

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas  
Secretary of Homeland Security  
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE  
Washington, DC 20528-0525

October 4, 2023

Dear Secretary Mayorkas,

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to you today to urge your office to take swift action to safeguard our democracy by addressing domestic extremism within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

In your recent testimony to the House Judiciary Committee, you stated that “one of the most prominent terrorism-related threats that we face in the homeland is what we term domestic violent extremism.”<sup>1</sup> While we appreciate your acknowledgment of the threat posed by domestic extremism across the country, we remain concerned about DHS employees who, while working within the department, support extremist, paramilitary groups.

Domestic violent extremism threatens our national security and our democracy. According to the White House’s National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism, domestic extremism is “the most urgent terrorism threat the United States faces today” and as we saw on January 6, 2021, anti-government violence is a key component of this extremism.<sup>2</sup> White supremacy and racism are most often the driving ideologies behind violent domestic extremism in America.<sup>3</sup> Domestic extremists attack our country’s values of equity and free expression, with people of color, religious minorities, immigrants, and the LGBTQ+ community bearing the brunt of domestic extremism’s deadly toll. The recent shooting at a Dollar General store in Jacksonville, Florida was a tragic reminder that white supremacist violence continues to occur in the U.S. on a regular basis.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Hearing: Oversight of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security before the House Judiciary Comm., 118th Cong. (2023), <https://judiciary.house.gov/committee-activity/hearings/oversight-us-department-homeland-security-0> (advance video to 1:26:15).

<sup>2</sup> FACT SHEET: National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism, The White House (June 15, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/15/fact-sheet-national-strategy-for-countering-domestic-terrorism>; The White House National Security Council, National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism 8 (June 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/National-Strategy-for-Countering-Domestic-Terrorism.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> Minyvonne Burke, Dennis Romero and Tom Namako, *Jacksonville shooter who targeted Black shoppers had swastikas drawn on rifle*, NBC (Aug. 26, 2023), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/multiple-people-dead-incident-jacksonville-dollar-general-mayor-says-rcna101977>.

DHS's stated mission is to "safeguard the American people, our homeland, and our values."<sup>5</sup> That mission is undermined if violent domestic extremists are in its ranks. DHS staff who support or are members of domestic extremist groups cannot accurately determine what is and is not a credible security threat. The public has seen DHS misread threats in the past: in June 2020, DHS mounted an aggressive response toward racial justice protests, but leading up to and on January 6, 2021, DHS failed to adequately respond to the very real threat far-right extremists posed to the Capitol.<sup>6</sup> This type of dangerously disproportionate response demonstrates how domestic extremism within DHS could lead the department to undermine its mission to protect the homeland by at best failing to recognize and at worst willfully turning a blind eye towards real threats.

Civil society groups have attempted to uncover the extent of domestic extremists within DHS: In December 2022, an investigation by the Project on Government Oversight and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project found that more than 300 members of the Oath Keepers identified themselves as current or former DHS employees.<sup>7</sup> Members of a militia group whose leaders have been found guilty of seditious conspiracy and whose members stormed the Capitol on January 6, 2021 have no place in our government, and in particular in the Department of Homeland Security.<sup>8</sup>

In March 2022, DHS's Domestic Violent Extremism Internal Review found that the department has "significant gaps that have impeded its ability to comprehensively prevent, detect, and respond to potential threats related to domestic violent extremism within DHS."<sup>9</sup> These gaps include a lack of workforce training, an official definition of "domestic violent extremist" and department-wide systems to report on and investigate internal domestic extremism.

Since the department's internal review was released, over 65 members of Congress and over 25 civil society groups have repeatedly called on DHS to improve monitoring of domestic extremism within the department and to ensure that officials who support paramilitary

---

<sup>5</sup> Department of Homeland Security, *Mission*, <https://www.dhs.gov/mission>.

<sup>6</sup> Laura Iheanachor, *Docs show: "all hands on deck" for racial justice, "no credible threats" from alt-right groups on January 6*, CREW (Jan. 5, 2022), <https://www.citizensforethics.org/reports-investigations/crew-investigations/docs-show-all-hands-on-deck-for-racial-justice-no-credible-threats-from-alt-right-groups-on-january-6/>.

