

City of Washington, DC sues right-wing groups Proud Boys and Oath Keepers

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The new civil lawsuit targets individuals and groups that Washington, DC Attorney General Karl Racine says played a role in the January 6 Capitol riot [File: John Minchillo/AP Photo]

Washington, December 15 (RHC)-- The attorney general for Washington, DC has launched a civil lawsuit against the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers over the deadly riot at the United States Capitol on January 6,

seeking “severe” financial penalties from the far-right groups.

Members of the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers caused physical and financial harm to the U.S. capital and its residents, Karl Racine said on Tuesday, as he announced the lawsuit. The city will seek “severe” financial penalties against the defendants, the attorney general added.

“Our intent ... is to hold these violent mobsters and these violent hate groups accountable and to get every penny of damage we can,” Racine said during a news conference. The lawsuit seeks to recover the costs of deploying hundreds of city police officers to defend the Capitol against the attack, as well as medical and paid-leave costs incurred afterwards.

It also brings civil assault and battery charges against the two organisations, along with 30 named and 50 unnamed people that it alleges were involved in the assault.

The lawsuit opens up another legal front against alleged participants in the January 6 attack, when supporters of former President Donald Trump – including members of the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers – stormed the Capitol as Congress was meeting to certify Joe Biden’s election victory.

Trump, who gave an incendiary speech during a rally in Washington, DC, just before the deadly riot, was later impeached for “incitement of insurrection” in relation to the assault.

“Today, we’re holding these insurrectionists accountable for conspiring to terrorize the District by planning, promoting, and participating in the deadly attack on the Capitol,” Racine said on Twitter on Tuesday. “I’m seeking damages in this case and will keep working to ensure such an assault never happens again.”

The lawsuit invokes the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871, which allows people to sue for civil rights violations. It does not name Trump or former members of his administration as defendants.

Nearly 700 people face criminal charges stemming from the insurrection. Several alleged leaders of the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers have already pleaded guilty.

The Proud Boys describe themselves as a politically incorrect men’s club for “Western chauvinists.” Several members of the group have already been charged with conspiring to obstruct Congress related to investigations into the January 6 insurrection.

The Oath Keepers are an anti-government militia that focuses on recruiting current and former law enforcement and military to their ranks. Their ideology is thought to center on the protection of constitutional rights, primarily the right to bear arms outlined in the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

It is not clear whether the two groups are in a position to defend themselves, or whether the lawsuit will yield any financial penalties. Racine and other Washington, DC officials said they hoped the new lawsuit would also serve as a warning to deter similar behaviour by other hardline groups.

“If we don’t get a penny in restitution, this lawsuit’s deterrent effect will say: ‘Be prepared to spend money, because we are coming after you,’” said Eleanor Holmes Norton, who represents DC in the House of Representatives.



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