



August 26, 2020

The Honorable William P. Barr  
Attorney General  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20530

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*President and  
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Kristen Clarke

Assistant Attorney General Eric Dreiband  
Civil Rights Division  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20530

On behalf of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, we are writing to request that the U.S. Department of Justice immediately commence a full, thorough and independent hate crimes investigation into the fatal shootings that occurred in Kenosha, Wisconsin on August 25, 2020. Information available to date, including disturbing video recorded by bystanders, shows the intentional killing of two individuals and injury to others caused by a white male who was roaming the streets of Kenosha openly carrying a semi-automatic weapon. A suspect, Kyle Rittenhouse, has been arrested in his hometown of Antioch, Illinois, after fleeing the scene. This shooting occurred amid [reports](#) of organized militia groups such as the Kenosha Guard actively recruiting and activating "patriots" to "take up arms and defend our city tonight from the evil thugs." We believe that these facts are more than sufficient to support opening an investigation under the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, as well as other federal statutes.

At a time when we are seeing a spike in racial violence, hate crimes and white supremacy across the nation, we deem it critical that the Civil Rights Division immediately act, with the support of the FBI, to investigate and prosecute this deadly shooting that may have been racially motivated, because of the actual or perceived race of the victims. It is important to determine whether Mr. Rittenhouse acted in concert with others and whether the threat to demonstrators and residents of Kenosha continues. The shooting of Jacob Blake, an unarmed Black man who was shot in the back in the presence of his children appears to have inspired the deployment of dangerous and armed militia groups and prompted organizing activity which led to the August 25<sup>th</sup> shooting. We observe that this incident occurs in the wake of the recent murder of Ahmaud Arbery and other crimes



perpetrated against Black people across our country. The urgency of this moment could not be clearer.

The unique and far-reaching harm imposed by hate crimes has long been recognized by the Department of Justice. This deadly incident presents precisely the kind of facts that led Congress to adopt a statute that empowers the federal government to carry out federal investigations, as pursuit of the matter under state law alone could necessarily leave “demonstrably unvindicated the Federal interest in eradicating bias-motivated violence.” We are confident that the Justice Department has the expertise and resources necessary to thoroughly review the facts underlying this fatal shooting and to uncover any continuing threat posed by potential conspirators. We urge you to take appropriate action at the conclusion of your investigation.

We cannot stand idly by as hate groups, white supremacists and white militias continue to perpetrate racial violence against Black people across our nation. A federal investigation in Kenosha, Wisconsin must commence immediately. I welcome a response to this request at the earliest opportunity at [info@lawyerscommittee.org](mailto:info@lawyerscommittee.org).

Highest regards,

Kristen Clarke  
President and Executive Director  
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

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