



**One Hundred Fourteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515**

November 5, 2015

The Honorable Loretta E. Lynch
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Lynch:

Earlier this year, the White House held a three-day summit on Countering Violent Extremism. According to the White House, the summit was an opportunity to discuss concrete steps the United States and its partners can take to develop community-oriented approaches to counter hateful extremist ideologies that radicalize, recruit, or incite violence. The White House made the decision to not invite the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) because the Administration's approach to counter violent extremists is a "bottom-up approach" that is "premised on the notion that local officials and communities can be an effective bulwark against violent extremism."¹

Moreover, in March 2015, the 9/11 Review Commission, in its report to the Director of the FBI, found the FBI's CVE Office's "fundamental law enforcement and intelligence responsibilities do not make it an appropriate vehicle for the social and prevention role in the CVE mission."² The Commission recommended that the primary social and prevention responsibility of the FBI's CVE mission be transferred to the Department of Homeland Security or other agencies that are more directly involved with community interaction.³

¹ "F.B.I. Chief Not Invited to Meeting on Countering Violent Extremism," Michael S. Schmidt, *The New York Times*, Feb. 19, 2015.

² *The FBI: Protecting the Homeland in the 21st Century*, Bruce Hoffman, Edwin Meese, III, and Timothy Roemer, March 25, 2015.

³ *Id.*

It is troubling to see the FBI is turning a deaf ear to both the White House and the 9/11 Review Commission and not only remains in the CVE space but is pursuing programs to expand its reach into America's classrooms. This week, I learned that the FBI "is developing a Website designed to provide awareness about the dangers of violent extremist predators on the Internet, with input from students, educators and community leaders."⁴ Reportedly, this website, called "Don't Be A Puppet" is meant to be used by teachers and students to help the FBI prevent the violent extremism of youth.⁵ According to the *Washington Post*, teachers and students in multiple Northern Virginia school districts were invited to preview the website. The *Post* also reported that the FBI would reach out to schools to see if they were interested in using the site within classrooms.⁶ Reports indicate that the FBI is aiming for the site to be used in civics, social studies, and government classes.⁷

According to the U.S. Department of Education, a common refrain from educators is that they want to work with parents and students from diverse backgrounds and cultures, and to develop a shared responsibility for children's outcomes between home and school. As a former educator, I understand a teacher may be the only person that some students can trust. Also, while a teacher may be best-positioned to notice changes in a student's behavior, it is hard to see how having that teacher participate in a Federal law enforcement program would not chill relationships with students or, for that matter, undermine a supportive learning environment. Put simply, turning teachers into intelligence gathers and investigators has questionable value as a strategy for countering terrorism or violent extremism and may actually interfere with students involved in a range of risky behavior or in crisis turning away from that one person, a teacher, who might be able to make a difference.

Though I understand that plans for the website have been temporarily suspended, it is critical that you, as the leader of the Department of Justice, give personal attention to not only this program but also to the entirety FBI's CVE activities. Knowing your commitment to the Administration's countering violent extremism efforts, it is critical that you do oversight of the FBI's CVE activities, particularly with respect to the "Don't Be A Puppet" website. The FBI is responsible to you for its operations. As such, in an effort to increase transparency and gain a clearer understanding of the legal, civil liberties, privacy, and operational implications of the FBI's CVE activities, please review the FBI's CVE activities and provide the following information by November 18, 2015:

1. A timeline, from conception to implementation of the "Don't Be A Puppet" website.
2. Copies of any Privacy Impact Assessments prepared by DOJ's Chief Privacy and Civil Liberties Officer on any of the FBI's CVE programs.

⁴ "Muslim activists alarmed by the FBI's new game-like counterterrorism program for kids," Michelle Boorstein, *The Washington Post*, November 2, 2015.

⁵ Id.

⁶ Id.

⁷ Id.

3. Information on the national educational organizations, education leaders, childhood development specialists, and psychologists, if any, who were consulted with respect to the development of the website.
4. The names and titles of the officials from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, if any, who were consulted with respect to the development of the website.
5. Information on any contractors involved in the development of the website, together with information on the scope of work that each contractor performed.
6. Information on any scientific validation studies conducted prior to November 1, 2015 on the anticipated efficacy of the website.

Additionally, please provide answers to the following questions:

1. Was the U.S. Department of Education involved in the creation of this website? If so, please provide the names and titles of individuals who gave the FBI advice and counsel on the implementation of this website. Also, please specify the nature of the involvement of such individuals.
2. Did DOJ's Chief Privacy and Civil Liberties Officer conduct a Privacy Impact Assessment on the use of the website "Don't Be A Puppet" or any other website aiming to dissuade youth from participating in violent extremist activity? If so, please provide a copy.
3. According to reports, the FBI conducted focus groups to preview the website. Please provide information on the dates, locations, and durations of each preview as well as corresponding information on the individuals or groups that participated in each preview. Also, please answer the following questions:
 - A) How did the FBI determine which groups and individuals to invite to the previews?
 - B) What groups and individuals declined to attend the previews?
How did the FBI collect feedback from participants and what, if any, feedback was recorded?
4. Does the FBI use the Violent Extremist Risk Assessment instruments (VERA or VERA-2)? Under what circumstances does the FBI employ the VERA or VERA-2 factors? Has the FBI done any research (or contracted for research with outside entities) to evaluate the effectiveness of these instruments in the circumstances in which the FBI uses them? Were these tools used to inform or create any portions of the website?
5. It has been reported that the FBI contacted schools to see if they were interested in using the program and was aiming for it to be used in civics, social studies and government classes.

- a. If so, please provide the names and locations of each school that the FBI targeted for participation.
 - b. Also, please provide information on the schools that have agreed to participate and the number of teachers at each school that would participate.
 - c. Approximately how many students at participating schools are expected to use the site when it is introduced?
 - d. For participating schools, does the FBI envision teacher participation to be discretionary or would teachers at these schools be obligated to attend training and participate in the program?
 - e. Please provide the materials which were provided to schools who have confirmed participation or interest in the website.
 - f. It was also reported that the FBI has already showed the site to some teachers and students in Northern Virginia to get feedback. Please identify each school, including its location, where the website was viewed and any feedback that was recorded by the FBI.
6. Did the Domestic Terrorism Executive Committee have the opportunity to preview the website? If so, please provide the dates the DTEC previewed the website.
 7. Did the Assistant Attorney General for National Security preview this website? If so, please provide the dates the Assistant Attorney General previewed the website.
 8. Did the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education have the opportunity to preview the website? If so, please provide the dates the Assistant Secretary previewed the website.
 9. It has been reported that at a community meeting in October, groups were provided limited detail of the FBI's plan for "Shared Responsibility Committees". One task of the committee would be to identify youth that are prone to violent extremism.
 - A. Please provide the Chief Officer for Privacy and Civil Liberties Impact Assessment on the "Shared Responsibility Committees."
 - B. Has the Assistant Attorney General for National Security been involved in the creation or implementation of "Shared Responsibility Committees?"
 - C. Please provide the names of the child psychologists and behavior therapists that provided input to the FBI for the "Shared Responsibility Committee."

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions about this request, please contact Hope Goins, Chief Counsel for Oversight at (202) 226-2616.

Sincerely,



Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security

cc: The Honorable Arne Duncan
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cc: The Honorable John King
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