



# Durbin, Booker Call Out Barr, Wray for Inadequate Effort to Combat White Supremacist Terrorism

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WASHINGTON—Following another devastating incident of domestic terrorism committed by a white supremacist, this time in El Paso, Texas, U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Cory Booker (D-NJ) today pressed Attorney General William Barr and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director Christopher Wray about what the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the FBI are doing to combat white supremacist violence.

“After the horrific September 11th terrorist attacks, your agencies shifted focus from investigating and prosecuting international terrorism attacks after the fact to disrupting and preventing attacks before they took place. The American people expect you to attack white supremacist terrorism with the same dogged and single-minded approach. It is imperative that you immediately take the initiative in leading a coordinated nationwide effort by federal, state, and local law enforcement and intelligence to disrupt and prevent white supremacist attacks before they take place,” Durbin and Booker wrote.

Today’s letter is a follow-up to a letter that Durbin and Booker, along with Senators Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Chris Coons (D-DE), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), and Kamala Harris (D-CA), sent more than three months ago, calling out the Trump Administration for shifting its approach to tracking domestic terrorism incidents to obfuscate the white supremacist threat. In that [letter](#) to AG Barr and FBI Director Wray, the Senators noted that the FBI had recently and inexplicably eliminated a domestic terror category focused specifically on white supremacist incidents, even though such a category had existed for the past decade. The Administration replaced that specific category with a new one for “racially-motivated violent extremism,” which inappropriately combines incidents involving white supremacists and so-called “Black identity extremists.” The inflammatory and misleading “Black identity extremists” label was created inexplicably by the FBI in

2017 without supporting evidence, and drew swift and vocal condemnation from activists, law enforcement officers, and lawmakers.

Three weeks ago during a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing, Director Wray [admitted](#) to Durbin that the majority of domestic terrorism arrests this year involved white supremacists. Booker [questioned](#) Director Wray regarding the number of violent attacks and fatalities attributed to white supremacists in the past two years, however, Wray did not provide precise numbers due to the Administration's decision to eliminate the specific designation for white supremacist incidents.

In March, Durbin reintroduced the [\*Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act\*](#) with Senators Booker, Klobuchar, Coons, Whitehouse, Blumenthal, and Harris; Senators Cardin, Duckworth, Kaine, Markey, Sanders, Schatz, Reed, and Van Hollen also have cosponsored the bill. This bill – the only legislation pending in the Senate to address this threat – would enhance the federal government's efforts to prevent domestic terrorism by requiring federal law enforcement agencies to regularly assess this threat, focus their resources on the most significant domestic terrorism threats, and provide training and resources to assist state, local, and tribal law enforcement in addressing these threats.

August 8, 2019

Dear Attorney General Barr and Director Wray:

On May 2, 2019, we sent you a letter, also signed by Senators Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)), Christopher Coons (D-DE), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), and Kamala Harris (D-CA), asking what the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) are doing to combat white supremacist violence and expressing our concern that you are minimizing this growing domestic terrorism threat. More than three months later, we are still waiting for a response.

Our nation is in mourning after yet another devastating incident of domestic terrorism allegedly committed by a white man motivated by racist and anti-immigrant hatred. It is clear that violent white supremacists are the most significant domestic terrorism threat facing our nation today. And, yet, Mr. Attorney General, as far as we can tell, you have not uttered a single word in public about this grave threat to American security since you became our nation's top law enforcement officer.

Moreover, the Trump Administration has made the inexplicable and irresponsible decision to stop tracking white supremacist incidents as a separate category of domestic terrorism. The Administration created a new category for "racially-motivated violent

extremism,” which inappropriately combines incidents involving white supremacists and so-called “Black identity extremists,” a fabricated category that has been widely criticized by law enforcement experts.

Given a large number of white supremacist attacks, it is clear that this reclassification downplays the significance of this threat. Indeed, Director Wray admitted to Senator Durbin just three weeks ago that the majority of domestic terrorism arrests this year involved white supremacists. Senator Booker questioned Director Wray regarding the number of violent attacks and fatalities attributed to white supremacists in the past two years, however, he did not provide precise numbers due to the Administration’s decision to stop specifically tracking white supremacist attacks. If we do not know the scope of this problem, how can we hope to effectively combat it?

You also have not responded to multiple inquiries asking what Congress can do to help your agencies more effectively combat white supremacist violence. We specifically asked you for your views on our Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act, the only legislation pending in the Senate to address the white supremacist threat. This bill would establish permanent offices to combat domestic terrorism at DOJ, the FBI, and the Department of Homeland Security. The bill also requires federal law enforcement to regularly assess domestic terrorism threats, focus limited resources on the most significant threats, and provide training and resources to assist state, local, and tribal law enforcement in addressing these threats. This would produce a sustained and coordinated effort with significantly more resources directed towards combatting white supremacist violence.

After the horrific September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks, your agencies shifted focus from investigating and prosecuting international terrorism attacks after the fact to disrupting and preventing attacks before they took place. The American people expect you to attack white supremacist terrorism with the same dogged and single-minded approach. It is imperative that you immediately take the initiative in leading a coordinated nationwide effort by federal, state, and local law enforcement and intelligence to disrupt and prevent white supremacist attacks before they take place. The victims of El Paso, Chabad of Poway synagogue, Mother Emanuel Church, the Oak Creek Sikh Temple, the Tree of Life Synagogue and many other white supremacist attacks deserve no less.

Please respond immediately to the following questions that we posed to you more than three months ago:

What specific steps, if any, have you ordered DOJ and the FBI to take to respond to the threat of white supremacist violence?

How are DOJ and the FBI currently allocating counterterrorism resources to address this threat?

How do you justify the change in tracking domestic terrorism incidents?

Will you rescind this change and return to the long-standing practice of tracking white supremacist violence as a separate category of domestic terrorism incidents?

Will you take this opportunity to endorse the Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act?

After the New Zealand mosque massacre, President Trump was asked whether he thought white nationalism was a growing threat. He responded: “I don’t, really ... I think it’s a small group of people that have very, very serious problems, I guess.” Do you agree with the President’s remarks?