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Women & Families

The Honorable John Thune

Senate Majority Leader S-230, The Capitol

June 17, 2025

Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Johnson Speaker of the House H-232, The Capitol Washington, DC 20515 The Honorable Charles Schumer Senate Minority Leader 322 Hart Senate Office Building Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries House Minority Leader 2267 Rayburn House Office Building Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Thune, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Johnson, and Minority Leader Jeffries:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, the nation's oldest and largest civil rights coalition with a diverse membership of more than 240 national organizations working to build an America as good as its ideals, and the undersigned 85 national organizations, we urge you to exercise your powerful responsibility under the U.S. Constitution to engage in robust oversight of the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ).

President Donald Trump's recently installed political appointees at DOJ are engaged in a shocking perversion of the founding mission of the Civil Rights Division — to enforce our federal civil rights laws in protection of the American people — and are presiding over a mass exodus of attorneys and managers and abandoning their existing civil rights docket by reflexively withdrawing from pending cases across issue areas regardless of their legal merit. Instead of enforcing the civil rights laws that are currently on the books, these political appointees are embracing the role as partisan culture warriors devoted to promoting President Trump's dangerous authoritarian, anti-civil and human rights agenda that targets our nation's most vulnerable people and communities, whom our civil rights laws are designed to protect.

These devastating attacks on the Civil Rights Division are consistent with this administration's relentless attempts to roll back civil and human rights across the country. President Trump has already issued dozens of executive orders that contradict and undermine our nation's civil rights laws and target the initiatives fostering diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility that assist in compliance with those laws. Civil rights offices across federal agencies have been eliminated or gutted. The administration has mounted

Sikh Coalition

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Women & Families National Urban League

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Service Employees International Union

Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism



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attacks on the legal professionals and law firms who work to defend civil and human rights. It has led breathtaking onslaughts on our nation's leading colleges and universities, using the pretext of civil rights enforcement to hinder their operations.

The Leadership Conference and dozens of organizations have already warned the Civil Rights Division that its weaponization of civil rights laws is harming the very communities protected by those laws. Unfortunately, its assault on civil rights has only escalated since Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Harmeet Dhillon was confirmed on April 3, over the strong objections of many of the undersigned organizations based on her long and disturbing record of hostility to civil rights laws and their enforcement. The division's actions during her brief tenure have already confirmed our worst fears. We call upon Congress to exercise its vast oversight authority and do everything in its power to protect the rights of all Americans to be free from discrimination and inequality.

Abandoning the Civil Rights Mission

In a reversal of historic proportion, the Civil Rights Division is upending civil rights enforcement principles and practices — which have been in place since its inception in 1957 — in favor of promoting a virulent, discriminatory agenda directly traceable to the president that targets the very communities Congress intended to protect by passing civil rights laws. This represents a complete distortion of the division's founding mandate and will do irreparable harm to the cause of civil rights in this country for decades to come.

Known as the "crown jewel" of DOJ, the Civil Rights Division was established by Congress through the Civil Rights Act of 1957. It is responsible for protecting and enforcing rights under the U.S. Constitution and our nation's civil rights laws, including the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, 1964, and 1968, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (as extended and strengthened by overwhelming bipartisan majorities in 1970, 1975, 1982, 1992, and 2006), the Fair Housing Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, and numerous others. These landmark laws, passed by Congress at the urging of the civil rights community, help ensure people across the nation enjoy equal opportunity and protection against discrimination in critical facets of their everyday lives. They protect our ability to freely cast our ballots, secure equal opportunity in education, obtain housing free of discrimination, access buildings and services on an equal basis, enjoy fairness in the workplace, and obtain equal treatment in the criminal justice system.

For nearly seven decades, the division has sought to uphold the principles of equality and justice that are foundational to a thriving American democracy. While every new administration may shift the priorities of the Civil Rights Division, the Trump administration has sunk to a new low by jettisoning longstanding civil rights enforcement principles in favor of strict adherence to President Trump's extremist and illegal executive orders, adopting its anti-civil and human rights agenda wholesale. This is an unprecedented and unlawful use of the Civil Rights Division that jeopardizes the civil rights of the American people.

