Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 22, 2012

The Honorable Eric Holder, Jr.
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Holder:

We are writing to express our support for the Department of Justice's decision to open an investigation into the devastating killing of Trayvon Martin. There are many unresolved questions about this seemingly unnecessary killing and the events that led up to it and transpired in its aftermath. It is in the best interest of our constituents and the country that you conduct a thorough investigation that also determines whether this was motivated by racial bias and therefore a hate crime.

Reports indicate that on February 26th in Sanford, Florida, Trayvon Martin, a 17 year-old black youth, was walking back to his home from a 7-Eleven convenience store when a neighborhood watch leader on patrol, George Zimmerman, began following him. Zimmerman called 911 to report what he deemed suspicious activity and against the advice of the dispatcher, continued to pursue Martin. What happened next is unclear, but several minutes later Trayvon Martin had been fatally wounded.

According to news reports, the Sanford Police Department decided not to test Mr. Zimmerman's blood alcohol level nor conduct a background check. The police department decided not to arrest Mr. Zimmerman after he claimed to have acted in self-defense. However, according to news reports, multiple 911 audio tapes seem to contradict Zimmerman's claim. This incident must be thoroughly investigated to determine what happened and why Mr. Zimmerman was cleared so easily.

Additionally, the question remains whether the shooting was racially motivated, and therefore a hate crime. An investigation of this issue is imperative. The FBI's 2010 Hate Crime Statistics indicate that 6,628 criminal incidents involving 7,699 offenses were reported in 2010 as a result of bias toward a particular race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity/national origin, or physical or mental disability. Of the 6,624 single bias incidents, 47.3 percent were motivated by a racial bias. The California Office of the Attorney General indicates that in 2010 there were 1,107 hate crime incidents reported statewide. Hate crimes with a race/ethnicity/national origin bias are the most common type of hate crime and since 2001, have accounted for nearly 60 percent of all hate crime incidents in California. History has shown that investigating these crimes and enforcing our laws against them bring the issue to light and help our society progress.

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The incident that took place on February 26th did not receive immediate media attention. Instead, local outrage after the incident prompted by social media finally piqued the interest of the national media. It is alarming that so little attention was paid to the death of a teenager.

Again, we thank you for your decision to bring light to the events that led to the killing of an innocent teenager, and we urge you to determine whether this was a hate crime. The family of Treyvon Martin deserves to know the truth and the American people expect justice to be served.

Sincerely,

Member of Congress

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