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March 28, 2023

The Honorable Christopher A. Wray
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20535

The Honorable Alejandro N. Mayorkas
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
301 7th St, SW
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Director Wray and Secretary Mayorkas:

Yesterday the nation witnessed the vicious murder of small schoolchildren in Nashville, Tennessee. An individual identified by police as Audrey Hale killed six people—students Evelyn Dieckhaus, Hallie Scruggs, and William Kinney, and employees Cynthia Peak, Katherine Koonce, and Michael Hill—in a murderous rampage at a Christian school known as The Covenant School.¹ It is commonplace to call such horrors “senseless violence.” But properly speaking, that is false. Police report that the attack here was “targeted”²—targeted, that is, against Christians.

Federal law explicitly criminalizes acts of violence against individuals based on religious affiliation as hate crimes. To be exact, the federal hate crime statute, 18 U.S.C. § 249(a)(1), bars “willfully caus[ing] bodily injury to any person . . . because of the actual or perceived race, color, *religion*, or national origin of any person.” According to Nashville law enforcement, Hale’s attack was both premeditated and “targeted” against this Christian school, its students and employees. Nashville police chief John Drake announced yesterday that “we have a manifesto, we have some writings that we’re going over that pertain to this date, the actual incident We have a map drawn out of how this was all going to take place.”³ Moreover, police detectives believe that Hale had “some resentment for having to go to that school.”⁴

I urge you to immediately open an investigation into this shooting as a federal hate crime. The full resources of the federal government must be brought to bear to determine how this crime occurred, and who may have influenced the deranged shooter to carry out these horrific crimes. Hate that leads to violence must be condemned. And hate crimes must be prosecuted.

Sincerely,



Josh Hawley
United States Senator

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-65095355>

² <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/nashville-school-shooting-covenant-school/>

³ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/nashville-school-shooting-covenant-school/>

⁴ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/nashville-school-shooting-covenant-school/>