¹ "Leadership Conference and Civil Rights Groups Letter to the Civil Rights Division." *The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights*. Apr. 1, 2025. https://civilrights.org/resource/leadership-conference-and-civil-rights-groups-letter-to-the-civil-rights-division/.



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One of the clearest illustrations of this dangerous directive is reflected in the mission statements sent by Assistant Attorney General Dhillon to the 11 sections within the division shortly after she assumed her leadership role. For example, the mission statement for the voting section barely mentions the Voting Rights Act.² Instead, it focuses exclusively on using federal resources to pursue the negligible problem of voting fraud, including ensuring that only American citizens vote in elections and "preventing illegal voting, fraud, and other forms of malfeasance and error." This comes at the expense of addressing voting discrimination against racial, ethnic, and language minorities and people with disabilities for which there is ample evidence of frequent violations.

For the first time in the Civil Rights Division's history, it is the president's agenda, not civil rights laws passed by Congress, which is dictating the work of the division. Assistant Attorney General Dhillon instructed staff in the new mission statement for the education section: "The zealous and faithful pursuit of this section's mission requires the full dedication of this section's resources, attention and energy to the priorities of the president." She has directed division staff to pursue investigations based on President Trump's executive orders, many of which have been challenged in court as unlawful, including Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling, Eradicating Anti-Christian Bias, and Keeping Men Out of Women's Sports. To be effective and to protect the rights of the American people, civil rights enforcement must function independently and be free from control by the White House.

The intense focus on implementing President Trump's spiteful, white nationalist agenda is an alarming departure from the Civil Rights Division's congressional mandate to enforce civil rights laws. It caters to those who feel victimized by equality and fairness instead of protecting those most vulnerable to discrimination, harassment, and violence. At a time when reported hate crimes are at a record high, the division's obligation to protect all communities is even more imperative. The division should center all of those impacted by discrimination, harassment, and violence and fully exercise its congressional mandate.

Significant Loss of Civil Rights Leadership and Expertise

The reversal in the division's historic mission combined with additional pressure from a deferred resignation program has resulted in a massive exodus of career management officials, attorneys, and other critical staff from the division. This will have its intended effect by further impairing the ability of the division to enforce federal civil rights laws and causing irreparable loss of the substantial institutional knowledge at the Department of Justice regarding civil rights enforcement.

² Cohen, Matt. "Trump's DOJ to Focus on Voter Fraud, Not Voting Rights." *Democracy Docket*. Apr. 30, 2025. https://www.democracydocket.com/news-alerts/trumps-doj-to-focus-on-voter-fraud-not-voting-rights/.

³ "Justice Dept.'s Civil Rights Division Pushes Trump's Culture War Agenda." *The New York Times*. Apr. 18, 2025. https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/18/us/politics/trump-doj-civil-rights.html.

⁴ See, e.g., "Justice Dept.'s Civil Rights Division Pushes Trump's Culture War Agenda." *The New York Times*. Apr. 18, 2025. https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/18/us/politics/trump-doj-civil-rights.html; "Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling." *The White House*. Jan. 29, 2025. https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-radical-indoctrination-in-k-12-schooling/; "Eradicating Anti-Christian Bias." *The White House*. Feb. 6, 2025. https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/keeping-men-out-of-womens-sports/.



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Recent estimates indicate that more than 250 attorneys in the Civil Rights Division have resigned or accepted a deferred resignation offer or have been reassigned elsewhere within the Department of Justice. With approximately 365 attorneys staffing the division as of January, this reflects a breathtaking reduction in attorney staff of 70 percent. Individual sections such as voting, employment litigation, and educational opportunity, which traditionally were each staffed with dozens of attorneys, now operate with thread-bare rosters of attorneys. The section devoted to ensuring nondiscrimination by recipients of federal funds has no attorneys whatsoever. It is incomprehensible that the chief law enforcement agency responsible for civil rights can continue to operate effectively with such diminished legal support and oversight. These cuts will naturally erode protection of civil rights for the American people.