<sup>7</sup> Nick Schwellenbach, *Hundreds of Oath Keepers Have Worked for DHS, Leaked List Shows*, POGO (Dec. 12, 2022), [https://www.pogo.org/investigation/2022/12/hundreds-of-oath-keepers-have-worked-for-dhs-leaked-list-show-s#:~:text=This%20investigation%20was%20produced%20in,of%20Homeland%20Security%20\(DHS\)](https://www.pogo.org/investigation/2022/12/hundreds-of-oath-keepers-have-worked-for-dhs-leaked-list-show-s#:~:text=This%20investigation%20was%20produced%20in,of%20Homeland%20Security%20(DHS).).

<sup>8</sup> Kyle Cheney, *4 more Oath Keepers found guilty of seditious conspiracy tied to Jan. 6 attack*, Politico (Jan. 23, 2023), <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/01/23/oath-keepers-guilty-seditious-conspiracy-jan-6-00079083>.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. DHS Office of the Chief Security Officer, *Report to the Secretary of Homeland Security, Domestic Violent Extremism Internal Review: Observations, Findings, and Recommendations* (March 11, 2022), <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2022-03/Report%20to%20the%20Secretary%20of%20Homeland%20Security%20Domestic%20Violent%20Extremism%20Internal%20Review%20Observations%2C%20Findings%2C%20and%20Recommendations.pdf>.

groups are not within DHS's ranks.<sup>10</sup> However, these calls have not been met with a public response from DHS. Most recently, members of Congress wrote to you in July requesting written answers to questions regarding the department's plan to root out domestic extremism in its ranks. We echo the questions posed by members of Congress in the July letter and urge you to answer them in a public response.<sup>11</sup> In addition, we ask that you publicly respond to the following questions:

1. What progress has been made since the 2022 internal review to improve the detection of domestic extremists within the department?
2. Will the department implement the recommendations made in the internal review? Which recommendations?
3. Will you update the public when the recommendations are adopted?
4. Will DHS take actions similar to those outlined in the guidance on Countering Extremist Activity Within the Department of Defense?<sup>12</sup>
5. Will DHS do an evaluation to determine whether and what decision making on and in the days leading up to the January 6th insurrection was potentially compromised by the presence of domestic extremists in the department?

Open communication from the department regarding these concerns is essential to maintain public trust in DHS and our government institutions. We hope you will take action to defend our democracy against domestic violent extremism within and outside of DHS. We stand ready to work with you toward a safer, more equitable country.

Sincerely,

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)  
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action  
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)  
Common Cause  
Communities United for Status & Protection (CUSP)  
DemCast USA  
Global Project Against Hate and Extremism  
Government Accountability Project

---

<sup>10</sup> See [Letter from Senators Markey, Warren, and Booker calling on the Biden administration to prioritize reining in violent paramilitary vigilantes \(2023\)](#); [Letter from WSC, and other advocates, to DHS calling for accountability for bigoted paramilitary groups \(2022\)](#); [Letter from SPLC to DHS calling on the agency to address paramilitary groups at the border \(2021\)](#), [Letter to DHS from Reps Goldman, Garcia, and Sen. Markey on Extremism in DHS \(2023\)](#).

<sup>11</sup> Letter to DHS from Reps Goldman, Garcia, and Sen. Markey on Extremism in DHS (2023), <https://goldman.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/goldman.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/letter-to-dhs-on-domestic-violent-extremism.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> David Vergun, DOD Issues Guidance on Plans to Counter Extremist Activity in the Force (2021), <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2880115/dod-issues-guidance-on-plans-to-counter-extremist-activity-in-the-force/>.

Government Information Watch  
Human Rights First  
Interfaith Alliance  
Jewish Council for Public Affairs  
National Center for Transgender Equality  
National Council for Jewish Women  
National Immigration Law Center  
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice  
People Power United  
Project On Government Oversight  
Revolving Door Project  
Southern Poverty Law Center  
The Digital Democracy Project  
The Workers Circle  
Western States Center  
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center