

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 30, 2015

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
Chairman
Senate Judiciary Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Grassley:

The American people are responding to the recent shooting in Charleston, South Carolina with an outpouring of grief and outrage. This act of mass murder not only took the lives of nine innocent Americans, it undermined Americans' confidence that they can be safe in public spaces regardless of the color of their skin. Attorney General Loretta Lynch has appropriately pledged to investigate this killing as a hate crime.

In addition to being a hate crime, the Charleston shooting also appears to have been an act of domestic terrorism. Domestic terrorism is defined in the U.S. Code as a criminal act dangerous to human life that is intended to "intimidate or coerce a civilian population" or "to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction [or] assassination." 18 U.S.C. § 2331(5).

Here, it appears that the suspect, Dylann Roof, through public and private acts filled with racial animus, sought to intimidate African Americans and discourage them from asserting their rights. We often think of terrorism as the sacrifice of innocent lives in service to a murderous ideology, and Roof's actions were clearly driven by bizarre and perverse beliefs. Indeed, it has been reported that Roof spoke of a desire to start a race-based civil war, and that he told his victims, "You rape our women and you're taking over our country. And you have to go." If this same act had been perpetrated by someone claiming a desire to harm Americans in the service of Islamist principles, it would immediately be labeled an act of terror. A violent act motivated by a racist desire to intimidate a civilian population falls squarely within the definition of domestic terrorism.

Dylann Roof's actions should remind us that America's effort to root out terrorism must include a focus on violent racism in our own backyard. Homegrown hate groups have engaged in violence against civilians for these purposes throughout our nation's history, particularly targeting the African American community, and such groups continue to survive and even thrive.

We urge you to hold hearings in the Senate Judiciary Committee on the threat posed by domestic terrorism and homegrown hate groups. In the past, mass violence in our country has been explained away as an act of insanity to be treated as a mental health issue. What we saw in South Carolina is about hate, and it is about evil. We must address the reality of domestic terrorism spurred by racial hatred head on. The Senate Judiciary Committee has the jurisdiction and expertise to shed light on this important topic. In 2012, following the mass shooting by a white supremacist at Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, the Senate Judiciary Committee's Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights Subcommittee held a hearing on "Hate Crimes and the Threat of Domestic Extremism." It is clearly time for the Judiciary Committee to revisit this issue. A hearing could investigate how domestic terrorist hate organizations recruit and spread

their ideas; how they gain access to the tools that they use to commit violent acts; and how their members and followers reach the decision to commit murder.

We look forward to working with you to craft a hearing on this important issue. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



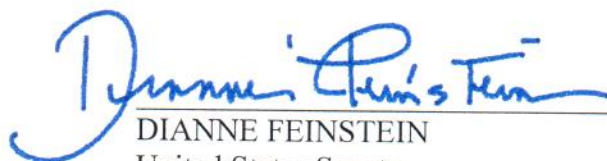
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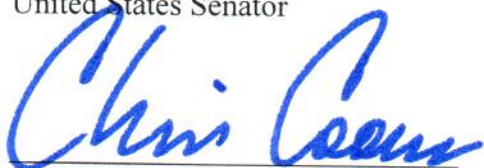
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