Importantly, seasoned career officials have been removed from their leadership roles within the division and transferred in what amounts to internal demotions where they now address public information requests or complaint adjudication, leading many to resign altogether. This loss or reassignment of career officials has substantial, long-term consequences for the division. Career managers have significant subject matter and litigation expertise in particular areas of civil rights law that contributes to the effectiveness and success of enforcement efforts. Exiling these managers also removes an important buffer between political officials and line attorneys, which helps the division make enforcement decisions based upon the facts and the law rather on than a political agenda. Many section chiefs and other managers who have now departed had decades-long tenures within the division, which enabled them to navigate transitions between administrations to promote consistency and legal compliance within the litigation docket and on policy matters.

Additionally, despite the fact that a prior inspector general report condemned Civil Rights Division officials during the second Bush administration for politicized hiring practices and other improper personnel actions, there is now concerning evidence of repeat offenses.⁷ According to a May 27 filing, division leadership has installed a Trump administration political appointee as the acting chief of the voting section⁸ — and there is evidence of additional such appointments in the employment, education, and special litigation sections as well⁹ — even though department policy and federal civil service law prohibit making personnel decisions for a nonpartisan career position like this one on the basis of political affiliation.¹⁰ Such personnel decisions should be determined solely on the basis of relative ability, knowledge, and skills, not politics. Here, however, no vacancy announcement for the vacant voting

⁵ Levine, Sam. "Justice department civil rights division loses 70% of lawyers under Trump." *The Guardian*. May 1, 2025. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/may/01/civil-rights-division-doj-trump.

⁶ Beitsch, Rebecca. "Critics see 'monumental shift' in Trump remaking of DOJ civil rights division." *The Hill.* Apr. 28, 2025. https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/5268277-trump-administration-civil-rights/.

⁷ "An Investigation of Allegations of Politicized Hiring and Other Improper Personnel Actions in the Civil Rights Division." *Department of Justice*. Jul. 2008. https://www.justice.gov/opr/page/file/1206591/dl?inline.

⁸ "Justice Department Files Help America Vote Act Lawsuit Against North Carolina for Inaccurate Voter List." *Department of Justice*. May 2025. https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-files-help-america-vote-act-lawsuit-against-north-carolina-inaccurate.

⁹ See, e.g., acting chiefs listed for the "Employment Litigation Section." *Department of Justice*. https://www.justice.gov/crt/employment-litigation-section; "Educational Opportunities Section." *Department of Justice*. https://www.justice.gov/crt/educational-opportunities-section; and "Special Litigation Section." *Department of Justice*. https://www.justice.gov/crt/special-litigation-section.

¹⁰ IG Report at 4 (citing 28 C.F.R. § 42.1 and *Curinga v. City of Clairton*, 357 F.3d 305, 311 (3d Cir. 2004)).



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section chief position has been posted publicly or internally within DOJ. It also does not appear that the vacancy has been offered to a career employee on an acting basis, which would be the normal practice.

Decimating the Civil Rights Docket

In abdicating the division's mission and aided by massive staff cuts, political leaders at the Civil Rights Division have gutted its enforcement docket through sweeping directives or the withdrawal of seminal cases across issue areas. In their stead, the division has swiftly initiated investigations that are at odds with civil rights compliance and strictly adhere to presidential directives targeting the very people protected by civil rights laws.

