



Department of Justice

STATEMENT OF

**RYAN T. YOUNG
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
UNITED STATES SENATE**

AT A HEARING ENTITLED

**“VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM: EXAMINING THE THREAT TO
HOUSES OF WORSHIP AND PUBLIC SPACES”**

**PRESENTED
MARCH 16, 2022**

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Good morning Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman, and Members of the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the current threats to Houses of Worship and other public spaces here in the United States. In a time of ever-changing threats, now more than ever, the FBI needs the support and confidence of the American people to secure public spaces where Americans gather every day. Threats to members of faith-based communities across the United States, Houses of Worship, and schools have been rising in recent years, as evidenced by the hostage-taking at Congregation Beth Israel, a synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, and the bomb threats against Historically Black Colleges and Universities (“HBCUs”) that continue today. The more we work with the American public to share information and ensure the public’s trust, the more effective the FBI will be in carrying out its mission to protect American citizens.

The FBI relies heavily on our partnerships with affected communities to receive threat information and provide training on preventive measures to those communities. Prevention means working closely with community groups and their leaders. The FBI directly reaches out to various communities to hear their concerns, build cultural understanding, and foster trust. This is an ongoing effort, 365 days a year. Through this trusted partnership, the FBI works to empower citizens to protect themselves from ongoing threats and crimes. The FBI works proactively, using a wide array of intelligence and other resources, in concert with our federal, state, and local law enforcement partners, to disrupt and stop bias-motivated violence before it happens. Indeed, the FBI has recorded some extraordinary recent successes in interdicting violent hate crimes, including planned attacks against synagogues, churches, schools, and other public spaces. At FBI Director Chris Wray’s direction, we have created a domestic terrorism/hate crimes fusion cell, which brings together both our domestic terrorism expertise and our hate crimes expertise and ensures that the multidisciplinary nature of the problem is effectively addressed. And part of the goal of that effort is to be more proactive and preventive, and not just reactive.

FBI'S COMMITMENT TO OUTREACH

FBI headquarters divisions and every one of the 56 field offices has strong community outreach and works with minority groups, academic institutions, and religious, civic, and non-profit organizations toward crime prevention. Our outreach also includes local, national, and international safety campaigns and educational video screenings.

Additionally, the FBI created a Multi-Cultural Engagement Council, composed of ethnic, religious, and minority leaders to better understand these cultures and devise solutions to the threats facing these communities.

All of the FBI's outreach efforts are ways we help individuals and families stay safe from cyber predators; help businesses protect against hackers and economic espionage; protect Houses of Worship, academic institutions, and workplaces against violent rampages; and help all citizens be alert to potential acts of terror and violent extremism. I will now discuss some of the work and responsibilities of the three offices that collectively manage the bulk of the FBI's outreach—the Office of the Private Sector (OPS), the Office of Partner Engagement (OPE), and the Office of Public Affairs (OPA).

OUTREACH EFFORTS WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND ACADEMIA

Our Office of the Private Sector's (OPS) essential function is to strengthen the FBI's relationships with private industry and academia to protect the Nation's economy and national security. OPS outreach comprises intelligence product information sharing; engagement through field office private-sector coordinators; issue-based collaboration through strategic engagement advisors; private-sector cooperation through the Domestic Security Alliance Council (DSAC) and InfraGard, and strong relationships through the academic program.

OPS strives to facilitate one "FBI voice" and provide a consistent point of contact for private sector and academia to promote meaningful dialogue and build trust among the FBI and its partners. OPS works closely with FBI operational divisions to communicate threats and risks across different industries, sectors, companies, and public spaces such as hotels, grocery stores, and Houses of Worship. This past month, in response to the numerous bomb threats targeting HBCUs, OPS partnered with OPE and DHS to host a partner call for HBCUs across the country. Approximately 1400 participants were on the call, during which we provided a situational update, points of contact to report additional threats, and resources available to the academic institutions.

OUTREACH EFFORTS TO OUR LAW ENFORCEMENT PARTNERS

Our Office of Partner Engagement (OPE) coordinates enterprise-level strategies for the FBI's engagement with federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement agencies. Through partner calls, situational reports, intelligence products, and timely electronic

communications, OPE leans forward to share information to keep partners apprised of threats and mitigation efforts.

