Americans. The terrorists who took 23 lives in El Paso, Texas, who assaulted a mosque and synagogue in California, and who killed nine African Americans at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church shared dangerous ideological views with the Buffalo terrorist.

President Biden's *National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism*¹ echoes the Intelligence Community's (IC) assessment that the national security threat posed by domestic terrorism is elevated, especially by those with racist and white supremacist extremist views. The *National Strategy* notes that the FBI remains an essential agency in combating domestic terrorism due to its law enforcement authorities and its role in intelligence collection and analysis.

Throughout the Global War on Terror, the FBI, the DOJ, and other government partners have done commendable work to deny foreign-backed terrorists resources to launch attacks against Americans from inside the U.S. I have been honored to meet with FBI and DOJ personnel who have devoted their lives to protecting the American people from terrorist attacks. I am also thankful for the federal agents and other officials currently working in the aftermath of the attack in Buffalo, including Deputy Director Abbate who briefed me on the progress of the investigation. The Department of Justice initially established itself by

¹ *National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism*, June 2021. National Security Council, Executive Office of the President. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/National-Strategy-for-Countering-Domestic-Terrorism.pdf>

prosecuting the Ku Klux Klan and defending Black Americans against the Klan's white supremacist campaign of violence. Now, it must again lead on the task of fighting white supremacy while protecting the rights of all Americans.

We owe nothing less to those like Celestine Chaney, a grandmother of six, who on May 14th was at the Tops market with her sister. At 65, she had survived breast cancer and multiple brain aneurysms. One of her grandchildren was planning to surprise her with flowers and other gifts for Mother's Day. To those like Andre Mackniel, 53, who was at Tops buying a surprise birthday cake for his three year-old son, and Margus Morrison, 52, who was purchasing snacks for a movie night with his wife. All three, plus seven others, abruptly had their lives taken from them in a horrific act of racist violence.² Buffalo's East Side now joins numerous other communities devastated by white supremacist terrorism. In their memories, we must act to bring them justice and prevent future terrorist acts of hate. I thank the Bureau, the Department of Justice, and its committed body of public servants for continuing to navigate this important undertaking. I look forward to your prompt response by June 8th, 2022.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

² "Buffalo shooting victims: 'Hero' guard and a teacher who was a 'pillar of the community' are among 10 killed", May 18, 2022. Alisha Ebrahimji, Dakin Andone, and Amir Vera. CNN.
<https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/15/us/buffalo-shooting-victims-what-we-know/index.html>