With no justification or discussion, political appointees reportedly directed the few remaining attorneys in the voting section to dismiss all active voting rights cases. ¹¹ This follows the division's withdrawal from a major vote dilution case involving Texas's congressional and state legislative districts after prosecuting the case for nearly four years and another apparently politicized withdrawal from a broad-based lawsuit against Georgia's massive voter suppression law after Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger asked Attorney General Pam Bondi to drop the lawsuit. ¹² The division has withdrawn from cases involving voter purges in Alabama and Virginia removing naturalized citizens from voting rolls and has dismissed challenges to at-large municipal districts in Georgia and Pennsylvania that had prevented Black and Latino communities from electing candidates of choice despite their significant populations. ¹³

The division has halted longstanding efforts to address systemic civil rights violations in policing, jeopardizing significant progress by previous administrations to curb abuses by law enforcement. After the police killings of George Floyd in Minneapolis and Breonna Taylor in Louisville, the previous Civil Rights Division had investigated police departments in those cities, found significant civil rights violations, and entered into court-ordered agreements requiring major reforms. But days before the fifth anniversary of George Floyd's murder, the current division announced it would dismiss those agreements

¹¹ Levine, Sam. "Trump's justice department appointees remove leadership of voting unit." *The Guardian*. Apr. 28, 2025. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/apr/28/trump-doj-voting-rights.

¹² See, e.g., Contreras, Natalia. "DOJ drops fight against Texas political maps as Trump administration retreats from voting rights cases." *The Texas Tribune*. Mar. 13, 2025. https://www.texastribune.org/2025/03/13/texas-redistricting-lawsuit-justice-department-withdraws/; Brumback, Kate. "Justice Department instructed to dismiss legal challenge to Georgia election law." *A.P.* Mar. 31, 2025. https://apnews.com/article/georgia-election-law-legal-challenge-232c5d05db604aed31beb9e717f745f9.

¹³ See, e.g., Holmes, Jacob. "DOJ drops lawsuit that halted Alabama's voter purge." *Alabama Political Reporter*. Mar. 17, 2025. https://www.alreporter.com/2025/03/17/doj-drops-lawsuit-that-halted-alabamas-voter-purge/; Seltzer, Rachel. "Trump's DOJ Voluntarily Dismisses Case Challenging Virginia's Voter Purge Program." *Democracy Docket*. Jan. 29, 2025. https://www.democracydocket.com/news-alerts/trumps-doj-voluntarily-dismisses-case-challenging-virginias-voter-purge-program/; Rosa, Alba. "Trump's DOJ pulls out of lawsuit that accused Houston County of suppressing Black voters." *The Telegraph*. Mar. 31, 2025. https://www.macon.com/news/local/community/houston-peach/article303164456.html; "Justice Department drops lawsuit accusing Pennsylvania city of diluting Hispanic vote." *Politico*. Apr. 22, 2025. https://www.politico.com/news/2025/04/22/justice-department-drops-lawsuit-accusing-pennsylvania-city-of-diluting-hispanic-vote-00305131.



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and retract its findings.¹⁴ It also announced the closure of investigations into unconstitutional policing in Phoenix, Memphis, Trenton, Oklahoma City, and Mount Vernon, New York and by the state police in Louisiana, in addition to the review of federal oversight of departments in another dozen cities.¹⁵ Assistant Attorney General Dhillon stated: "Overbroad police consent decrees divest local control of policing from communities where it belongs, turning that power over to unelected and unaccountable bureaucrats, often with an anti-police agenda."¹⁶ The dismissal of an entire body of litigation reflects the extreme steps the division is taking to roll back civil rights enforcement, and their actions mean that unjustified killings, excessive force, and race discrimination by police agencies will go unremedied.

