

August 17, 2017

The Honorable Jeff Sessions Attorney General of the United States United States Department of Justice 950 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W. Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Sessions:

On behalf of the 1.6 million members of the American Federation of Teachers, I write to express our support for your decision to initiate an investigation into the horrific acts of domestic terrorism perpetrated against the American people on Aug. 12, 2017, in Charlottesville, Va. These events stand as a sobering reminder of the racist and anti-Semitic beliefs held by a malicious group of American white supremacists and neo-Nazis, who now feel empowered to use violence to incite terror and fear in our communities. Although we believe these groups are a heinous affront to American values, we honor the right to protest and associate embedded in the First Amendment. That makes your job even more important and tougher, since it is critical to ensure the safety of those whom these white supremacist groups intend to terrorize.

As you have stated, this act of domestic terrorism "strikes at the heart of American law and justice," and such acts of racial hatred and bigotry "betray our core values" as Americans. But this moment requires more than simply denouncing hatred; it requires action to protect the rights and safety of American families from those who peddle terror and hate. Although we are encouraged by your commitment to support local law enforcement in their investigation of this heinous act of hate and by your stated commitment to "take the most vigorous action" to ensure justice prevails, we believe that this type of domestic terrorism, which is designed to create fear across our nation, requires a national response from the highest level of law enforcement to prevent continued terrorism and hate-based violence. We therefore call on you to direct the Justice Department to conduct a thorough and transparent investigation into the recent actions of white supremacists in Charlottesville and to prosecute those responsible for these acts of hate-based, domestic terrorism under federal laws.

But, make no mistake, the terror and hatred unleashed in Charlottesville does not exist in isolation. It is being unmasked in communities across our great nation. Therefore, we further call on you not only to investigate what happened in Charlottesville, but to probe deeper into the agenda of white supremacist organizations and their neo-Nazi allies

The American Federation of Teachers is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO

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present within the United States who may have plans for future violent confrontations. These steps are necessary to defend the American people against the proliferation of hate crimes and domestic terrorism.

The American people need assurance that the law will be enforced to protect them. We intend to closely follow the actions of the Justice Department to ensure that its response to what you correctly describe as an "evil attack that cannot be accepted in America," as well as any future attacks meant to undermine the vitality of our constitutional democracy, is sufficiently vigorous to ensure an end to the type of domestic terrorism witnessed in Charlottesville. Your task is not an easy one, but doing the right thing and enforcing the laws of the land never is easy.

Sincerely,

Randi Weingarten AFT President

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