

Good morning, my name is Amita Swadhin, I am a resident of Los Angeles, California, born in Ohio to two immigrants from India, and raised in New Jersey. And I am grateful to Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Feinstein, and Members of the Committee for the opportunity to be here today.

In October, millions of sexual assault survivors were triggered when hot mic tapes were released of President-elect Trump describing forcibly kissing women and grabbing women by the genitals.

I was one of those survivors. I am a victim of violent crime, in the form of eight years of rape and over a decade of psychological, verbal and physical abuse by my father, beginning when I was four years old. In addition to direct violence from my father, I grew up watching him abuse my mother in a textbook case of domestic violence and marital rape, until she finally found the courage and support to leave him when I was 15 years old.

I am here on behalf of survivors of rape and sexual assault to urge you not to confirm Senator Sessions as Attorney General. In the wake of President-elect Trump's comments about grabbing women by the genitals becoming public, Senator Sessions was quoted stating he doesn't characterize that behavior as sexual assault. Let me be clear - Senator Sessions stated he does not characterize non-consensual genital grabbing as sexual assault. Furthermore, in reference to President-elect Trump's comments, Senator Sessions told Fox News "This thing is overblown. Everybody knows that Trump likes women." While he criticized President-elect Trump's inappropriate language, at no point did Senator Sessions condemn the behavior President-elect Trump had admitted to engaging in.

As a publicly out survivor of child sexual abuse, many people, mainly in my father's family and community of friends and colleagues, have dismissed my story as a private family matter or have diminished the impact of this violence on my present-day life. I live with Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and struggle every day to be well. It directly and negatively impacts me when people disbelieve or attempt to discredit me or other survivors. So, to watch our President-elect admit to forcibly kissing women and grabbing them by the genitals, and to hear Senator Sessions say this behavior does not constitute sexual assault, and then to consider him leading the Department of Justice has been incredibly triggering.

I am unfortunately far from alone in my experience. We live in a country in which the crimes of rape, sexual assault, child abuse, domestic violence are happening at epidemic rates, behind closed doors. These are public health issues occurring in the private sphere. According to the US Department of Justice National Crime Victimization Survey, more than 320,000 Americans over age 12 are raped or sexually assaulted each year. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be sexually abused before age 18. In 80% of adult sexual assaults and 90% of cases of child sexual abuse, victims know and trust their perpetrators. When survivors attempt to come forward, we are often shamed and disbelieved in the media. For this reason, most victims of violent crime never seek healing or accountability from the state. Most violent crimes remain unreported.

We need a justice department that can be a partner to families and communities. Our Attorney General must be able to demonstrate leadership to victims of violent crime that helps us feel we can trust the state, the courts, and victim service agencies more than we fear our perpetrators. For most survivors of violent crime, this means trusting the state more than you fear the family member, friend or community member who you trusted and who raped or abused you.

My own story demonstrates how difficult this is to achieve. I disclosed my father's abuse to my mother when I was 13 years old. As in many tight-knit immigrant communities, my mother felt pressured to not get divorced, and lacked support from her peers to leave my father, despite him having hit her at community events more than once over the years. So, when I disclosed, she called a therapist for support, which led to state intervention due to mandated reporting. The female police officer who questioned me sat me across from a double mirror, watched me break down in tears during questioning, and stoically told me I clearly needed therapy but that wasn't her job - she was just there to get the facts about what had happened. The two male prosecutors threatened to prosecute my mother for being complicit in my abuse, without knowing any details from me. They also told me I would be harshly cross examined by the defense attorney. They did not connect me to any victim advocates or support services. Because of these reasons, I did not feel comfortable disclosing the extent of the violence I had survived, and my father was given five years probation and no jail time. He was allowed to continue living in my home for a year and a half after state intervention. Even after my mother finally found the strength to leave him when I was 15, my father was allowed to have unsupervised visits with me and my sister - he convinced social workers that my mother could serve as the visitation supervisor, subjecting all three of us to another year of verbal and physical violence. These events occurred from 1991 to 1994, just before the Violence Against Women Act was created.

Thankfully, we have improved the response of the criminal justice system to victims of intimate violent crime in the past 23 years. VAWA requires the criminal justice system to work with the victim services system. The STOP (Services, Training, Officers, and Prosecutors) Violence Against Women Formula Grants under VAWA provide training and resources to judges, prosecutors, police officers and other court personnel to support survivors. In 1991, the police did not contact victim advocates for me. Today, thanks to VAWA, the law enforcement system is encouraged to provide victims an advocate to support them in breaking their silence and sharing their truth.

Yet despite this progress, most victims of violent crime still do not come forward, particularly survivors living at the intersections of multiple oppressions - survivors of color, disabled survivors, immigrant survivors, and LGBT survivors. We need an Attorney General who will continue the progress we have made since the initial passage of VAWA, someone committed to improving and enforcing our laws to ensure the most vulnerable victims of crime can come forward to seek accountability and to access healing.

Time and again, Senator Sessions' voting record has shown he is not the man for the job. While he voted in favor of the Violence Against Women Act in the bill's early years, when VAWA was expanded in 2013 to ensure LGBT survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault were being served, Senator Sessions voted against the bill. This is not the first time he demonstrated his bias against the LGBT community. In 2006, Senator Sessions voted in favor of a constitutional ban

on same-sex marriage. In 2009, he voted against the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which extends federal hate crime protections to people victimized because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability.

By voting against VAWA specifically when services and protections were strengthened for LGBT survivors, Senator Sessions has shown his personal bias against LGBT Americans is so strong, he is willing to throw all survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault under the bus, stripping away the services and trainings we have created to better support survivors over the past two decades.

As a bisexual woman with a transgender romantic partner, and as an advocate working to support sexual assault survivors in the LGBT community, the prospect of Senator Sessions as Attorney General is personally and professionally alarming. National data shows LGBT people, and particularly transgender women of color, are disproportionately victimized by rape and sexual assault, intimate partner violence and homicide. One in two transgender people will be raped or sexually assaulted in their lifetime. Furthermore, the majority of hate violence homicide victims are transgender women. In fact, only 11 days into the new year, two transgender women of color have already been murdered - Meshia Caldwell, an African American transgender woman from Mississippi, and Jamie Lee Wounded Arrow, a two-spirit Oglala Lakota woman from South Dakota.

We must trust the Attorney General to enforce and apply our laws fairly, per our Constitution's provisions on equal protection. We must trust the Attorney General to respect the humanity of all Americans, and especially to be committed to seeking justice for our most vulnerable victims of crime. Given his voting record on VAWA and on LGBT issues, we have no reason to put our faith in Senator Sessions as Attorney General. We cannot trust that he would enforce the Hate Crimes Prevention Act, or the nondiscrimination clause of the Violence Against Women Act to protect LGBT victims and other vulnerable survivors against discrimination from victim service agencies nationwide.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize that a broad range of national organizations working to end violence against women, including the National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence, the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the National Council of Jewish Women, Ujima, Inc., the National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community, the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence and Break the Cycle, oppose Senator Sessions' nomination because of these issues I am raising today. Thank you.