The division is engaged in devastating course reversal across civil rights areas. It withdrew from a decades-old desegregation consent decree in Louisiana, with Assistant Attorney General Dhillon claiming that dismissing a remedy against intentional segregation was "righting a historical wrong, freeing the local school district of federal oversight." Announcing that "DOJ will no longer push 'environmental justice' as viewed through a distorting, DEI lens," Ms. Dhillon terminated a landmark environmental justice settlement aimed at rectifying longstanding sewage infrastructure issues disproportionately exposing Black residents in Alabama's Black Belt to disease and intolerable living conditions, leaving this community suffering from decades of environmental racism without the meaningful reforms they require. The administration switched positions in a case before the Supreme Court challenging a Tennessee ban on gender-affirming care for minors, stating that it has "now determined that [the law] does not deny equal protection on account of sex or any other characteristic." The division withdrew from an Americans with Disabilities Act case concerning the Utah Department of Corrections' refusal to treat a transgender inmate with gender dysphoria who resorted to self-castration while waiting for treatment. And the division is moving to terminate early many of its consent decrees based on a

¹⁴ Londono, Ernesto. "End of Federal Oversight Plan for Minneapolis Police Draws Criticism Over Timing." *The New York Times*. May 21, 2025. https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/21/us/minneapolis-floyd-police-consent-decree.html.

¹⁵ Barrett, Devlin; Dewan, Shaila; Forton, Jacey; and Londono, Ernesto. "Justice Dept. to End Oversight of Local Police Accused of Abuses." *The New York Times*. May 21, 2025. https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/21/us/trump-police-consent-decrees.html.

¹⁶ "The U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division Dismisses Biden-Era Police Investigations and Proposed Police Consent Decrees in Louisville and Minneapolis." *Department of Justice*. May 21, 2025. https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/us-department-justices-civil-rights-division-dismisses-biden-era-police-investigations-and.

¹⁷ See, e.g., "Justice Department ends Civil Rights-era school desegregation order in Louisiana." *CNN*. May 2, 2025. https://www.cnn.com/2025/05/02/us/louisiana-justice-department-desegregation-order; "Justice Department Dismisses Half Century Old Louisiana Consent Decree." *Department of Justice*. Apr. 29, 2025. https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-dismisses-half-century-old-louisiana-consent-decree.

¹⁸ "Department of Justice Terminates Environmental Justice Settlement Agreement, Advancing President Trump's Mandate to End Illegal DEI and Environmental Justice Policies." *Department of Justice*. Apr. 11, 2025. https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/department-justice-terminates-environmental-justice-settlement-agreement-advancing-president.

¹⁹ Sherman, Mark. "Trump administration withdraws support for transgender minors in Tennessee case at the Supreme Court." *A.P.* Feb. 7, 2025. https://apnews.com/article/supreme-court-transgender-health-trump-minors-5f70fc50f1b2e15c6774b3107c29d34d.

²⁰ Pitts, Emma. "DOJ drops lawsuit against Utah over transgender inmate's rights." *Deseret News*. Feb. 11, 2025. https://www.deseret.com/utah/2025/02/11/utah-attorney-general-doj-drops-transgender-inmate-case/.



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longstanding civil rights enforcement tool that focuses on the disparate impact of policies on particular communities, such as redlining cases against banks that exclude Black and Hispanic communities from home mortgage loans.²¹

In place of enforcing longstanding civil rights laws, the division is pursuing investigations of officials taking steps to comply with civil rights laws and ensure their institutions are inclusive and accessible. It recently announced an investigation into the hiring practices of the City of Chicago after Mayor Brandon Johnson praised the number of top Black officials in his administration.²² It launched an investigation into a local Minnesota prosecutor's office over its attempts to ensure race discrimination was not infecting prosecutorial decisions.²³ The division opened an investigation into the admissions practices of four California universities, perverting the use of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 supposedly to "eradicate illegal DEI."²⁴ The division is also using civil rights investigative tools to pursue President Trump's political agenda without regard to legal or factual predicates, instituting a pattern or practice investigation — usually reserved for examining police misconduct — against the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department over long delays in issuing gun permits.²⁵

Congressional Oversight Is Imperative

Under any administration, it is vital that the Civil Rights Division fulfill its responsibility to vigorously enforce the nation's landmark civil rights laws. For decades, the Justice Department has safeguarded the independence of its law enforcement decisions, consistently insulating them against political influence. This administration has instead abandoned that independence, making itself servile to the president's political ambitions and vendettas. We deserve better. We deserve — and Congress must require — a Civil Rights Division that protects and advances the rights of *all* people in America. We urge you to exercise your full authority under the Constitution to conduct immediate, robust oversight of the Civil Rights Division through investigations, hearings, and all other means at your disposal. The civil rights of every single American are at stake.

