

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 9, 2021

The Honorable Avril Haines
Director
Office of the Director of National Intelligence
Washington, DC 20511

Dear Director Haines:

We write regarding the immediate importance of safeguarding classified and sensitive information from individuals who are involved in hate and violence-based extremist groups. The United States faces a growing domestic terror threat comprised of white supremacists, Neo-Nazis, and other right-wing violent extremists who have become further emboldened by conspiracy theories and false narratives.

Over the last several years numerous individuals involved with hate and violence-based extremist groups have been granted access to classified information. At the 2017 “Unite the Right” rally in Virginia, a government contractor with a security clearance was identified as a member of a violent white supremacist group.¹ In 2019, a State Department employee holding a Top-Secret clearance was covertly running a Washington-area chapter of a white nationalist group.² Also, in 2019, a Coast Guard Lieutenant with a Secret clearance was sentenced to 13 years prison for planning a domestic terror attack on the basis of white supremacist beliefs.³ And most recently, a United States Navy contractor, Army reservist, and apparent white supremacist and Nazi sympathizer with a Secret clearance was arrested for participating in the deadly attack on the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021.⁴

As you are aware, the domestic terror landscape has shifted dramatically to the online ecosystem where white supremacists, Neo-Nazis, and far-right extremists are free to organize and share their violent ideology with little oversight or accountability. We are concerned that the current background investigatory process does not adequately screen for these activities.

¹ A.C. Thompson and Ali Winston, “He is a member of a violent white supremacist group. So why is he working for a defense contractor with a security clearance?”, *ProPublica*, July 5, 2018,

<https://www.propublica.org/article/michael-miselis-rise-above-movement-white-supremacist-group-northrop-grumman>.

² Michael Edison Hayden, “U.S. State Department official involved in white nationalist movement, Hatewatch determines,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, August 7, 2019, <https://www.splcenter.org/gebert>

³ U.S. Department of Justice, “Christopher Hasson sentenced to more than 13 years in federal prison on federal charges of illegal possession of silencers, possession of firearms by an addict to and unlawful user of a controlled substance, and possession of a controlled substance,” January 31, 2020, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-md/pr/christopher-hasson-sentenced-more-13-years-federal-prison-federal-charges-illegal>

⁴ <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/tasneemnashrulla/us-navy-contractor-arrested-capitol-riot>

The current adjudicative guidelines were last updated in 2016 and became effective in 2017.⁵ We believe that the existing guidelines are not sufficient to address this evolving threat of domestic violent extremism. We ask that you work to address this national security threat by issuing new adjudicative guidelines that would disqualify individuals from obtaining a security clearance if there is evidence that they are involved with or have participated in activities that advocate hate, violence, or a violent political ideology. This would also include the publishing or distributing of information in any medium, including online, in which the primary purpose of the content is to support extremist activities. The guideline should apply to all government employees, contractors, and military personnel in national security positions.

The ability of an individual to safeguard United States national security comes with a promise that they will protect all Americans and uphold our nation's values. That ability is in doubt if there is reason to believe the individual supports or participates in activities that embrace hate, violent political ideologies, and far-right extremism. We thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to working with you to address this threat.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Wexton
Member of Congress



Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

⁵ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *National Security Adjudicative Guidelines*, December 10, 2016, <https://www.dni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/Regulations/SEAD-4-Adjudicative-Guidelines-U.pdf>.