

May 14, 2018

SENT VIA EMAIL AND CERTIFIED MAIL

Chief Kim Vickers, Executive Director
Texas Commission on Law Enforcement
6330 East Highway 290, STE 200
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Re: **Accreditation of John Guandolo’s “Understanding the Jihadi Threat to America” training**

To Whom It May Concern:

Muslim Advocates is a civil rights organization dedicated to protecting the rights of all Americans to live and worship free from discrimination. We, along with the Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign, Southern Poverty Law Center, and Western States Center, write to urge the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (“TCOLE”) to rescind any accreditation it provided for a training held by John Guandolo on May 4, 2018 in San Angelo, Texas. The training, entitled “Understanding the Jihadi Threat in America,” was advertised as open to law enforcement, citizens, and clergy.¹

As detailed below, Mr. Guandolo’s long and well-documented history of spreading anti-Muslim sentiment make him woefully unsuited to conduct any training that satisfies TCOLE’s accreditation standards. Numerous law enforcement organizations and community leaders have discredited and repudiated Mr. Guandolo’s trainings after learning more about the gross inaccuracies and biases driving his work, and we urge TCOLE to do the same.

Background

According to reports, Christian Reporter News (“CRN”) and the Concho Valley Council of Governments (“CVCOG”) co-organized a training led by Mr. Guandolo and his consulting group, “Understanding the Threat” (“UTT”), on May 4 in San Angelo, Texas.² TCOLE provided accreditation that allowed law enforcement officials who attended to receive TCOLE credit hours.³

¹ *Disgraced ex-FBI agent John Guandolo training law enforcement this week in San Angelo, Texas*, Southern Poverty Law Center (May 2, 2018), <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/05/02/disgraced-ex-fbi-agent-john-guandolo-training-law-enforcement-week-san-angelo-texas>.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

Yet this “training” was no typical event, because Mr. Guandolo is no ordinary “trainer.” He and his associates at UTT are best known for spreading anti-Muslim sentiment through public comments and private law enforcement trainings across the United States. For close to a decade, Mr. Guandolo has repeated his baseless claim that a vast conspiracy exists among Muslim groups to “overthrow America and establish Islamic law.”⁴ Through such inflammatory rhetoric, Mr. Guandolo has sought to inculcate anti-Muslim prejudice among local law enforcement authorities and communities at large. To provide just a few examples, Mr. Guandolo has declared that:

- All U.S.-based Muslim organizations “share the same ideology as ISIS;”⁵
- That “Islam is a barbaric and evil system,”⁶ and that “the civilized world knows Islam is the problem;”⁷
- That there is no such thing as a peaceful “version” of Islam, and that those who believe Islam is a religion of peace are “psychotically disconnected from reality;”⁸
- That Muslim Student Associations at colleges and universities around the country are “points of recruitment in America for the Muslim Brotherhood and jihad;”⁹
- That Muslims “do not have a First Amendment right to do anything,”¹⁰ and that mosques should “not [be] afforded the same legal rights” as churches;¹¹
- That mosques in the U.S. are akin to foreign military bases on American soil,¹² and that the vast majority of mosques in the country should be shut down and their leaders arrested;¹³

⁴ Brian Mosely, *Islamic subversion alleged by speaker*, Shelbville Times-Gazette (Feb. 17, 2009), <http://www.t-g.com/story/1502537.html>.

⁵ Miranda Blue, *John Guandolo: Obama Committing ‘Treason’ By Working With US Muslim Groups With The ‘Same Ideology As ISIS,’* Right Wing Watch (Dec. 11, 2015), <http://www.rightwingwatch.org/post/john-guandolo-obama-committing-treason-by-working-with-us-muslim-groups-with-the-same-ideology-as-isis/>.

⁶ John Guandolo (@JohnGuandolo), Twitter (Aug. 27, 2017, 4:04 PM), <https://twitter.com/JohnGuandolo/status/901943534890213376>.

⁷ John Guandolo (@JohnGuandolo), Twitter (Aug. 31, 2017, 7:38 PM), <https://twitter.com/JohnGuandolo/status/903446902586400768>.

⁸ John Guandolo, *Is Violence a Core Teaching in Islam?*, Understanding the Threat (Jan. 20, 2015), <https://www.understandingthethreat.com/is-violence-a-core-teaching-in-islam/>.

