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## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

KOLAN L. DAVIS, *Chief Counsel and Staff Director*  
JENNIFER DUCK, *Democratic Staff Director*

April 28, 2017

The Honorable Jeff Sessions  
Attorney General  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20530-0001

Dear Mr. Attorney General:

We write to request that the Department of Justice undertake effective action to address the increasing number of religious hate crimes in the United States. In 2017 alone, Jewish gravesites have been desecrated, mosques vandalized, and Muslims and people perceived as Muslims have been killed, attacked, and threatened by virtue of their status. The increase in such crimes is documented best by the 2015 FBI Hate Crimes Statistics Report, released last November. According to the report, the fastest-growing category of religious hate crimes, those against Muslims, rose by 67% over 2014. The most common religious hate crimes according to the report, against Jews, increased by 9% between 2014 and 2015.

Although all violent crimes are worthy of condemnation and law enforcement response, religious and other hate crimes differ in that the extent of the victimization extends beyond the individual harmed to an entire community. To the extent that they create a sense of fear, a chilling effect will take effect against public gatherings, religious or otherwise, harming various institutions. These crimes also are an affront to the liberty of all Americans, even if they are not members of the particular group that has been harmed.

Given the fundamental constitutional protection of the free exercise of religion and vindication of civil rights, the federal government has long played a role in investigating and prosecuting religious hate crimes. Where state or local officials cannot or will not act, the federal government must do so. We also

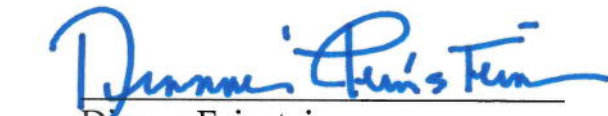
believe that the federal government should continue its traditional supporting role to state and local law enforcement agencies that investigate these crimes, including awarding grants and providing services such as forensics.

We also encourage the Justice Department to work with state and local law enforcement to provide accurate information concerning hate crime incidents. It is our understanding that 27% of police and sheriffs reported no hate crimes in the past six years. However, other agencies lacked adequate data on hate crimes. We think the Department should work with state and local officials to improve their participation in the Hate Crime Statistics Act's reporting for crimes directed against people of faith and other hate crimes.

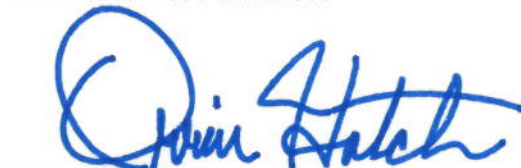
The Department can also assist religious institutions with victim assistance and grant funding focused on safety and preparedness programs for houses of worship and other targeted religiously-affiliated institutions. Reaching out to entities that may be unfamiliar with the assistance that the Department makes available would be beneficial.

We appreciate the work the Department has done to assist local law enforcement and to trace the individual who allegedly made so many threats against various Jewish community institutions. We commend the priority the Department has given to address these crimes and to bring perpetrators to justice. We work in partnership with you on these issues, and look forward to your response on how the Department plans to foster prosecution and reporting of religious hate crimes at the state and local levels, as well as ensuring that appropriate federal prosecutions are commenced as well.

Sincerely,

  
Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator

  
Charles E. Grassley  
United States Senator

  
Orrin Hatch  
United States Senator

  
Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



Mazie Hirono  
United States Senator