Sincerely,

²¹ Mark, Julian and Meckler, Laura. "Discrimination cases unravel as Trump scraps core civil rights tenet." *The Washington Post.* Jun. 1, 2025. https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2025/06/01/trump-disparate-impact-discrimination-cases-civil-rights/.

²² Lauer, Claudia. "Justice Department investigates Chicago's hiring practices after mayor touts Black hires." *A.P.* May 20, 2025. https://apnews.com/article/chicago-black-hires-trump-department-of-justice-81c4a0136a6eb73f6334be8c15ee9b79.

²³ Barrett, Devlin. "Justice Dept Investigates Minnesota Prosecutor Over Race Policy." *The New York Times*. May 4, 2025. https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/04/us/politics/justice-dept-minnesota-prosecutors-race.html.

²⁴ "Attorney General Pamela Bondi Launches Compliance Review Investigation into Admissions Policies at Stanford University and Several University of California Schools, Advancing President Trump's Mandate to End Illegal DEI Policies." *Department of Justice*. Mar. 27, 2025. https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/attorney-general-pamela-bondi-launches-compliance-review-investigation-admissions-policies.

²⁵ Blakinger, Keri; Harter, Clara; and Rector, Kevin. "Trump's DOJ to investigate L.A. County Sheriff's Department over long waits for gun permits." *Los Angeles Times*. Mar. 27, 2025. https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-03-27/trump-doj-los-angeles-sheriffs-department-gun-rights.



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The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

A. Philip Randolph Institute

Advancement Project

AFL-CIO

AFT

All Voting is Local Action

American Association of University Women (AAUW)

American Atheists

American Civil Liberties Union

American Humanist Association

Americans United for Separation of Church and State

Arab American Institute

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC

Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote (APIAVote)

Association on Higher Education And Disability (AHEAD)

Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN)

Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

Black Voters Matter Fund

Center for Reproductive Rights

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)

Clearinghouse on Women's Issues

Common Cause

Democracy Defenders Action

Dēmos Action

Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF)

Drug Policy Alliance

Equal Rights Advocates

Equality California

Fair Elections Center

Family Equality

Feminist Majority Foundation

FFRF Action Fund

Government Information Watch

Human Rights Campaign

Japanese American Citizens League

Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA)

Justice in Aging

Juvenile Law Center

LatinoJustice PRLDEF

Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

Lawyers for Good Government

League of Conservation Voters

League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)



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League of Women Voters of the United States

Legal Action Center

NAACP

NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc.

Nathaniel R. Jones Foundation

National Action Network

National Association of Social Workers

National Bar Association

National Community Reinvestment Coalition

National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA)

National Council of Churches

National Council of Jewish Women

National Council of Negro Women

National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)

National Education Association

National Employment Law Project

National Employment Lawyers Association

National Fair Housing Alliance

National Health Law Program

National Hispanic Media Coalition

National Housing Law Project

National Institute for Workers' Rights

National Network for Arab American Communities (NNAAC)

National Organization for Women

National Partnership for Women & Families

National PLACE

National Urban League

National Women's Law Center Action Fund

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

People For the American Way

Poverty & Race Research Action Council

Public Citizen

Public Justice

Service Employees International Union

Southern Poverty Law Center

Stop AAPI Hate

The National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development (National CAPACD)

The Restaurant Opportunities Center of Pennsylvania (ROC PA)

The Sikh Coalition

The Workers Circle

Union for Reform Judaism

VoteRiders

Woori Juntos



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cc:

Members of the Senate Members of the House of Representatives