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CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 27, 2017

The Honorable Jeff Sessions
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Sessions:

I write today to urge you to investigate the recent desecration of a Jewish cemetery in Missouri, and designate this attack as a hate crime. We cannot afford to ignore the series of recent threats against the American-Jewish community. Anti-Semitism poses a grave threat to our democracy and every American's Constitutional right to freely practice their religion.

As you know, more than 170 headstones were overturned at Chesed Shel Emeth Cemetery, which is a historical Jewish cemetery in a suburb outside St. Louis, Missouri. While local law enforcement is working hard to identify the perpetrators, it is evident that a federal Hate Crime investigation is warranted due to the dark history of anti-Semitic attacks of this nature, both here and abroad, and the symbolic message it sends to the Jewish community all over the world. Throughout the 19th century, Jews were the targets of attacks, known as pogroms, under the rule of the Russian empire. A common tactic was to destroy the property and sacred sites of Russian Jews; including, stores, homes, synagogues, and burial sites. Unfortunately, attacks of this nature spread under the Third Reich, and Jewish cemeteries were destroyed throughout Germany and much of Eastern Europe. Today, the destruction of Jewish cemeteries continues to be used as a means to intimidate and degrade the Jewish community. For example, in January 2016, a Connecticut Jewish cemetery had roughly 15 monuments overturned and in early October only a month before the Presidential election, a New York Jewish cemetery was desecrated with swastikas and the words "Heil Hitler".

Given the recent surge in threats against the Jewish community, as well as the symbolic and violent history connected to the desecration of Jewish burial sites, it is clear this attack in St. Louis should be swiftly and thoroughly investigated as a hate crime.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Keith Ellison".

Keith Ellison
Member of Congress