Although outreach with Houses of Worship and faith-based groups falls under the purview of the Office of Public Affairs (OPA), OPE maintains the relationship with those in the faith-based community who are responsible for keeping the community safe and secure. Most notably, OPE works with the Secure Community Network (SCN), which is “the official homeland security and safety initiative of the organized Jewish community of North America” and other groups, such as groups related to the Catholic Church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints as well as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). This role includes maintaining relationships with various national-level leaders in the faith-based community by establishing regular telephone calls between these groups and the FBI’s operational divisions. Additionally, OPE maintains regular contact with executives of these groups, responding to their concerns and keeping them informed of events of interest by leveraging FBI subject-matter experts from operational divisions to speak during these member calls.

Other examples of the FBI’s outreach efforts include creating an internal working group comprising OPA, Criminal Investigative Division (CID), and others to discuss House of Worship matters. One of the resulting actions from this working group was having Director Wray host two calls with approximately 30 faith-based leaders nationwide last month. Additionally, since 2019, OPE has hosted one-day symposia with community leaders to discuss various topics of interest on issues impacting these faith-based groups.

OUTREACH EFFORTS FROM OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The Office of Public Affairs (OPA) helps inform, alert, and mobilize members of the public to assist in investigations and empower them to protect themselves from ongoing threats and crimes. And by doing so, OPA strives to enhance public trust and confidence by sharing information about the FBI’s responsibilities, operations, and accomplishments.

There are several efforts underway in OPA that are part of the FBI’s broader outreach efforts. Further, there are ongoing conversations with HBCUs touching on the recent HBCU bomb threats and ways in which the FBI can protect schools.

To ensure coordination on matters pertaining to Houses of Worship, the FBI created an internal working group consisting of OPA, CID, and others. OPA also oversees and implements the FBI’s community engagement strategy, as well as the outreach efforts of more than 65 Community Outreach Specialists who serve in the field offices. Community Outreach Specialists develop and maintain relationships with community leaders and organizations. They develop strategic outreach plans and organize community outreach initiatives and events.

The recent incidents involving the Colleyville Hostage crisis and threats made to HBCUs are two examples of why it is essential to have strong relationships before a crisis. As part of the FBI’s response, OPA was able to quickly make several outreach efforts with local faith leaders,

minority, and HBCU connections because the FBI had preexisting patterns of engagement established by our Community Outreach Specialists.

On January 11, 2022, OPA and OPE met with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to discuss the protection of Houses of Worship. On January 18th, 2022, the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security conducted a partner call about Congregation Beth Israel, during which the FBI discussed the many shared resources developed along with the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), including detailed guidance and plans to respond to crises, such as active shooter or bomb threats. The FBI shared resources and links related to training, videos, and more with our national and local partners. On January 20, 2022, OPA coordinated Director Wray's appearance during Anti-Defamation League's national virtual meeting. On February 1st, OPA—along with OPE, the Criminal Investigative Division, and the Counterterrorism Division—met with Rabbi Cooper of the Wiesenthal Center.

As mentioned earlier, on February 2, 2022, OPA worked with OPS to host a partner call about bomb threats to HBCUs with our national faith-based and minority partners. OPA provided FBI resources and active-shooter training to help protect academic institutions. Additionally, when requested, the FBI will work with our subject-matter experts and conduct webinars and meetings with our national partners. On February 23, 2022, OPA held a large webinar for the Church of God in Christ to discuss protection of Houses of Worship. The church requested specific steps to take to make its congregation safer. OPA worked with the Criminal Investigative Division to share critical information to help these faith leaders.

CONCLUSION

In closing, Houses of Worship and HBCUs, along with other public spaces where people gather, require robust protection efforts, which start with effective partnerships. The FBI places a strong emphasis on partnering with community leaders to build trust and share relevant information to protect public spaces and fulfill our obligation to the American public. In working with our law enforcement and community partners, we systematically use, collect, and share intelligence. The threats to public spaces in our country are among the diverse dangerous threats that the men and women of the FBI work tirelessly to counter every single day, sometimes risking their lives in the process. Those threats underscore the complexity and breadth of the FBI's mission: to protect the American people and uphold the Constitution of the United States.

Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman, Members of the Committee, thank you again for this opportunity to discuss the FBI's efforts to protect Houses of Worship. I appreciate your continued support and look forward to answering any questions you might have.