



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Intelligence & Counterterrorism Subcommittee Chairwoman Elissa Slotkin (D-MI)

The Nonprofit Security Grant Program and Protecting Houses of Worship: A View from the American Jewish Community

February 08, 2022

Since I became chair of the Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism last year, we've focused on how the threat to our communities has evolved over the last several years — from international terrorism to homegrown and domestic violent extremism.

More and more, we're finding that these extremist ideologies don't exist in isolation — the lines between hate, terror, and conspiracy are increasingly blurring together.

The latest reminder of this truth — and the catalyst for this hearing — is what we saw in Colleyville, TX, last month. Ordinary Americans came face to face with what happens when an anti-Semitic terrorist ideology is mixed with historic conspiracy theories about Jews' influence.

This evolving threat is one that the Department of Homeland Security highlighted just yesterday, in their latest national terrorism bulletin. And as the ADL's Jonathan Greenblatt told our committee last week, "anti-Semitism is at the beating heart" of these extremist ideologies.

Let's be clear, this was no isolated incident. The last five years have seen a 60% increase in anti-Semitic incidents nationwide, with 2020 marking the third-highest amount since the ADL began tracking them in the 1970s. We've felt this particularly acutely in Michigan, where we saw a 21% increase — from graffitied swastikas to Zoombombings.

In the weeks after Colleyville, it's become clear that this tragedy, like so many before it, has become a rallying point for hate and extremism of all kinds: al Qaeda supporters, white supremacists, Holocaust deniers, QAnon conspiracy theorists, Islamophobes — all have seized onto this tragedy for their own twisted ends.

This growing threat can be demoralizing: but as our witnesses today will note, we are far from powerless against it. Today, we have the rare ability to not only discuss tools we know are effective in protecting against this violent hate, but to hear from someone who can speak to its value better than anyone.

I'm truly honored that we are able to have Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker with us today. Simply put, Rabbi Charlie's actions last month saved lives — and as he has said, they were made possible by the training and support he received, before the incident, including through the Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP).

We've seen the value of this program across Michigan. When one of the largest mosques in my district, the Islamic Association of Greater Detroit, faced a flurry of anti-Islamic harassment and vandalism just

after the Christchurch shooting, we brought them together with leaders from the Detroit Jewish community — and worked together to secure NSGP funding to protect their house of worship.

Since 2019, this program has provided nearly \$7 million to secure over 70 synagogues, mosques, churches, schools, and community centers across Michigan — over \$500,000 just to those in my district, including churches in Brighton and Okemos, a parish in Pinckney, Michigan State's Hillel in East Lansing, and, again, the Islamic Association in Rochester Hills.

But we know there's still more we can do: both in closing the \$200 million funding shortfall we saw last year, which I've advocated for along with over 170 of my colleagues, and in making the NSGP easier to access for our smaller communities.

Today's hearing is focused on some of the most pressing policy issues and threats before our committee. But for me, it's also deeply personal. As it happens, Rabbi Charlie is a native Michigander, with his mom still in Lansing — he actually went to summer camp with my brother.

But, as Rabbi Konikov has said, this could have been any of our synagogues, or churches, or mosques, or gurudwaras — Tree of Life, Christchurch, Sutherland Springs, Oak Creek.

I want to recognize the perverseness of the fact that we need to be here talking about how to harden our houses of worship against attack, in the way my colleagues hardened facilities when I was overseas alongside our military.

But while we work to prevent tragedies like these from occurring, it's also our responsibility to ensure that our most cherished and sacred places are not our most vulnerable.

Many have highlighted the seeming contradiction between the spirit of charity with which the attacker in Colleyville was welcomed into the congregation, and the threats facing our faith communities. But that openness, which moves a congregation to open their sanctuary to a stranger in need? That's our strength as a community.

Today, I'm looking forward to discussing how we can protect it.

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