

**PRESS RELEASE**

# **John T. Earnest Sentenced to Life Plus 30 years in Prison for Federal Hate Crimes Related to 2019 Poway Synagogue Shooting and Attempted Mosque Arson**

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**For Immediate Release**

U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of California

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**NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY – December 28, 2021**

SAN DIEGO – John T. Earnest, a Rancho Penasquitos man who entered the Chabad of Poway on April 27, 2019, opened fire and killed one woman, injured three others, and attempted to kill 50 others, was sentenced in federal court today to life plus 30 years in prison for his crimes.

Earnest previously pleaded guilty to a 113-count indictment that included 54 counts of violating the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, 55 counts of violating the Church Arson Prevention Act, and four firearms offenses.

Earnest also admitted that on March 24, 2019, he attempted to burn down the Dar-ul-Arqam mosque in Escondido, California, because of his hatred of Muslims and the religious character of the building. Seven missionaries were asleep in the mosque, but no one was injured.

"All people in this country should be able to freely exercise their religion without fear of being attacked," said Attorney General Merrick B. Garland. "This defendant's horrific crime was an assault on fundamental principles of our nation. The Justice Department is steadfast in its commitment to confronting unlawful acts of hate and to holding perpetrators of hate-fueled violence accountable."

"Today we stand with the family of Lori Gilbert Kaye, the injured, and all who suffered as a result of the defendant's heinous crimes," said U.S. Attorney Randy Grossman. "The

United States Attorney's Office and our law enforcement partners reject all forms of hatred and prejudice, and we will relentlessly pursue justice for the victims of bias-motivated violence." Grossman thanked the prosecution team, the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, the FBI, the ATF, the San Diego Sheriff's Department, and the San Diego Police Department for their excellent work on this case.

"Hate has no place in our society and bias-motivated violence will not be tolerated," said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. "By committing these heinous and senseless acts of violence against Jewish and Muslim community members, this defendant violated our most basic American ideal: all persons are created equal. The Department of Justice is committed to aggressively prosecuting bias-motivated violence and will continue partnering with state and local law enforcement to ensure that those who seek to engage in violence based on bias are held accountable for their crimes."

"While today's sentence brings an end to this case, it also reaffirms the FBI's commitment to pursue those who operate in the world of prejudice and religious hate," said FBI Special Agent in Charge Suzanne Turner. "Hate crimes tear at the social fabric of our community. The FBI stands with our state and federal partners to ensure houses of worship are free from bias-motivated violence, and we will use all investigative tools to seek justice for the victims."

"ATF will continue to use all investigative tools and resources at our disposal to combat hate-fueled gun violence," said ATF Special Agent in Charge Monique Villegas. "Hatred of any kind has no place in our society and we will work tirelessly with our federal and local law enforcement partners to ensure any individual or groups that perpetuate criminal acts are held accountable for their actions."

According to court documents, after several weeks of planning, on the morning of April 27, 2019, Earnest drove to the Chabad of Poway synagogue, where members of the congregation were gathered for religious worship. Earnest entered the building armed with a Smith and Wesson M&P 15 assault rifle that was fully loaded with a 10-round magazine. He wore a chest rig which contained five additional magazines, each loaded with ten rounds of ammunition. Earnest opened fire, killing Lori Gilbert-Kaye and injuring three other members of the congregation, including a then eight-year-old child. After Earnest emptied his initial magazine, several congregants rushed at Earnest. Earnest fled in his car and, shortly after, called 911 and confessed that he had "just shot up a synagogue." Earnest was apprehended by local law enforcement who found the rifle and additional ammunition in his car.

Investigators found a manifesto written by Earnest and posted on the Internet shortly before the attack. In the manifesto, Earnest made many anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim statements, including "I can only kill so many Jews" and "I only wish I killed more."

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Shane Harrigan and Peter Ko, along with Deputy Chief Rose Gibson of the Civil Rights Division. The FBI, ATF, and San Diego Sheriff's Department conducted the investigation.

*Updated December 28, 2021*