

Petition Urges White House to Classify Westboro Church as Hate Group

More than 475,000 people have signed petitions asking the White House to crack down on **Westboro Baptist Church** after the group, known for holding **anti-gay demonstrations** at funerals, threatened to picket in Newtown, Conn.

Newtown was the site of a school massacre on Dec. 14 in which 20 young children and six adults were killed.

Five petitions posted on the White House website since the shootings have asked the government to name the church, based in Topeka, Kan., as a **hate group** or end its tax-exempt status. The requests were among the most popular on the White House site on Thursday.

The Southern Poverty Law Center, a civil rights organization, has called the church “arguably the most obnoxious and rabid hate group in America” because of the anti-gay signs its members have carried at hundreds of military funerals. The protests reflect their view that God is punishing America for tolerance of gays and lesbians.

The church has successfully defended its right to free speech in court. The church could not be immediately reached for comment.

The White House did not respond to a request for comment on whether it would address the petitions.

The White House has a policy of responding to petitions that reach a threshold of 25,000 signatures but does not comment on certain law enforcement issues that are within the jurisdiction of federal agencies or courts, according to its

website.

Obama last week asked Americans to pressure Congress to help tighten gun laws. He responded after several hundred thousand people signed a dozen petitions calling for tougher gun laws following the Newtown attack.

Twenty-year-old Adam Lanza used a military-style assault rifle to kill 20 elementary school children and seven adults, including his mother shot earlier at the family home, then he took his own life.

Obama has called for Congress to approve a ban on the sale of military-style assault weapons and a ban on the sale of high-capacity ammunition clips, as well as measures to ensure background checks for gun purchases at gun shows.

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