



# NAACP

March 5, 2021

The Honorable Richard Durbin  
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee  
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Grassley  
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee  
152 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

**RE: NOMINATION OF VANITA GUPTA FOR ASSOCIATE ATTORNEY GENERAL  
OF THE UNITED STATES**

Dear Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Grassley:

On behalf of the NAACP, our nation's oldest, largest and most widely-recognized grassroots based civil rights organization, I strongly urge you to support the nomination of Vanita Gupta to be Associate Attorney General of the United States.

This is an urgent moment for civil rights and racial justice. A relentless pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated our nation's longstanding racial disparities. Despite widespread calls for an end to structural inequality, racism still infects the criminal justice system at every stage of the process. Just this week, the FBI Director informed the Judiciary Committee that racially-motivated domestic terrorism represents our greatest national threat.<sup>1</sup> The white supremacist movement, which has targeted Black Americans for centuries, instigated and participated in the violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. In the wake of that insurrection, we are seeing a rapid proliferation of voter suppression bills designed to exclude voters of color from the political process.<sup>2</sup> Hate crimes against many different communities are soaring in number.<sup>3</sup>

Today, the U.S. Department of Justice must lead the nation forward and help restore faith and confidence in our government. In its leadership positions, we need the best our nation has to offer. Vanita Gupta is one of the NAACP's longest friends and closest allies. She is exactly the right person to help lead the Department at this critical time in history. Her unwavering dedication to equal justice and her utmost respect for the rule of law make her the ideal candidate for Associate Attorney General.

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Goldman, *Domestic Terrorism Threat is 'Metastasizing' In U.S., FBI Director Says*, NY TIMES, Mar. 2, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/02/us/politics/wray-domestic-terrorism-capitol.html>

<sup>2</sup> Kelly Mena, *More than 100 Bills That Would Restrict Voting Are Moving Through State Legislatures*, CNN, Feb. 2, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/02/politics/voting-rights-state-legislation/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> Michael Balsamo, *Hate Crimes in U.S. Reach Highest Level in More Than Decade*, ASSOCIATED PRESS, Nov. 16, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/hate-crimes-rise-fbi-data-ebbcadca8458aba96575da905650120d>

We deeply appreciate the historic nature of Ms. Gupta's appointment. As the daughter of Indian immigrants, Ms. Gupta would be the first woman of color to serve in the forty-four year history of this position. Importantly, she would be the first civil rights lawyer to serve as Associate Attorney General. At a time when civil rights enforcement must take center stage within the Department of Justice, it is vital to have leaders with deep expertise across the civil rights and criminal justice issues facing our nation today.

Ms. Gupta has devoted her entire career to the cause of justice. She was a 27-year-old lawyer when she challenged the racially motivated arrests by an undercover officer of 10% of the Black population in Tulia, Texas. It was Ms. Gupta who obtained pardons for nearly everyone convicted and negotiated a multi-million dollar settlement for the victims. Her instrumental role in delivering justice to African Americans who were wrongfully targeted on the basis of race is an extremely compelling example of her dedication and commitment to civil rights and is the subject of a book by Nate Blakeslee, Tulia.<sup>4</sup>

Ms. Gupta has held attorney and leadership positions with several of our nation's premier civil rights organizations, with which we stand every day in the fight for equal justice. She began her career at the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, which was founded by Thurgood Marshall. She served as an attorney with the Racial Justice Program of the ACLU and then as deputy legal director and director of its Center for Justice, where she managed its extraordinary "smart on crime" campaign against mass incarceration. Currently, she serves as president and chief executive officer of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, where she has led the national civil rights community through a tremendously challenging time in our history.

Our nation urgently needs Vanita Gupta's leadership at the Justice Department. The Associate Attorney General oversees the Civil Rights Division, long recognized as the "crown jewel" of the Department. Ms. Gupta served as the head of this Division for three years during the Obama administration. In that capacity, she ensured that our federal civil rights laws were fully and vigorously enforced. Under her leadership, the Division launched efforts to hold police agencies accountable for unlawful conduct. She enforced our nation's voting rights laws to protect the franchise for communities of color. She initiated litigation to protect against all forms of discrimination in education, housing, employment, and public accommodations. She prosecuted hate crimes and was at the forefront of efforts to prevent discrimination against communities of color, women, people with disabilities, older Americans, people of faith, and the LGBTQ community.

The NAACP believes that Ms. Gupta is exceptionally suited to oversee Justice Department offices that ensure local law enforcement agencies are complying with civil rights laws and advancing public safety by maintaining positive relationships with the communities they serve. These include the Office of Justice Programs, Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), and the Community Relations Service. As people from all walks of life call for an end to police violence against the Black community, we need the Justice Department to develop solutions to this longstanding crisis that prioritize accountability and transparency and inspire confidence and trust by all involved. Ms. Gupta is exactly the leader to do this. Widely known as a "bridge-builder," she can use her exceptional skills and talents to bring diverse groups together to advance the cause of justice. She has an extraordinary reputation for working with federal, state, and local law enforcement on civil rights issues, and her nomination is supported by an unprecedented number of law enforcement leaders and organizations.<sup>5</sup>

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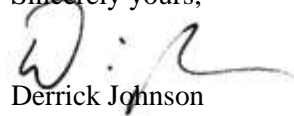
<sup>4</sup> Nate Blakeslee, *TULIA: RACE, COCAINE, AND CORRUPTION IN A SMALL TEXAS TOWN*, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Mucha, *Exclusive: Law Enforcement Organizations Back Biden Pick for Associate AG*, AXIOS, Feb. 26, 2021, <https://www.axios.com/vanita-gupta-attorney-general-biden-6fc0ae59-56e3-4030-8f19-db5d036df97e.html>

As Associate Attorney General, Vanita Gupta will help heal the nation and restore our collective commitment to equal justice and our confidence in the rule of law. We are incredibly grateful for her willingness to serve in this historic position. The Senate should confirm her as quickly as possible.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Should you have any questions or comments, please contact Hilary Shelton, Director of the Washington Bureau and Senior Vice President for Policy and Advocacy at his office at (202) 463-2940.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Johnson", written over a faint, light-colored background.

Derrick Johnson  
President and CEO

cc: Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee