



March 8, 2021

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
Chair
Senate Judiciary Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Ranking Member
Senate Judiciary Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Durbin and Ranking Member Grassley:

Now in our 50th year, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) is a catalyst for racial justice in the South and beyond, working in partnership with communities to dismantle white supremacy, strengthen intersectional movements, and advance the human rights of all people.

On behalf of the SPLC Action Fund and the forty-one undersigned organizations, we write in strong support of the confirmation of Vanita Gupta to serve as Associate Attorney General of the United States. Ms. Gupta is well known to us as the former President and CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, the nation's oldest, largest, and most diverse civil and human rights coalition, with over 200 member organizations. She brings extraordinary credentials for the job, having previously worked at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, as ACLU's Deputy Legal Director leading criminal legal system reform work, and as Acting Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights from 2014 until the end of the Obama's administration.

For the past three and a half years, Ms. Gupta has brilliantly directed the Leadership Conference's advocacy, research, and education initiatives. As President and CEO, Ms. Gupta has honed her ability to bring groups and individuals together for a common goal and established and deepened her relationships with civil rights, religious, law enforcement, and business leaders – all stakeholders necessary for success in her new role at the Department of Justice.

We are confident that Ms. Gupta's extraordinary consensus-building skills, and her personal background as the daughter of immigrants from India and as a lifelong civil rights attorney, have prepared her well to serve as the third ranking official in the Justice Department in these challenging times.

Among the programs under the direct supervision of the Associate Attorney General are the Civil Rights Division, the Community Relations Service, the Office on Violence Against Women, and grant-making and training programs, including the Office of Justice Programs and Community Oriented Policing Services. Ms. Gupta has deep familiarity with these programs. We expect that, under her leadership, Justice Department officials will work to find an appropriate balance between enforcement and prevention, between mass incarceration and restorative justice initiatives, between safeguarding true religious liberty and restricting the rights of LGBTQ people, women, and religious minorities, and between national security and individual rights.

This is an especially challenging time for police-community relations. The killing of George Floyd and many other unarmed men and women of color by the police has driven thousands to sustained protests in the streets, energizing a decades-long movement calling not just for reform, but for a fundamental reimagining of policing and incarceration policies — and a deep reinvestment in community-based programs.

After a period of inattention to police misconduct and disinterest in promoting productive reforms or positive police-community relations under both Attorney General Sessions and Attorney General Barr, Ms. Gupta has the relationships and the credibility with leaders in both the civil rights community and law enforcement officials to successfully navigate efforts to reform and transform the criminal legal system. As Acting Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, Ms. Gupta led investigations and successfully negotiated tough, but fair, legal settlements resolving unconstitutional policing practices in cities across the country, including Ferguson, Baltimore, and Chicago. Yet, those who know her are not at all surprised that a number of the most important law enforcement organizations in the country have endorsed or reacted positively to her nomination.¹

The incoming leaders of the Department of Justice face dual challenges: reversing the catastrophic damage to civil and human rights done by former President Trump and his allies, and doing the even harder work of exposing and dismantling the engines of entrenched, systemic white supremacy that have always threatened inclusive democracy in the U.S. At a time when the COVID pandemic has had a stunning, disproportionate impact on Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities – and revealed staggering inequities in health care and housing, in the workplace, and in financial and educational systems – there is an urgent need for Justice Department leaders that will work vigorously to eliminate white nationalism and hate violence, address structural racism and historic inequalities, remove unjust barriers to fundamental voting rights, expand inclusive anti-discrimination protections, and reinvigorate our values as a diverse, welcoming and compassionate nation.

Vanita Gupta is a gifted, compassionate, deeply experienced leader who will help restore faith in the independence and integrity of the Justice Department. She has the experience and the vision to reimagine how we can truly become a more just and equitable nation. We expect that, under her leadership, the Justice Department will be a driving force for good, to help make America fulfill our highest ideals and aspirations for individual dignity, fairness, equal treatment, and justice.

We urge you to support her speedy confirmation.

Sincerely,

SPLC Action Fund
ACLU of Georgia
AIDS Alabama
Alabama Black Women's Roundtable
Alabama Justice Initiative
Alabama Sierra Club

¹ Ryan J. Reilly, *Policing Leaders Praise DOJ Nominee Vanita Gupta. One Group Is Smearing Her Anyway.* https://www.huffpost.com/entry/vanita-gupta-confirmation-police_n_602e81adc5b66dfc101cd8c3, February 19, 2021.

All Voting is Local, Georgia
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee - South Florida Chapter
Bay Area Women Coalition, Incorporated
Black Lives Matter
Center for Popular Democracy Action
Church Without Walls
Common Cause Georgia
Fair Fight Action
Faith and Works
Farmworkers Self-Help Inc.
Florida Legal Services, Inc
Florida People's Advocacy Center
¡HICA! Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama
Healing Touches In Life
LatinoJustice PRLDEF, Southeast Office
Medical Advocacy & Outreach
Montgomery Pride United
NAACP Florida State Conference
National Council of Jewish Women Atlanta Section
National Council of Jewish Women Greater Miami Section
National Council of Jewish Women, State of Florida
NewLife-Second Chance Outreach, Inc.
The Ordinary People Society
Public Wise
Represent GA Action Network, Inc.
Rep GA Institute Inc
Restorative Strategies, LLC
Sero Project
Southern AIDS Coalition
Southern Center for Human Rights
SURJ Atlanta
Treatment Action Group
Tuscaloosa County Office of Public Defender
Voices for Progress
Western States Strategies
WE- Women Engaged