



The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee

Statement for the Record on

Countering Violent Extremism Act, H.R. 2899

before the

U.S. House Committee on Homeland Security

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American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee

To: Congressmen Michael T. McCaul, Chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House Committee on Homeland Security

I am writing to you on behalf of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), the country's only national Arab-American organization. ADC has a long history of supporting the human and civil rights of all Americans and opposing racism, discrimination and bigotry in any form. ADC was founded by former U.S. Senator James Abourezk in 1980. Today, ADC is the largest grassroots Arab-American civil rights and civil liberties organization in the United States. ADC is non-profit, non-sectarian, and non-partisan, with members in every State of the United States. ADC routinely works with a broad coalition of national organizations to ensure that the rights of ethnic minorities in the United States are protected. The constitutional, civil and human rights of Arab Americans are more than ever at stake. ADC respectfully takes this opportunity to provide a statement for the record with comments on the Countering Violent Extremism Act, H.R. 2899 to the United States House Committee on Homeland Security.

The Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Act of 2015, H.R. 2899 ("Act") is predicated upon completely false premises and an inherently flawed CVE Program which was initiated by the White House earlier this year. The Act would authorize the creation of a new Office for Countering Violent Extremism ("CVE Office") within the Department of Homeland Security and will allocate 10 million dollars of funding for its establishment. The Act attempts to codify unfair practices of racial and religious profiling under the CVE program that targets minority communities, particularly Arabs and Muslims. The Act incorrectly claims that 1) there are identifiable factors that can be linked to the presence of extremism in communities; and 2) wrongly asserts that extremism must be combatted through a law enforcement mechanism. These two points are meant to represent the guiding principles of the CVE Office. However, these so called "principles" are not supported by facts and therefore it is highly doubtful the CVE Office can have a positive impact.

In the Responsibilities section of the Act, the new CVE Office is commanded to "[identify] risk factors that contribute to violent extremism in communities in the United States...." Based on the



American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee

previous actions of government agencies we know the risk factors the new program will likely identify. For example, in a past report the FBI claimed that the commonplace activities of many American Muslims, including wearing traditional religious attire, frequent attendance at mosques, participating in a pro-Muslim social group or political cause, or even growing facial hair could be indicative of radicalization or extremism. However, it has been proven time and time again that no religious, ethnic or behavioral traits can be substantively linked to violent extremism.

We can look to empirical studies as well as recent events to prove this point. The Combating Terrorism Center at West Point found that since 2007 there has been a dramatic rise in the number of violent plots from persons who identify with far-right of American politics. However, the major ideological movements linked to violence varied from “a racist/white supremacy movement, an anti-federalist movement and a fundamentalist movement,” but did not include Arabs or Muslims. In fact, the only documented link between Arab and/or Muslim community centers and violent extremism is that mosques were often the targets of violent attacks. The report noted that “the great majority of attacks perpetrated by the racist groups are aimed against individuals or groups affiliated with a specific minority ethnic groups, or identifiable facilities (churches, mosques, synagogues, or schools affiliated with minority communities).” Additionally, the 2014 European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report found that the majority of terrorist attacks are committed by separatist groups, rather than particular religious or ethnic groups. The recent acts of terrorism in Charleston, South Carolina also demonstrate that the model of profiling minority religious and ethnic groups is fundamentally flawed. Instead of producing new research that will better protect America, the CVE Office will fall back on the kind of ignorant antagonistic stereotypes that have been used by previous programs, and unfairly target Arab and Muslim communities.

The conflation of ideology with violence in the Act is false narrative. The Act surmises that violence can be eliminated by combating radical ideology. The error in this reasoning is that there is no solid connection between radical ideology and violence. There are many people in this country that hold views that can be considered extreme, but belief in such ideas and the perpetration of violence are two separate things entirely.

Tied to this is the government’s law enforcement approach to CVE. Under the current CVE program, all community engagement efforts are conducted by law enforcement agencies including the FBI and DHS. Our communities understandably do not trust law enforcement. This distrust is based on reports of 1) entrapment of vulnerable portion of the Arab and Muslim community; 2) strong-arming our community members into becoming informants with threats of deportation and criminal prosecution; and 3) targeting our religious institutions and cultural centers for surveillance without probable cause. Furthermore, recent reports regarding the United Kingdom’s CVE model, which proponents of this legislation looked to for guidance, found that this program not only failed, but also backfired by alienating communities. Similarly, the FBI implemented CVE program has failed to increase individual and community resilience to violent extremism but has effectively divided communities and been outright rejected.

The CVE Office’s mandate to “[manage] the outreach and engagement efforts of the Department directed toward communities at risk” is just another way to describe and target Arab and Muslim communities and unfairly designate entire communities as dangerous. Unwarranted manipulation of people’s thoughts and beliefs can never be permissible. This unfair targeting of entire communities could lead to further alienation and distrust, especially as white supremacy groups and other right wing groups have never been categorized or considered as part of the “communities at risk.”

The Act and the Office that it intends to create are founded on misguided and incorrect ideas about the causes and remedies for Violent Extremism. The targeting of individuals based on their ideology legitimizes the government’s power to control how its citizens think. These concepts should raise red flags with even the most passive of bystanders. The CVE Office would waste monetary and bureaucratic resources pursuing ends that are not only useless but that would have a detrimental effect on relations with minority communities living in this country.