

Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC 20510

August 30, 2021

The Honorable Merrick Garland  
Attorney General  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Attorney General Garland:

On Sunday, August 22, 2021, local and out-of-state far-right extremists, including the Proud Boys, descended on Portland, Oregon, leaving a wake of violence and chaos. During Sunday's events, a man opened fire at counter-protesters in downtown Portland. Photographs and videos have surfaced of violent interactions between the Proud Boys and counter-protesters, in what has become an all-too-common scene for Portland.

The Proud Boys are a known right-wing violent, nationalistic, extremist group with views that are misogynistic, Islamophobic, transphobic, and anti-immigrant. In addition, some members espouse white supremacist and antisemitic ideologies and engage with white supremacist groups. It has become increasingly clear that the tactics of this group, and others like it, involve some members traveling across state lines with the intention of eliciting violent altercations with counter-protesters, sometimes with seemingly lethal intent. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, which has designated the Proud Boys a hate group, "the Proud Boys stage frequent rallies around the country. Many have descended into violent street riots where members openly brawl with counter-protesters...through 2019 and 2020, the Proud Boys were one of a handful of far-right groups instrumental in instigating violence and civil unrest in the Pacific Northwest."<sup>1</sup>

The principle of freedom of speech does not preclude the Proud Boys and other right-wing extremist groups from espousing hateful, repugnant ideologies. However, the Constitution does not provide protection for the criminal behavior that we have seen in Portland such as assault, firearms violations, potential hate crimes, and more – some of which may rise to the level of federal offenses. We respectfully request that the Department of Justice open an investigation into interstate criminal activity and coordination between extremist groups across state lines with the intent to commit acts of violence in connection with recurring violent altercations in Portland.

Investigating domestic violent extremist groups that target otherwise peaceful demonstrations to incite violence must be a high priority, for the country has already seen the deadly results when extremists feel emboldened to acts of violence, vigilantism, and terror. We have seen these acts of hate and violence in mass shootings, in the shooting of demonstrators, in the plot to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, at the January 6<sup>th</sup> Insurrection, and more. We know the significance and deadly impact of domestic violent extremism is not lost on you, and we applaud

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<sup>1</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, "Proud Boys," <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/proud-boys>, accessed August 24, 2021.

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the work the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) has done to increase their investigative focus on domestic terrorism.

We are grateful that this most recent clash in Portland did not claim any lives, but like many others, we fear that it is only a matter of time before violence in Oregon escalates with deadly consequences unless we take the threat of domestic violent extremism seriously. We urge the Department to prioritize investigating the networks that exist across state lines to support and operationalize the violent intent of groups such as the Proud Boys and to radicalize and recruit people into their extremist and hateful ideologies. We are committed to providing the resources that the Department of Justice needs to combat domestic violent extremism, and we look forward to working with you on this matter.

To that end, please provide responses to the following questions by September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021:

1. Can you confirm if the FBI or any other Department of Justice entity currently has an ongoing investigation into interstate criminal activity, in particular with respect to people who travel across state lines to Oregon, or are acting in coordination with people in other states, to cause violence or other federal crimes?
2. What action has the Department of Justice or the FBI taken to prioritize protecting the people of Oregon from bad actors who come to the state to provoke violent encounters?
3. Has the Department of Justice coordinated with state and local law enforcement or other federal agencies to provide guidance for how to appropriately de-escalate tensions if extremist groups and counter-protesters appear to be headed for a violent encounter?
4. Can you provide a status update to the implementation of the National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism and information sharing on domestic terrorism groups with state and local law enforcement?

We look forward to your response. Please contact Tara Stutsman at [tara\\_stutsman@merklej.senate.gov](mailto:tara_stutsman@merklej.senate.gov) or 202-224-3753 with any questions.

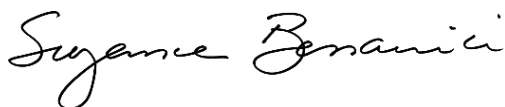
Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress



Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress