

January 25, 2022

Dear President Biden:

As organizations representing communities of faith across the United States, we believe that all people ought to be free from fear when gathering for religious worship and service. During Shabbat services on Saturday, January 15th, many across the country, and indeed the world, watched with horror the hostage crisis at the Beth Israel Synagogue in Colleyville, Texas. We are grateful to law enforcement and first responders who were able to end the standoff and bring the hostages out safely.

Watching the event brought to mind some of the deadly domestic attacks on American religious communities of recent memory, including the 2006 attack at the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle, the 2008 attack on the Nariman House synagogue, the 2012 deadly attack on the Sikh Temple of (Oak Creek) Wisconsin, the 2014 deadly attack on the Jewish Community Center and retirement community in Overland Park, Kansas, the 2015 deadly attack on the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, in Charleston, South Carolina, the 2017 attack on the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, Texas, the 2018 deadly attack on the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the 2019 deadly attack on the Congregation Chabad in Poway, California.

The Colleyville armed hostage event could easily have ended tragically, and, unfortunately, it was one of many incidents reported this past year of religiously and ethnically motivated violence, including shootings, arson, bombing, assaults, and property damage, targeting faith-based and charitable institutions. The nation's law enforcement and counterterrorism experts recognize this and have elevated these threats as a top homeland security concern.

Attorney General Merrick Garland captured this threat landscape in testimony last year as, "the burning and bombing of places of worship throughout the country, as well as other acts of hate-fueled violence that are less likely to make national news but that still terrorize entire communities." Amplifying this concern, the Department of Justice recently reported that hate crimes perpetrators motivated by their victims' religious characteristics are more likely to cause mass casualty events and, when acting alone, to target religious victims.

Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas said "We must answer hate with action & ensure synagogues and all houses of worship are sanctuaries of safety, Shabbat and other days of faithful observance a time of peace, and America a place of freedom for all."

We are grateful for your commitment "to synagogues and places of worship that we're not going to tolerate this, that we have this capacity to deal with the assaults on particularly the anti-Semitism that has grown up.... I'm making sure that we deal with these kinds of acts." Where Americans of all faiths choose to pray, gather, and live out our communal lives must be safe. The ability to deter, detect and prevent these attacks from happening is a shared responsibility and one of our government's most important duties. The attack on Colleyville is evidence of how difficult it is for law enforcement to detect and prevent these threats before they occur and of the need for the federal government to do more to support the physical security of communities with elevated risks.

We appreciate that bipartisan efforts have led to recent robust funding for FEMA's Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP). Unfortunately, less than half the applications submitted in Fiscal Year 2021 were funded and \$220 million in requests were left unfulfilled. The hundreds of thousands of houses of worship and more than a million nonprofits in this country need your leadership. Please work with Congress to increase funding for this critical program to \$360 million for Fiscal Year 2022 and ensure that this increase is part of your budget request for Fiscal Year 2023.

The Jewish Federations of North America
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee for Religious Liberty
Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America
Agudath Israel of America
National African American Clergy Network
National Association of Evangelicals
The Episcopal Church
The Seventh Day Adventist Church-North American Division
St. James Church of God in Christ & Bright Star Church of God