⁹ Christopher Holton, *HOLTON: The Muslim Brotherhood Is Flexing Its Muscles At LSU*, The Hayride (Sept. 11, 2013), <http://thehayride.com/2013/09/holton-the-muslim-brotherhood-is-flexing-its-muscles-at-lsu/>.

¹⁰ Bob Smietana and Tony Gonzalez, *Sheriff hires mosque foe to lead terrorism training*, USA Today (Feb. 15, 2012), <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/story/2012-02-15/terrorism-training-tennessee/53102430/1>.

¹¹ Miranda Blue, *John Guandolo Tells Members Of Congress U.S. Mosques Shouldn’t Be ‘Afforded The Same Legal Rights’ As Churches*, Right Wing Watch (Nov. 15, 2017), <http://www.rightwingwatch.org/post/john-guandolo-tells-members-of-congress-u-s-mosques-shouldnt-be-afforded-the-same-legal-rights-as-churches/>.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ Brian Tashman, *John Guandolo: Close The Majority Of Mosques In America*, Right Wing Watch (Apr. 4, 2016), <http://www.rightwingwatch.org/post/john-guandolo-close-the-majority-of-mosques-in-america/>.

- And in recent months, Mr. Guandolo has repeatedly claimed—despite the FBI’s conclusion to the contrary¹⁴—that the October 2017 Las Vegas massacre that killed nearly 60 people and injured hundreds more was “a jihadi operation.”¹⁵

Contrary to his assertions, Mr. Guandolo is not an expert on counterterrorism. Rather, he has repeatedly made clear that his professional opinions are formed not by expert analysis but by his unrelenting anti-Muslim bias. For example:

- In June 2017, while discussing an automobile attack on a London mosque that killed and injured several worshippers, Mr. Guandolo stated that his “first professional response to this event is not to believe at face value anything that the Muslims at the scene are reporting;”¹⁶
- On September 15, 2017, Mr. Guandolo photographed two bearded Transportation Security Administration officials and posted the images on Twitter with the captions: “Nothing like traveling thru LaGuardia Airport w/ sharia adherent muslims (aka Jihadis aka Terrorists) wearing TSA uniforms. @jeffsessions,”¹⁷ and “Am I the only 1 who sees a problem w/ Terrorists (jihadis/sharia adherent muslims) ‘protecting’ us?;”¹⁸
- On November 3, 2017, Mr. Guandolo photographed a bearded Transportation Security Administration official and posted the image on Twitter, along with the caption, “See something, Say something. This JIHADI (sharia adherent muslim) is a TSA supervisor at DFW airport. @DHSgov @jeffsessions @potus;”¹⁹
- On February 14, 2018, the date of the tragic school shooting in Parkland, Florida, Mr. Guandolo stated on Twitter that the FBI’s announcement that the shooting had “nothing to do with terrorism” should be taken as a sign that “its [sic] likely a jihadi;”²⁰
- On March 22, 2018, Mr. Guandolo photographed a bearded Southwest Airlines employee and posted the image on Twitter, along with the caption,

¹⁴ Associated Press, *FBI: Las Vegas shooter had no connection to ISIS*, *N.Y. Post* (Oct. 2, 2017), <https://nypost.com/2017/10/02/fbi-las-vegas-shooter-had-no-connection-to-terror-groups/>.

¹⁵ *Anti-Muslim company’s bombing tweet the latest in a series of erratic statements and behaviors*, Southern Poverty Law Center (Nov. 1, 2017), <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/11/01/anti-muslim-company%E2%80%99s-bombing-tweet-latest-series-erratic-statements-and-behaviors>.

¹⁶ *The ‘Axis of Terror’: The apparent and the not so apparent*, Stand in the Gap (June 19, 2017), <https://subsplash.com/americanpastors/media/mi/+sbp8cwn>, at approx. 7:30.

¹⁷ John Guandolo (@JohnGuandolo), Twitter (Sept. 15, 2017, 3:49 PM), <https://twitter.com/JohnGuandolo/status/908825137381826566>.

¹⁸ John Guandolo (@JohnGuandolo), Twitter (Sept. 15, 2017, 3:56 PM), <https://twitter.com/JohnGuandolo/status/908826884213002240>.

