



# COMMONWEALTH *of* VIRGINIA

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Statement of

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Representatives attending the U.S House Committee on  
Oversight and Reform hearing “Confronting Violent White  
Supremacy (Part V): Examining the Rise of Militia Extremism”

Chair Raskin, and Representatives attending today's hearing, thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement regarding the rise of paramilitary activity.

The rise in right-wing extremism, white supremacist violence, and paramilitary activity that we are seeing across the country should frighten every single American.

There are those who believe they can control or influence these groups. They cannot.

There are those who think they are harmless groups that are just having some fun. They are not.

There are those who believe these groups could never turn on them and try to impose their will on their community through mob violence. They are wrong.

I urge everyone to see these groups for what they are—a threat to our system of self-governance and a potentially violent and destructive force within our communities—and to reject them accordingly.

These groups cannot act with impunity, because acquiescence only leads to escalation.

We know this all too well in Virginia.

On August 12, 2017, Charlottesville, Virginia saw the largest white supremacist gathering in recent history. Three Virginians lost their lives on that tragic day and our Commonwealth was changed forever.

We watched with horror and sadness as white supremacists and militia members walked through the streets of Charlottesville, many dressed in full military garb and carrying automatic rifles. These individuals were acting as though they were heading into battle, not simply protesting or demonstrating about their beliefs.

But the Unite the Right rally was only the beginning.

Since then, we have seen the annual Gun Lobby Day flood Richmond's streets with thousands of heavily armed individuals, including many members of far-right militia groups who claimed to be "keeping the peace" when in fact they were terrifying those who call the city their home.

We have seen localities across the Commonwealth proclaiming themselves "2A sanctuary cities", an assertion that they claimed would be enforced by their own local militias.

And we have seen these same groups holding "militia musters" around Virginia, where they gather to practice drills and formations, preparing for when the day when they inevitably believe they will need to spring into action.

For years I have done everything in my power to warn Virginia citizens, law enforcement, and elected officials that the rise of right-wing extremism was a real, urgent, and growing threat to the safety of our communities and our Commonwealth.

Three years in a row I introduced legislation that would have further protected Virginians and combated this stark rise in white supremacist violence, and until 2020, each one of those measures died in committee at the hands of Republican legislators who did not care about this threat.

I issued an official advisory opinion making it clear that it was illegal for these groups to impersonate a law enforcement officer and purport to be keeping the peace, when clearly, they were not.

But while it may be nearly impossible to comprehend, some localities and their leaders in Virginia have taken official steps to endorse this right-wing extremism, these groups, and their baseless conspiracy theories about gun confiscation, pandemic denial, and “antifa.”

Some have responded to right-wing rallies with accommodation and even assistance, while greeting those protesting other causes like law enforcement violence with arrests and even more violence.

And most frightening of all, some sheriffs and municipal governments are building relationships and even attempting to give official recognition or endorsement to unorganized, unaccountable, heavily-armed, self-styled militias that answer to absolutely no one.

As Attorney General, my obligation and my duty are to protect all Virginians, and while I have worked incredibly hard to do this over the past few years, those efforts have been hampered by a lack of authority, funding, and resources.

I urge you to create incentives for federal and state cooperation in identifying and countering dangerous paramilitary activity.

Second, I ask that the federal government treat states as a full partner, sharing information, breaking down information silos, and ensuring that we counter criminal activity before it erupts into large-scale violence.

And third, I want to encourage you to consider allocating more funding for training for law enforcement officers so that they can better handle these kinds of groups.

Unless we all work together to come up with real, concrete solutions, the threat of right-wing extremists and unchecked paramilitary groups will not go away.

We have all seen what these groups are capable of, you just have to look to the insurrection at the Capitol on January 6<sup>th</sup> to know that they must be taken seriously, and I implore you to do just that.