# HEARING THIRTEEN
## Faith Leaders and Community Engagement
**June 25, 2020**

*The following summary is intended to provide an overview and highlights of the testimony and discussion during the hearings. For a full and detailed account of the hearings, please refer to the Commission website and the audio recordings and transcripts located there.*

## Faith Leaders and Community Engagement, June 25, 2020

**First Panelist*: Jeff Ballabon, CEO for B2 Strategic, Cofounder, American Restoration Institute***
*Highlights:*

- In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, I was designated by Attorney General Ashcroft to be the point of contact between the Federal Government and the American Jewish community in the event of credible threats against Jewish targets. For the last several years I have focused on the alarming rise of antisemitism in American and the renewed mainstreaming of classic anti-Jewish conspiracy theories.
- Last year, a multiethnic conference dedicated to combatting hate in America excluded antisemitism, with the organizers explaining that Jews are not a minority; when it was pointed out that Jews are the minority most often targeted for hate crimes according to the FBI, organizers responded that Jews get along well with the police. I'm here to talk about two points illustrated by that story.
- Firstly, Jews, and particularly Orthodox Jews, have worked to develop excellent relationships local law enforcement, welcoming law enforcement to learn about our culture, and being interested in theirs. We are grateful to them because we vitally need their protection, and local law enforcement perceives us as supportive. These efforts ratcheted up in the aftermath of the 1991 Crown Heights riots. It's a successful model worthy of comprehensive study.
- Secondly, Jews general and Orthodox Jews most prominently, because of their visibility, are subject to increasingly more harassment and violent attacks. There remains too much confusion and too little reliable data about the nature of the threat and what constitutes an imminent danger. Our political narratives deny antisemitism where it exists and claim it where it does not.
- However, we have two resources we lacked even ten years ago, and it is necessary to deploy them now. First, a widely accepted definition of what constitutes antisemitism, ratified by the United States and applied to federal law and accepted by Israel and the United Nations.
- Second, technology capable of tracking sentiment data: beliefs, trends, and their linkage to violence. My colleagues and I worked on what is essentially an epidemiological map of antisemitism, which spreads astonishingly like a disease, and can be tracked like one.

*Recommendations:*

- Rather than viewing hate crimes solely as a tool for prosecution and punishment, epidemiological data should be used to assist policymakers and law enforcement with preemption, protection, and prevention.

- If this approach is executed successfully against anti-Jewish violence, it can be adapted to help law enforcement deal with other forms of violent hate.

**Second Panelist*: Rabbi Jack Moline, Executive Director, Interfaith Alliance***

*Highlights:*

- I grew up a second-generation privileged nice Jewish boy. When my daughters were eight and five, shortly after I dedicated a new community center at the Agudas Achim congregation in Alexandria, it was defaced with swastikas and my family and I were evacuated due to a bomb threat. My younger daughter sobbed, "Why would anyone want to hurt us." The difference between the American Dream and the American Nightmare is whether a parent has to answer that question for their child. .
- This story, from a member of a minority well-integrated in American society, is part of the story of faith communities and ethnic communities in the United States, who bring with them those the histories: children of immigrants and refugees, African-American citizens whose ancestors were torn from their roots.
- The law enforcement agents who enter an interaction with a citizen unaware that those histories can be triggered by a uniform—even when that individual is a suspected perpetrator—is unequipped for the job.
- It is not hard to learn about other communities' values and traditions—but if you don't, you inevitably validate the suspicions of vulnerable people, who sense a hostility when an officer does not know enough to say *Namaste* or *abi gezunt* when dealing with the community. Those who have heard an elected official describe them as bad guys and criminals, or had to worry about a knock on the door in the middle of the night, or been pressured into betraying brothers and sisters in faith, need to be reassured you are on their side.

*Recommendations:*

- At every level of law enforcement, officer training in cultural literacy, including in community and generational trauma, is as important as in the techniques of investigation and enforcement.
- People need to know that you will not claim there are fine people on both sides of bigotry.

**Third Panelist*: Imam Talib Shareef, President of Masjid Muhammad***

*Highlights:*

- My organization, Masjid Muhammad, The Nation's Mosque, was established by American citizens of African descent, and established the first mosque built by 100% American citizens. It is vital that the voice of the Islamic community be welcomed; we bring a unique perspective to this Commission.
- Masjid Muhammad initiated a successful program that can serve as a template for necessary change, the AMATE Initiative: American Muslims Against Terrorism and Extremism, using grant funding from the Department of Homeland Security. We were chosen for the grant in 2018 because the community of the late Imam W. Deen Mohammad has been implementing the longest and most comprehensive deradicalization program in the U.S. for over four decades.