¹⁹ John Guandolo (@JohnGuandolo), Twitter (Nov. 3, 2017, 8:16 AM), <https://twitter.com/JohnGuandolo/status/926468083077828611>.

²⁰ John Guandolo (@JohnGuandolo), Twitter (Feb. 14, 2018, 7:05 PM), <https://twitter.com/JohnGuandolo/status/963972602523017216>.

“I wish this were shocking...a sharia adherent muslim (aka jihadi) at my plane as I head to AZ to speak at the Western Conservative Conference.”²¹

TCOLE’s accreditation of Mr. Guandolo’s May 4, 2018 training

Despite Mr. Guandolo’s voluminous record of anti-Muslim bias, reports indicate that TCOLE provided accreditation to law enforcement attendees of his May 4, 2018 training. Such accreditation is deeply problematic. Mr. Guandolo’s anti-Muslim rhetoric and “teachings” disparage the faith of millions of Americans and promote biased policing that discriminatorily targets individuals and communities based on religion and ethnicity—not on evidence of actual wrongdoing. This discriminatory lens can foster fear and suspicion of American Muslims amongst law enforcement and the general public.²² These teachings are particularly problematic during a time of dramatic increase in religious-based hate crimes across the country.

After learning more about Mr. Guandolo’s inflammatory teachings, law enforcement agencies in Kansas²³ and Virginia²⁴ canceled or declined to sponsor his training sessions; before that, the Deputy Police Chief in Columbus, Ohio found Mr. Guandolo’s training to be so offensive that he suspended it after the first day.²⁵ We urge TCOLE to take similarly strong action here by rescinding any accreditation it provided for Mr. Guandolo’s presentation and discontinuing any further partnership with him or UTT. To better understand the relationship between TCOLE and Mr. Guandolo—including whether his “training” satisfies TCOLE’s internal requirements for accreditation—we also submit the attached records request.

By copy of this letter, we share our concerns with CRN and CVCOG, so that they may inform their staff about the gross inaccuracies in Mr. Guandolo’s trainings and ensure they do not sponsor or endorse his future events.

²¹ See Bree Burkitt, *Southwest Airlines condemns ‘cruel’ anti-Muslim tweet targeting employee*, AZ Central (Mar. 25, 2018), <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona/2018/03/25/southwest-airlines-condemns-anti-muslim-tweet-john-guandolo/456886002/>.

²² For these same reasons, federal agencies that have used training materials employing similar anti-Muslim stereotypes have been called into criticism in the past—and have since reformed their materials and teaching methods. See, e.g., Spencer Ackerman, *FBI ‘Islam 101’ Guide Depicted Muslims as 7th-Century Simpletons*, Wired (July 27, 2011), <https://www.wired.com/2011/07/fbi-islam-101-guide/>; Spencer Ackerman, *FBI Purges Hundreds of Terrorism Documents in Islamophobia Probe*, Wired (Feb. 15, 2012), <https://www.wired.com/2012/02/hundreds-fbi-documents-muslims/>.

²³ See Tim Potter, *Sedgwick County Sheriff’s Office won’t partner on anti-terrorism training by controversial speaker*, The Wichita Eagle (May 23, 2014), <http://www.kansas.com/news/article1144011.html>.

²⁴ See Ian Millhiser, *Virginia Police Academy Nixes ‘Advanced Counterterrorism Training’ Taught By Anti-Muslim Activist*, ThinkProgress (Feb. 25, 2014), <https://thinkprogress.org/virginia-police-academy-nixes-advanced-counterterrorism-training-taught-by-anti-muslim-activist-38e4e6d42c7a/>.

²⁵ Dina Temple-Raston, *Terrorism Training Casts Pall Over Muslim Employee*, NPR News (July 18, 2011), <http://www.npr.org/2011/07/18/137712352/terrorism-training-casts-pall-over-muslim-employee>.

Thank you for your time in addressing this important issue. If we can provide any further information regarding our concerns, please contact Juvaria Khan (Muslim Advocates) at (202) 897-1896 or juvaria@muslimadvocates.org.

Sincerely,

Muslim Advocates
Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign
Southern Poverty Law Center
Western States Center

cc: Kat Rowoldt, Christian Reporter News
John Austin Stokes, Concho Valley Council of Governments