

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4305

March 29, 2023

The Honorable Merrick Garland
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice 950
Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Garland:

This week, America watched while a mentally ill shooter brutally massacred Christian schoolchildren in Nashville, Tennessee. This murderer, identified by law enforcement as Audrey Hale, shot and killed six people—three students, Evelyn Dieckhaus, Hallie Scruggs, and William Kinney, and three employees Cynthia Peak, Katherine Koonce, and Michael Hill—while they studied and worked at The Covenant School. Police reports confirmed what many Americans already suspected. This attack was a targeted assault on American Christians.

Federal law is clear, acts of violence against individuals based on religious affiliation are hate crimes. As you know, 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.*”. The Nashville Metro Police Department has reported “writings” at Hale’s home that suggest a “calculated and planned” attack. The [shooter] was a former student at Covenant school and specifically chose to terrorize this school because of their Christian faith. It is appalling that you have not yet committed to opening a hate crime investigation despite the shooter’s motive being as clear as day.

We urge you, as head of the Department of Justice, to immediately offer the full resources of federal law enforcement to the victims and community of this attack and open a hate crime investigation. Additionally, we urge you to forcefully condemn anti-Christian bias to send an unambiguous message to all Americans that discrimination against any community is unamerican and will not be tolerated. Further, we would ask that you update us regularly as to what steps the Department has taken to address our concerns. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Lance Gooden
Member of Congress



Andy Ogles
Member of Congress