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March 23, 2017

Attorney General Sessions
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Sessions:

As President of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., I write in response to the recent horrific hate crime that occurred in New York City earlier this week. Yesterday, the New York Police Department arrested James Harris Jackson, a self-described white supremacist, after he took responsibility for the stabbing death of Timothy Caughman, an African-American man, who Caughman encountered on the street. In admitting this random murder, Jackson also admitted his hatred of African-American men and said that he traveled to New York City from his home in Baltimore with the intent to murder them. According to news reports, Mr. Caughman chose New York as the location for this attack in order to obtain maximum publicity.

The brutal killing of Mr. Caughman comes as communities across this country are experiencing a significant uptick in hate-related activities since the beginning of Mr. Trump's Presidential campaign. The Southern Poverty Law Center found that the number of hate groups in the United States in 2016 rose to 917 from 892 in 2015 and documented 867 bias-related incidents in the first ten days after the election.

This week's violent, hate-inspired attack in New York is not the first one to occur on your watch. Since you took office in February, there have been at least six hate-related incidents, including the murder of Srinivas Kuchibhotla, shot in Kansas by an individual who preceded the violence by directing racial slurs at Mr. Kuchibhotla and suggesting he did not belong in the United States. It also includes the investigation and arrest of a South Carolina man who sought to conduct an attack similar to Dylann Roof. The unspeakable violence of Mr. Roof's attack and the white supremacist manifesto he wrote justifying his actions, continues to resonate with devastating clarity in the African-American community. As these incidents increase, the Department of Justice (DOJ) must show leadership, be vigilant and communicate by its words and actions that these activities will not be tolerated in any way.

We call on DOJ to bring federal hate crime charges under 18 U.S.C. § 249 and to express publicly that acts of domestic terror and hate, like this and other cases, will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law and as fiercely as any other acts of terror in this country. More broadly, given the rise of hate-related activities, we call on DOJ to take the necessary steps to address and prevent these incidents systemically, including convening and leading an interagency task force to examine and investigate these incidents and develop a strategy to combat them.

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Finally, we note that under federal law, the murder of Mr. Caughman may potentially constitute an act of domestic terrorism. 18 U.S.C. 2331(5). As such, we are calling on DOJ and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to vigorously investigate this attack, including examining whether Mr. Jackson was associated with a hate group or other organized national or international effort designed to foment violence and hate and whether he is connected to others who may have aided or planned this attack.

In sum, we encourage you to speak clearly and forcefully against hate crimes, and to use the full powers of your office to confront and prosecute violent white supremacist acts against innocent Americans. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sherrilyn A. Ifill". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sherrilyn Ifill
President and Director-Counsel
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.