- Under the grant, we produced a progressive, informational online social media campaign challenging the narratives of extremist ideology. A significant number of individuals are recruited to extremist factions via online channels; we distributed counter messages, including a full-length documentary, showing the true, peaceful nature of Islam. We partnered with the U.S. Institute of Peace to organize a symposium of Islamic and CVE experts.
- AMATE used geotargeting to mobile devices, selecting 129 zip codes with a potential audience of 134 million. We collaborated with mosques and cultural centers across the DMV area. We convened focus groups to ensure messaging was effective. We conducted photoshoots to capture authentic images of Muslims at worship, serving the community, and fellowshipping with those of various religions.
- This body of work has left an incredible mark on the discourse about the Islamic community in America, and I'm confident that elements of this approach to changing the conversation about policing and policing culture can be just as effective.
- The years leading up to 2018 had been marred by reports of violent actions by those posing in the name of Islam. Law enforcement is facing a similar challenge. It needs to challenge the narrative, give community a chance to see law enforcement in the light of genuine positive interactions. Having credible, authentic voices will help bring about sustainable change.
- We were successful in showing that democracy is not something that Muslims have to be afraid of—in fact, it may be closer to Islamic justice than any other political ideology. It recognizes that man, or governments, cannot take away the rights given citizens by God.
- I have attached three supporting documents to this testimony: an AMATE PowerPoint; the Carnegie Report, *An American Dilemma*; and *Transforming the Hate that Hate Produced*, a policy report that looks at real and perceived grievances in African-American and Muslim communities and addresses issues and interaction with law enforcement and how a community critical of the state was able to get past injustices via the legal system. I also recommend *America's Other Muslims: Imam W D Mohammed, Islamic Reform, and The Making of American Islam* by Muhammad Fraser-Rahim.

*Recommendations:*

- Treat all citizens as the creations of God. Be transparent as much as possible so the public can have faith and confidence. Cultivate trust.
- Implement geotargeting campaigns showing law enforcement officers engaging with communities as allies. Show sound bites from officers talking about their connections to the communities they serve. Establish a multimedia website.

## Question-and-Answer Session, June 25, 2020

**Q:** [Katharine Sullivan for the panel]: In my experience as a judge, I saw juries struggle with charging or not charging hate crimes—for the panel, what do you think is the relationship between the First Amendment and hate crimes? And for Mr. Ballabon, how much bias might there be in a mapping project like you describe, because what one community sees as a hate crime another does not?

**A:** [Mr. Ballabon]: I am submitting review points that address your question. Briefly, people of good will generally rally around the idea of hate crimes laws; it's hard to be critical of them. And it is not only a First

Amendment problem but a danger to say the government can prosecute ideas, no matter how ugly. If someone yells at me for being a Jew, that's not illegal; if someone punches me, it is, and the crime there is hurting me. Instrumentalities of law can be easily turned against us; sooner or later someone of less goodwill or different ideas can use hate crimes to to prosecute individuals with whom they disagree.

However, I recommended epidemiology for antisemitism, and there we have a broad consensus definition—the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition. If the epidemiological study of antisemitism is successful, maybe then we can try to undertake a consensus definition of hate. We should also look at using hate crimes statistics as a way to deploy police resources preventatively.

**A:** [Rabbi Moline]: The law is constantly in a process of refinement. The First Amendment has lot of parts to it—I assume you're referring to freedom of speech, but our other First Amendment rights have to be protected as well. I think we are obligated to be certain people do not exploit the rights and privileges granted us by one part of the Constitution to limit or negate the rights and privileges granted by other parts.

**A:** [Imam Shareef]: The First Amendment does not give the right to incitement or endangerment. We need to look at hate speech in those terms—it crosses the line when it becomes an action, an attack, or to some degree even a threat.

**Q:** [David Rausch for the panel]: I'd like to hear more suggestions on how to go forward with engagement and with educating law enforcement on the importance and necessity of understanding the differences in the communities we police.

**A:** [Mr. Ballabon]: In our local orthodox communities, this issue grew up as an organic expression of the feeling of being embattled and needing protection. Most people don't have any visibility into us, so it's important that we come to the police and try to integrate them—come observe our festivals, our lives. We know sometimes this is going to be arduous for you. For the last decade or more, most significant-sized synagogues have had to have law enforcement presence outside for protection. It's happening in America. The police literally risk their lives to help us, so we reach out to them. Communities have created genuinely bottom-up outreach. It would not have worked as well as a centralized policy.

**A:** [Rabbi Moline]: The first two rights in the First Amendment have to do with freedom of religion, and separation of government from religion. Being a person of faith or of no faith is constitutionally guaranteed. And so I don't think it's accurate to suggest there needs to be outreach from minority communities to justify who they are. I admire what Imam Shareef has done in countering violent extremism, but it bothers me that the Muslim community or any other faith community needs to justify itself as being loyal and cooperative Americans. It needs to be the presumed default position of law enforcement that they need to know about the communities whose rights they're protecting, and that default should be a necessary part of law enforcement training.

**A:** [Imam Shareef:]: What the Rabbi said is right: we shouldn't have to do that. But unfortunately it's been the case that we've had to. To change that, a number of things have to happen in various areas. Partnership on community events is one of those—we did a chili cook-off in D.C. and invited the U.S. Attorney, the FBI, the MPD. The members of the community had been really skeptical of them, but they came and they participated, and some of the walls began to come down. But that's not a relationship. Law enforcement has to have a relationship with the people that fund their positions.

But I also work with ex-White supremacists, and with them as well as former radical Islamist, there is hate because there are no meaningful relationships.

We've got to change legislation, change the paradigm, the mindset—mandate simulation training, take officers who violate human rights off the street immediately. Start going to town hall meetings in the community and being transparent.

**A:** [Mr. Ballabon]: I want to follow up briefly. All I'm reporting is a set of facts—that a minority community that needs law enforcement has created a set of excellent relationships with law enforcement. It seems to me that's something all communities should want, but I can't project onto other communities. I don't understand how police are supposed to be fully understanding of our community's needs without us explaining it to them. All the more reason to undertake a study of the phenomenon of communities inviting law enforcement in to learn about them.