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Anti-Discrimination Committee

March 9, 2018

**The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen**  
**Chairman**  
**House Appropriations Committee**  
**2306 Rayburn House Office Building**  
**Washington, DC 20515-3011**

**The Honorable Nita Lowey**  
**Ranking Member**  
**House Appropriations Committee**  
**2365 Rayburn HOB**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

**Re: Community Relations Service**

Dear Chairman Frelinghuysen and Ranking Member Lowey:

As organizations committed to justice that are strong supporters of the Community Relations Service (CRS), we write to ask that you help ensure that CRS can continue to help address tension associated with discrimination and support local leaders in efforts to prevent and improve the response to hate crimes. We also ask that you help ensure that CRS, an agency that has served local law enforcement leaders, government officials, school leaders, and community members across the country for over 50 years, can continue to meet the needs of the American people. Created by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, CRS helps communities address tension associated with allegations of discrimination based on race, color, and national origin. CRS also helps communities develop the capacity to more effectively prevent and respond to violent hate crimes.

We have seen CRS in action across the country working with local law enforcement and other public safety officials, local and national civil rights organizations, and religious leaders at times when communities are in crisis. When communities are at greatest risk of being torn apart by discrimination, hate incidents, and hate crimes, CRS trains local community leaders to help keep the peace at rallies and marches. In the aftermath of a hate crime, CRS helps law enforcement engage with the communities targeted for hate, helping local law enforcement and government officials develop sustainable mechanisms for engaging with community leaders to help prevent and respond more effectively to hate in the future. CRS has regional offices that allow its staff to understand the communities they are privileged to serve and to respond quickly to their needs.

We were concerned to learn that the President's 2019 Budget calls for an end to all funding for CRS and that other proposals discussed included closing regional offices and consolidating a few staff into one CRS headquarters office in Washington, D.C.. It is important that CRS continue to be able to do its critical work. At a time when local law enforcement agencies and community organizations agree that hate incidents and crimes are on the increase, we need CRS more than ever.

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We know the power and wisdom to address these issues lies not in Washington, D.C., but in the individuals in communities whom we are proud to represent and serve. We also know that there are times when, as advocates and community leaders, a neutral federal mediator can get us to the table with local law enforcement and government officials to keep community members safe and protect their rights.

### **CRS MUST REMAIN INDEPENDENT OF LITIGATORS WHO INVESTIGATE AND PROSECUTE**

The President's Budget states that it would transfer CRS' activities to the Civil Rights Division. One of the reasons CRS is able to be effective is because it is not an investigative nor prosecutorial component of the DOJ. For mayors, chiefs, sheriffs, school officials, and community leaders, the fact that CRS could not be used to support a prosecution or an investigation made it possible for leaders to ask for the help that they needed to prevent violence and keep the peace, rather than worry it could come back to hurt them in a lawsuit. CRS involvement decreases the potential for litigation, saving taxpayer dollars while simultaneously promoting public safety.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 actually prohibits CRS from participating in investigative or prosecutorial functions, making it a misdemeanor punishable of up to one year in prison for making public in any manner any information shared with the expectation that it would remain confidential. (Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, Title X, 42 U.S.C. § 2000g-2)

A proposed move of CRS services to the Civil Rights Division undermines the effectiveness of the agency in contradiction of the very statute that created the agency.

### **CRS NEEDS A REGIONAL PRESENCE TO REMAIN EFFECTIVE AND SERVE THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE OUTSIDE OF WASHINGTON**

CRS needs a local presence, not more people sitting in Washington, D.C. thinking that they understand the needs of people in other parts of the country. Professionals in CRS regional and field offices invest time and resources in their local communities, earning the trust necessary to serve as neutral mediators to keep the peace and to keep people safe. These regional and field offices understand the needs of people in their communities. When community leaders learn a hate group is coming to town, they don't call an office in D.C. in the hopes that someone there will understand the unique needs of their community. Instead they call the CRS regional director or trained conciliator in the region to help train religious leaders and other community leaders as self-marshals that keep the peace. CRS regional representatives also help facilitate meetings between local advocates and law enforcement in advance of a march or rally.

When unrest follows a tragedy like an officer-involved shooting, local government, law enforcement, and community leaders need people who can get to the area quickly with an understanding of underlying tensions. When the television cameras leave, community leaders look to CRS to help work with local government and law enforcement leaders in order to begin conversations, brainstorm solutions, and create action agendas to address some of the longstanding issues at the root of the problem. In short, CRS assists in creating long-term and sustainable social change.

### **CRS PROVIDES A CRITICAL AND UNIQUE SERVICE THAT WE NEED NOW MORE THAN EVER**

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CRS works behind the scenes, providing impartial and confidential conciliation and mediation services intended to enhance local capacity to respond to future conflicts more effectively. By helping local leaders keep the peace, CRS saves local and federal taxpayer dollars, and helps communities develop their own solutions.

CRS' mission and mandate recognize that the answers to the most difficult issues confronting communities across the country rest not in lawyers nor in politicians in Washington D.C., but in local community, law enforcement, and school leaders across the country. Please help make sure that it can continue to do its work on behalf of the American people.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Becky Monroe, with The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, at [bmonroe@lawyerscommittee.org](mailto:bmonroe@lawyerscommittee.org).

Sincerely,

Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

Anti-Defamation League

Human Rights Campaign

Muslim Advocates

African American Ministers In Action

AJC

American Association of University Women (AAUW)

Arab American Institute

B'nai B'rith International

Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism, CA State Univ., San Bernardino

Central Conference of American Rabbis

Japanese American Citizens League

Jewish Council for Public Affairs

Lambda Legal

Matthew Shepard Foundation

Men of Reform Judaism

Muslim-Jewish Advisory Council

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NAACP

National Asian Pacific American Bar Association

National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)

National Bar Association

National Center for Transgender Equality

National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA)

National Council of Jewish Women

National Disability Rights Network

National Organization for Women

National Urban League

People For the American Way

Sikh American Legal Defense Education Fund

South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)

Southern Poverty Law Center

The Sikh Coalition

Union for Reform Judaism

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries

Women of Reform Judaism

CC: Members of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations