

December 21, 2021

The Honorable Merrick Garland  
Attorney General  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Garland:

Last week, the *New York Times* published the results of their investigation into Sanctioned Suicide, a website which “provides explicit directions on how to die.”<sup>1</sup> The *New York Times* lists 45 people who were active on the website and then died by suicide, 22 of whom were living in the United States. We write to you to explore avenues through which the Department of Justice (DOJ) and Congress can pursue justice for the families of these victims.

Sanctioned Suicide hosts public forums, live chats, and private messaging around suicide. Users share their suicide plans with one another, promote poisons, and post “goodbye posts” and real-time suicide attempts, which are the most-viewed posts on the site.<sup>2</sup> According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is the 10<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death in the United States and suicide rates have increased by roughly 33% between 1999 and 2019.<sup>3</sup> The *New York Times* article states that only 5% of the posts on Sanctioned Suicide are on recovery and of the hundred most-viewed posts, 53 include instructions or discussions of methods to die by suicide, and 28 narrate attempts.<sup>4</sup> This is deeply disturbing given that the website has 6 million average views per month, four times that of the national suicide prevention lifeline.<sup>5</sup>

Further, after extensive investigation, the article’s authors claim to have identified the two men running the website – Diego Joaquín Galante and Lamarcus Small, though both have denied these allegations.<sup>6</sup> Several service providers have taken the site down, and Australia, Germany, and Italy have each restricted access in their countries. Nevertheless, the site continues to pop up with new domain names. The owners of the site try to limit legal liability by encouraging anonymity, requiring users be over 18, and deleting accounts of users after they have posted “goodbye” threads.<sup>7</sup> The *New York Times* identified three victims under 18 in their article.<sup>8</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Where the Despairing Log On, and Learn Ways to Die.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/12/09/us/where-the-despairing-log-on.html>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Suicide Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> Where the Despairing Log On, and Learn Ways to Die.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/12/09/us/where-the-despairing-log-on.html>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

website’s terms also prohibit users from assisting and encouraging suicide, but a simple visit to the website confirms that this policy is not enforced.<sup>9</sup>

While it is our understanding that there is no federal law criminalizing assisting or encouraging suicide, we write to do our due diligence and confirm the DOJ’s options for pursuing a case against the owners of this website. Namely:

1. Does the DOJ have the authority and discretion to investigate the Sanctioned Suicide website?
2. Does the DOJ have the statutory authority to pursue a criminal case against Diego Joaquín Galante and Lamarcus Small, for their alleged role in operating or as members on the website? If not, why not?
3. Does the DOJ have the technical expertise and human resources to identify these kinds of popular websites that promote suicide?
4. Does the DOJ share information about websites that promote suicide with state and local law enforcement?
5. Does the DOJ share information about websites that promote suicide with community-based organizations involved in suicide prevention and mental health care?
6. What actions can Congress take to give the DOJ the authority necessary to prosecute the Sanctioned Suicide website owners and delist the site in the United States?

Thank you for your attention into this pressing matter.

Sincerely,

Lori Trahan  
Member of Congress

David B. McKinley, P.E.  
Member of Congress

David Cicilline  
Member of Congress

Susan Wild  
Member of Congress

Kathy Castor  
Member of Congress

Mark DeSaulnier  
Member of Congress

Tony Cárdenas  
Member of Congress

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<sup>9</sup> “Please understand that the information offered on this site is for educational purposes only, and provided only by other users like you. We do not encourage, promote, advise, suggest, or aid suicide in any way or form; we only provide a space to talk about it. Be responsible, know the laws of your country, follow the forum rules, and know that the way you use any information posted on the forum is fully and solely your responsibility.” From <https://sanctioned-suicide.org/threads/rules-and-faq.4/>. Last accessed Dec. 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021.