

BOB GOODLATTE, Virginia
CHAIRMAN

F. JAMES SENSENBRENNER, JR., Wisconsin
LAMAR S. SMITH, Texas
STEVE CHABOT, Ohio
DARRELL E. ISSA, California
J. RANDY FORBES, Virginia
STEVE KING, Iowa
TRENT FRANKS, Arizona
LOUIE GOHMERT, Texas
JIM JORDAN, Ohio
TED POE, Texas
JASON CHAFFETZ, Utah
TOM MARINO, Pennsylvania
TREY GOWDY, South Carolina
RAUL R. LABRADOR, Idaho
BLAKE FARENTHOLD, Texas
DOUG COLLINS, Georgia
RON DeSANTIS, Florida
MIMI WALTERS, California
KEN BUCK, Colorado
JOHN RATCLIFFE, Texas
DAVE TROTT, Michigan
MIKE BISHOP, Michigan

JOHN CONYERS, JR., Michigan
RANKING MEMBER

JERROLD NADLER, New York
ZOE LOFGREN, California
SHEILA JACKSON LEE, Texas
STEVE COHEN, Tennessee
HENRY C. "HANK" JOHNSON, JR., Georgia
PEDRO R. PIERLUISI, Puerto Rico
JUDY CHU, California
TED DEUTCH, Florida
LUIS V. GUTIERREZ, Illinois
KAREN BASS, California
CEDRIC L. RICHMOND, Louisiana
SUZAN K. DE BENE, Washington
HAKEEM S. JEFFRIES, New York
DAVID CICILLINE, Rhode Island
SCOTT PETERS, California

ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

2138 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6216

(202) 225-3951
<http://www.house.gov/judiciary>

March 23, 2016

The Honorable Loretta Lynch
Attorney General
United States Department of Justice
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Lynch,

The Southern Poverty Law Center ("SPLC") has been accused of using overly broad criteria to label organizations with no history of violence or hate crimes as hate groups, and listing their locations on an interactive "hate map," which it maintains on its website.¹ Indeed, SPLC broadly defines hate groups as organizations that "have beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics."² It goes on to list constitutionally protected activities such as "marches, rallies, speeches, meetings, leafleting or publishing" as "[h]ate group activities."³ SPLC even states that a "[l]isting does not imply a group advocates or engages in violence or other criminal activity."⁴

SPLC's listing of non-violent, law-abiding groups has had terrible consequences. In 2012, the headquarters of the Family Research Council, a non-violent conservative group with no history of committing hate crimes, was attacked by a man who stated that he was guided by SPLC's hate map.⁵ The man, who shot an unarmed security guard before being restrained and arrested, told the Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI") that he wanted to "kill as many as possible and smear the Chick-Fil-A sandwiches in victims' faces, and kill the guard."⁶ He pleaded guilty to domestic terrorism, and was sentenced to 25 years in prison.⁷

¹ Available at <https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map>.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Paul Bedard, *Southern Poverty Law Center website triggered FRC shooting*, Washington Examiner (Feb. 6, 2013), <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/southern-poverty-law-center-website-triggered-frc-shooting/article/2520748>.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Ann Marimow, *Family Research Council shooter sentenced to 25 years*, Washington Post (Feb. 19, 2013), https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/2013/09/19/d0df61f2-2131-11e3-b73c-aab60bf735d0_story.html.

Nevertheless, the Department of Justice (“DOJ”) continues to support SPLC’s mission of tracking “hate.” Until March 2014, for example, the FBI had listed SPLC as a hate crimes resource on its website.⁸ Now, on October 14, 2015, Assistant Attorney General John Carlin delivered remarks on domestic terrorism at an event co-sponsored by SPLC and the George Washington University Center for Cyber and Homeland Security’s Program on Extremism. In his written remarks, Mr. Carlin stated that “SPLC has a long history of tracking and countering hate, and their efforts will continue to be critical.”⁹

Given DOJ’s public support for SPLC, does DOJ also support SPLC’s efforts to list non-violent groups that have no history of committing hate crimes on its hate map?

Sincerely,



Bob Goodlatte
Chairman
House Committee on the Judiciary

⁸ Paul Bedard, *FBI dumps liberal legal group as ‘hate crime’ partner*, Washington Examiner, Mar. 31, 2014, at 1.

⁹ Available at <http://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/assistant-attorney-general-john-p-carlin-delivers-remarks-domestic-terrorism-event-co>.