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December 16, 2025

Dear Chairman Roy and Ranking Member Scanlon:

On behalf of the Congressional Black Caucus, we write to express our grave concern regarding today's hearing targeting the Southern Poverty Law Center. This hearing is not a good-faith exercise of oversight; it is a deliberate effort to intimidate and discredit an institution that has spent decades defending civil rights, exposing hate, and advancing opportunity for all Americans. Although the hearing singles out one organization, its purpose is broader: to chill and silence all who challenge this Administration's efforts to roll back civil rights and normalize discrimination. The weaponization of congressional authority in this manner is dangerous, violates fundamental democratic norms, and must be rejected unequivocally.

The rights enshrined in our Constitution have never been self-executing. Their protection has always depended on everyday people, advocates, and civil rights organizations that document violations, expose harm, and press governments—regardless of party—to uphold the law. That role becomes essential precisely when civil rights protections are under threat, and public accountability is most needed.

It is in this context that today's hearing must be understood. Across nearly every area of public life—voting, education, housing, employment, and health care—civil rights protections are being narrowed or dismantled, while the organizations that challenge these rollbacks are increasingly targeted for retaliation. Rather than engaging in good-faith debate over policy, this administration, and now this Subcommittee, has moved to discredit, investigate, and intimidate civil rights institutions for doing their work. This dual strategy—weakening civil rights protections while attacking those who defend them—poses a direct threat to our democracy and fuels the continued rise of authoritarianism, which has no place in this country.

Targeting civil rights organizations for their work has consequences that extend far beyond any single group. It sends a clear message that exposing discrimination and advocating for those long denied equal treatment will be met with punishment. This country has lived through similar moments before, including during the Civil Rights Movement, when the federal government's power was turned against those seeking racial justice. These attacks were directed at civil rights organizations, churches, grassroots groups, and community advocates.

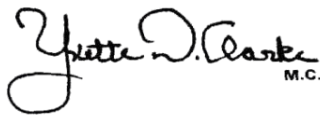
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This is just one of many examples throughout history of our government being weaponized to perpetrate cycles of oppression against advocacy leaders seeking to uphold constitutionally guaranteed rights for our nation's most vulnerable communities. This weaponization has always been rooted in anti-black racism, discrimination, fear, and control. It undermines the very civil institutions that give everyday people voice, protection, and power. The lesson from that history is unmistakable: when advocacy is treated as a threat, the rights and freedoms of all Americans are placed at risk.

Our nation is stronger and more just because of organizations like the Southern Poverty Law Center, which have helped move this country closer to its founding promise of equality under the law and freedom from hate and discrimination. And yet, this hearing is plainly intended to silence individuals and institutions who dare to demand that this promise be honored. What is at stake is whether people and organizations can speak, organize, and advocate without fear of government retaliation. If civil rights organizations can be targeted for their work, then no independent voice is truly safe.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Yvette D. Clarke" with "M.C." written in smaller letters below the name.

U.S. Representative Yvette D. Clarke (NY-09)
Chair, Congressional Black Caucus