

October 26, 2015

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20016

The Honorable Loretta Lynch
Attorney General
950 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Lynch and Secretary Johnson,

The undersigned civil rights, faith and community-based organizations write to express our concerns regarding the new Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programs.

On October 16, 2015, the FBI convened a "Community Focus Group" comprised of faith and community-based groups to have the "opportunity to review FBI products regarding the community's involvement in deterring violent extremism and [to] provide constructive feedback on this endeavor."

At the meeting, we were informed that the FBI wants to partner with communities to implement prevention and intervention efforts to counter violent extremism. Pursuant to this partnership, the FBI would establish a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with community groups and create a Shared Responsibility Committee (SRC). The stated aim of the SRC is to rehabilitate an individual who has been identified by the FBI as at-risk for violent extremism. The undersigned organizations cannot support the SRC framework under CVE as currently proposed.

While we advocate for local communities to build relationships with law enforcement based on trust, we are disturbed by many aspects of the CVE Program and SRC. Such programs and initiatives lack safeguards and undermine healthy partnerships. We are concerned that encouraging law-abiding Americans to provide non-criminal behavior information to law enforcement may result in more abuses. For example, if the SRC deems an individual rehabilitated, the FBI may still continue to investigate the individual. Alarming, the MOU with the SRC does not preclude the FBI from using surveillance, informants or agent provocateurs. Such preclusion is necessary based on past actions of the FBI and local law enforcement infiltrating mosques, even in the absence of any wrongdoing. These actions have broken community trust with the FBI and local law enforcement.

We were also briefed on a new web-based program aimed at middle school and high school students, set to launch on November 2, 2015. This program creates a dangerous precedent of FBI overreach into sectors of our society that are best managed by experts, like teachers, curriculum developers, and other educators. By default, this program is asking teachers to become an extension of law enforcement. The FBI should investigate matters of national security and civil rights violations, not police theology in communities or thought in classrooms. Such a program is outside of the FBI's mandate and expertise in

law enforcement. Educating our youth on countering violent extremism, paths to extremism and identifying various extremist ideologies through a web-based program designed as a game can lead to bullying, bias, misperception, as well as racial and religious profiling of students.

In addition, the SRC is flawed as there is no role for community leaders other than intelligence sharing. The FBI CVE program thus undermines current community-led and community-driven programs that place emphasis on prevention and intervention through a multidisciplinary approach. The FBI should support these programs, and should not be directly or indirectly involved in prevention and intervention methods on countering violent extremism.

Because of our serious concerns, we request a meeting with you, Attorney General Lynch and Secretary Johnson. The Department of Justice has been the lead for the federal government thus far on CVE and with the formation of the new Office of Community Partnerships at the Department of Homeland Security, CVE programs created by any entity impacts all agencies.

Our organizations have diverse perspectives on the wisdom of CVE and therefore do not take a final position on CVE here. However, we all agree that given the federal government's involvement, it must also bear the responsibility for its impacts. We therefore urge immediate postponement of implementation of: (1) any CVE program; (2) the SRC; and (3) any web-based initiative targeting middle and high school students. We are dedicated to protecting civil rights and civil liberties, and look forward to meeting with you to discuss these concerns.

Sincerely,

Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)

KARAMAH: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights

Sikh Coalition

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)

CC:

The Honorable James Comey
Director of the FBI
935 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20004