



March 15, 2021

Dear Members of the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations:

U.S. democracy is in peril of further deterioration unless Congress urgently acts to address the [causes of conflict](#), increasing [violent extremism](#), [polarization](#), and [declining trust](#) in our democratic institutions. [Proliferation of misinformation](#), [systemic injustice](#), and [economic inequality](#) exacerbated by the [global pandemic](#) are driving grievances and conflict in the United States.

Organizations in the United States are already working to [prevent violent extremism](#), [strengthen democratic institutions](#), [advance criminal justice reform](#), [collect accurate data](#) on violence, [provide trauma healing to communities](#) in need, and [reduce political and community violence](#). This work is vital, yet sorely under-supported and under-funded.

We urge the 117th Congress to take bold and comprehensive action by allocating dedicated and robust funding to reduce and prevent violent conflict, rebuild our democratic institutions, and build sustainable peace.

Protect and Rebuild U.S. Democracy

- In 2020 [a study](#) found, for the first time in history, most Americans are dissatisfied with the state of democracy in the United States. To renew and rebuild our democracy, Congress should fund a bipartisan and robust [Democracy Fund](#) under an independent board of directors that provide competitive grants to non-profit and civic organizations to reform and increase civic education, break down information silos, increase online literacy and prevent disinformation, and protect our electoral systems. The Democracy Fund should be modeled after the bipartisan National Endowment for Democracy, which provides U.S. foreign assistance to strengthen democratic institutions in fragile states. American nonprofits and civic organizations are already working to protect and rebuild our democracy, but they need support from the federal government. ***We recommend an initial allocation of \$200 million dollars.***

Prevent Violent Extremism

- Reports warn [violent extremism will increase](#) in the coming months. Additionally, in 2020 there were a [record number of hate-related murders](#), and hate groups active in the United States [increased by 55 percent from 2017-2019](#). Congress should significantly increase funding to the Department of Homeland Security's [Office of Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention \(OTVTP\)](#) to address the surge in hate crimes and homegrown violent extremism in the United States. The OTVTP provides grants to a range of

organizations, institutions, and law enforcement agencies to advance the office’s terrorism prevention framework, which concentrates on building whole-of-society prevention approaches. ***We recommend increasing OTVTP’s funding to \$200 million with a focus on supporting community-based, women and minority led organizations.***

- To understand trends and respond, accurate and comprehensive data on these kinds of political violence is needed. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) tracks hate crimes but the data is incomplete. For accurate data the government’s efforts should be paired with non-governmental efforts in academia and non-profits for real-time, national and publicly available data.¹ ***We recommend allocating \$40 million in terrorism prevention grants to support collecting of event and crime data, analysis, dissemination and third-party and multi-stakeholder audit and review.***
- Congress should also allocate funding for Health and Human Service (HHS) to enhance the federal government’s engagement in preventing violent extremism to better understand the nexus between mental health/psychosocial support, trauma, and the commission of hate-motivated violence. A recent report on terrorism prevention [highlighted the need for an increased role for HHS](#) in this area as part of a shift to a public health model for CVE efforts in U.S. Programs. ***We recommend allocating \$10 million for research and pilot programs to support trauma and mental health programs linked to the commission of violent extremism.***

Build Social Cohesion

- American society is becoming more [polarized than ever](#), with the U.S. hitting historic levels of polarization and division over the last decade. The Department of Justice’s [Community Relations Services \(CRS\)](#) and community based mediation² and peacebuilding capacities need to be revitalized to address sources of local conflict as well as underlying systems of injustice and division. CRS is the only federal agency dedicated to working with community groups to resolve community conflicts. ***We recommend funding CRS at \$40 million.***
- Experiences [across the world have shown that innovative](#) “People-to-People” reconciliation programs, rooted in contact theory have built social cohesion and driven reconciliation in some of the most divided contexts – Israel and Palestine, post-Genocide Rwanda and Burundi, the Balkans and beyond, and developed a robust evidence base. U.S. assistance has pioneered these programs for nearly 20 years, supporting competitive

¹ Organizations that are already tracking hate crime data include the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); Bridging Divides Initiatives (BDI) at Princeton University; Anti-Defamation League’s Hate Crimes Mapping; and Stop AAPI Hate.

² The National Association for Community Mediation (NAFCM), for example, is an organization that represents community-level dispute resolution that is envisioned by Title X of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

grants to non-profit and community organizations designed to drive innovation and experimentation and build enduring bridges between divided individuals and communities, working in close cooperation with local governments, business, faith and community groups. ***We recommend \$31 million per year for five years to support a pilot program within the Department of Justice modeled upon the U.S. Agency for International Development's acclaimed "people to people reconciliation program."***

Criminal Justice Reform

- There is a significant need to support widespread, fundamental police culture and systemic change that transforms law enforcement and communities nationwide to build new mechanisms for community engagement and building public trust. Police-involved violence is a grievance and has become a significant spark for violent conflict in the U.S. In 2019, [a study found](#) that “police violence is a leading cause of death for young men, and young men of color face exceptionally high risk of being killed by police.” Police reform faces significant challenges with 18,000 separate police departments governing their own practices and policies. There is an urgent need to increase funding to agencies such as the National Institute of Justice, the Bureau of Justice Assistance, and the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services to conduct more extensive research to study the impact of policing on communities and develop programs for community-based education in support of much needed widespread police culture and community-based change. ***We recommend an allocation of \$10 million for this research and pilot programming aimed at understanding the impact of policing on communities, changing police culture and community-based education around policing.***

Finally, as Congress carefully considers the funding priorities outlined in this letter, members should also evaluate our security investments. There is a significant mismatch between military funding and vital programs needed to address increasing grievances, preventing violent extremism, and building peaceful and just democratic societies both at home and abroad.

We have much bipartisan work to do as a country across all levels of society – local, state, and national. The recommendations outlined above, while not exhaustive, will send a strong signal that Congress is ready to take bold action. We stand ready to work with you to advance our shared goal of preventing violent conflict and rebuilding our democracy and social cohesion.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Peacebuilding
Aware Girls
Best Conflict Solutions. LLC
Bridge Alliance
CDA Collaborative Learning
Center For Policy Analysis Of Horn Of Africa

Charity & Security Network
Cleveland Mediation Center
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
EIHR: The Educators' Institute for Human Rights
Generations For Peace
Global Mediation Team
International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)
IREX
Karuna Center for Peacebuilding
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Mediators Beyond Borders international
Mindbridge
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
NewGen Peacebuilders
Parallel Networks
PartnersGlobal
Pax Christi USA
Peace Direct
Police2Peace
Search for Common Ground
ShelterBox USA
Tanenbaum
The Carter Center
The Fund for Peace
The International Youth Foundation
Women of Color Advancing Peace & Security