

August 29, 2017

Dear Mr. Gillespie:

On August 11 and 12, we saw violence and hate we hoped we would never again witness on American soil. In Charlottesville, Neo-Nazis and white supremacists took to the streets, marched with torches, gave Nazi salutes, shouted that Jews “will not replace them,” chanted the Fascist slogan “Blood and Soil,” proclaimed white supremacy, and murdered a woman who was brave enough to stand up to them. Then, instead of clearly rejecting this evil, the President of the United States twice defended those marching with the very Neo-Nazis who unleashed this deadly violence on one of Virginia’s greatest cities.

After President Trump’s press conferences, we were left shocked and then deeply saddened. Let’s be clear. **“Very fine people” don’t march with people who are holding Nazi flags and chanting anti-Semitic slogans.** We were heartened to see, in the wake of Donald Trump’s horrifying comments, that leaders in both parties came together to reject hate and renew our nation’s founding principles of equality and inclusiveness. **But instead of joining these leaders — including many prominent Republicans — we understand you have refused to speak out against the President’s reaction to Charlottesville.**

As Jewish members of the Virginia General Assembly, we write you because, as Virginians and Jews, we find your failure to denounce the President’s reaction to Nazism deeply disturbing. The events in Charlottesville recall the darkest moments in both the history of this country and the Jewish people. What we saw on that Friday and Saturday was an assault on our democratic society and the very values this country was founded upon. Yet the President of the United States, the leader of our country, has not once but twice defended those who would march with the Neo-Nazis and their ilk.

Our country at its best has been a beacon of hope and safety for all peoples. Hundreds of thousands gave their lives so that the forces that destroyed Europe would never set foot on American soil. President Trump’s reaction to Charlottesville represented a betrayal of that noble legacy and our core American values.

Donald Trump is the leader of your party. **Your refusal to speak out against him is a colossal failure of leadership, a moral abdication, and deeply troubling to Virginia’s Jewish community.** We urge you to break your silence and immediately denounce Donald Trump’s hateful and inadequate response to the Charlottesville attack.

We are living through a moral reckoning, a time when all citizens of our great commonwealth and nation are called to defend the most fundamental values of our democracy. **We ask you to immediately stand up, loudly and clearly, against those who would condone violence and hatred.**

As Americans, Jews, and Virginians, we urge you to join us and immediately condemn the President’s dog-whistle defense of Nazism.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dick Saslaw". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Senate Democratic Leader Dick Saslaw

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Adam Ebbin". The signature is cursive and includes a long horizontal stroke at the end.


Senator Adam Ebbin

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Eileen Filler-Corn". The signature is cursive and includes a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Delegate Eileen Filler-Corn

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marcus Simon". The signature is cursive and includes a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Delegate Marcus Simon

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Levine". The signature is cursive and includes a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Delegate Mark Levine