



# COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Hearing Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)**

***The Targeting of Black Institutions: From Church Violence to University Bomb Threats***

**March 17, 2022**

The Committee is meeting to examine the “Targeting of Black Institutions: From Church Violence to University Bomb Threats.” Exactly a year ago, Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas testified before this Committee that “domestic violent extremism” represents the “greatest threat in the homeland right now.”

Today, we are here to discuss how one form of that extremism – white supremacist violence – threatens Black institutions, particularly Black churches and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Data from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) shows that right-wing extremism has surged to dangerous levels. Since 2015, right-wing extremists have been responsible for 267 plots and attacks and 91 deaths.

No one could forget the tragedy at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston in June 2015 – when a radicalized white supremacist murdered nine churchgoers while shouting racial epithets. According to the CSIS, Black churches were targeted in another 15 plots or attacks from 2016 to April 2021.

As a son of the South, I know all too well the horror that shakes a community when a house of worship is attacked. And today, we find ourselves confronting an unprecedented rise in threats of violence against HBCUs. Between January 4 and February 4 of this year, the FBI identified a staggering 51 total bomb threats, 28 targeting HBCUs and 12 targeting Black churches. There have been at least eight more bomb threats in the last six weeks.

While the nature of violence towards Black institutions may have evolved over the years, the attacks are by no means new. When I was coming of age in Mississippi, white supremacists attacked Black churches with impunity. Many were firebombed, burned, or destroyed. I also recall with great sadness the tragedy that occurred at Jackson State University when I was a young man.

In May 1970, 75 police officers were sent to campus to break up a protest. In a use-of-force incident the President’s Commission on Campus Unrest later called an “unreasonable, unjustified overreaction,” police fired 140 shots towards a dormitory building, tragically killing two students and injuring another 12.

Shortly after I was elected to Congress, our Nation was again confronted with a resurgence in attacks on Black churches. In 1995-96 alone, there were as many as 35 burnings of Black churches. And here we are, yet again, today. These attacks sicken me.

These terrorists, and they are terrorists whether they be engaged in physical violence or threats of such, seek to intimidate good people from exercising their religious beliefs and receiving an education. While these institutions have shown remarkable resilience under terrible circumstances, their academic or religious missions are too often hampered by having to divert resources to ensure safety and security. Congress has heard and answered the call for increased funding for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP). This program provides funding for physical security enhancements and other security-related activities to nonprofit organizations, such as houses of worship and universities, that are at high risk of a terrorist attack

In Fiscal Year 2021, Congress doubled funding for the program to \$180 million, but significant needs remain. In response, Congress increased funding for the program to \$250 million in the fiscal year 2022 Omnibus spending bill President Biden signed into law this week.

Additionally, I have introduced legislation co-sponsored by Ranking Member Katko that would authorize \$500 million for the program. This legislation would also create an office tasked with conducting outreach, education, and technical assistance to eligible non-profits, with a particular focus on underserved communities.

As someone with a long history with the NPSG program, I am pleased that we are holding this hearing today to get testimony on the record about its importance and how it might be further strengthened. I was also pleased to see that yesterday, the Biden Administration announced that HBCUs will be able to access grant funds under the Project School Emergency Response to Violence (Project SERV) program to restore a safe learning environment.

These are important steps, but much more remains to be done to help communities who have been hurt by this violence, bring the perpetrators to justice, and prevent future threats and attacks. It is unconscionable that Americans practicing their faith at houses of worship or obtaining an education to better themselves, their families, and future generations would have to fear for their lives. Indeed, racially motivated threats and violence against Black churches and schools are attacks on these institutions, but also on our American way of life. Our response must be swift and serious, commensurate with this persistent threat.

I am honored to have a distinguished panel of witnesses before the Committee this morning and look forward to hearing their testimony on this important topic. Reverend Eric Manning joined Mother Emanuel AME in Charleston, South Carolina as the Senior Pastor in June 2016, a year after the tragic shooting. He has lifted his church and community in the years since the terrorist attack and has continued to be a voice for social justice. My friend, Mr. Thomas Hudson, President of Jackson State University, is leading his university as it confronts this new wave of threats. President Hudson offers a unique perspective as HBCUs address an ongoing crisis. Finally, I look forward to hearing from Ms. Janai Nelson about the broader threat landscape facing Black institutions and what the Federal government can do to help keep those communities safe.

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Media contact: Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978