



February 25, 2021

**SUPPORT THE CONFIRMATION OF VANITA GUPTA
TO BE ASSOCIATE ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES**

Dear Senator:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights – a coalition of more than 220 national organizations committed to promoting and protecting the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States – and the 108 undersigned organizations, we write to express our strong support for the confirmation of The Leadership Conference’s former president and CEO Vanita Gupta to serve as Associate Attorney General of the United States. We could not be more pleased that President Biden has tapped Ms. Gupta for this critical leadership position at the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ).

Ms. Gupta is a fierce champion of civil rights and has devoted her career to advancing racial and social justice and equality for all. Ms. Gupta was a beloved leader of our organization who day in and day out placed the dignity and humanity of people and communities at the center of our work. She is an inspired choice to serve as the Associate Attorney General in the Biden-Harris Justice Department, and we urge her rapid confirmation by the U.S. Senate.

The position of Associate Attorney General is the third highest ranking position at the Justice Department and is a principal partner of the Attorney General and Deputy Attorney General in operating the 100,000-plus person federal agency. The Associate Attorney General supervises the Civil Rights Division, Civil Division, Office on Violence Against Women, Community Relations Service, Environment & Natural Resources Division, Office of Justice Programs, and several other critical offices.

The daughter of Indian immigrants, Ms. Gupta would be the first woman of color in U.S. history to serve as Associate Attorney General, and she would be the first civil rights lawyer to serve in one of the top three positions at DOJ. President Biden called Ms. Gupta “one of the most respected civil rights lawyers in America.”¹ Sherrilyn Ifill, the president and director-counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), said “Ms. Gupta is among the most highly-respected, visionary civil rights lawyers in the country, and her skill in consensus-building is exceptional.”² The executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Anthony Romero, called Ms. Gupta “a once-in-a-generation leader.”³

Ms. Gupta’s appointment comes at a pivotal moment in our history when it comes to the national reckoning with racial justice. From the tragic killing of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officers last year, to the recent Capitol coup attempt by white supremacists intent on overturning the results of the free and fair 2020 presidential election, this nation is in desperate need of a federal government that will work aggressively to enforce our civil rights laws and ensure racial

justice in America. President Biden’s Justice Department will lead that effort. As President Biden explained on January 7 when he announced his intent to nominate Ms. Gupta and his Justice Department leadership team: “[The Justice Department] was formed in 1870 to enforce the civil rights amendments that grew out of the Civil War. The 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments. To stand up to the Klan, to stand up to racism, to take on domestic terrorism. This original spirit must again guide and animate its work.”⁴

The fight for racial justice has guided and animated Ms. Gupta’s entire career, and she is very well suited to serve in DOJ leadership at this moment. After graduating from Yale University and New York University Law School, Ms. Gupta went to work at LDF, a civil rights organization that has helped lead the fight for racial justice in our courts for the past 80 years. While working at LDF, Ms. Gupta successfully led the effort to overturn the wrongful drug convictions of 38 individuals in Tulia, Texas, who were later pardoned by then-Governor Rick Perry.

After her tenure at LDF, Ms. Gupta continued her fight for racial justice at the ACLU, where she served as the deputy legal director and oversaw all of the ACLU’s criminal justice reform work. She also served as director of the ACLU’s Center for Justice and led their Smart Justice Campaign aimed at ending mass incarceration. Among other cases, Ms. Gupta filed a lawsuit that was subsequently settled with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency to improve detention conditions for asylum seekers.

In 2014, at age 39, Ms. Gupta was chosen to lead the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division, and she served in that position until the end of the Obama administration. In that role, she led critical efforts to reform our criminal justice system and investigate unconstitutional policing practices in Ferguson, Baltimore, Chicago, and other police departments around the country. She aggressively enforced our federal voting rights laws even though DOJ enforcement efforts were significantly hampered by the Supreme Court’s devastating 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* decision. And she worked tirelessly to protect LGBTQ and disability rights, prosecute hate crimes, and fight discrimination in education, housing, lending, and employment. One key to Ms. Gupta’s effectiveness has been her ability to work with individuals and organizations from various parts of the ideological spectrum to find common ground. Forging purposeful paths forward with all stakeholders, and her intimate knowledge of DOJ and the Civil Rights Division, will serve her in good stead as the Associate Attorney General.

We, of course, are most familiar with Ms. Gupta’s stellar work at the helm of The Leadership Conference for the past three and a half years. The Leadership Conference is the nation’s oldest, largest, and most diverse civil and human rights coalition, and Ms. Gupta was the perfect person to lead our coalition during an incredibly difficult time for civil and human rights in America – when these rights were under assault on a near daily basis.⁵ The Leadership Conference board chairs made the following statement about Ms. Gupta’s legacy: “She has taken the helm of the nation’s largest civil and human rights coalition and its public education arm and made them a strategic nerve center for addressing real-time threats while building an affirmative vision for an America as good as its ideals. Vanita significantly expanded the organizations’ capacity to lead major national campaigns around voting rights, the 2020 Census, federal courts, justice reform and police accountability, among other

priorities. While we are deeply saddened to see her go, we are thrilled that she has been asked by President-elect Biden to serve as the Associate Attorney General at the U.S. Department of Justice.”⁶

Ms. Gupta will bring a vital civil rights and racial justice focus to the work of the Biden-Harris Justice Department at a critical moment for our country. As President Biden said in his inaugural address: “A cry for racial justice some 400 years in the making moves us. The dream of justice for all will be deferred no longer.”⁷ Ms. Gupta will heed this call, and we urge the Senate to confirm her as soon as possible to be Associate Attorney General.

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
A. Philip Randolph Institute
ACCESS (Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services)
Act To Change
Advancement Project National Office
AFL-CIO
Alliance for Justice
Alliance For Youth Action
American Association for Justice
American Association of People with Disabilities
American Federation of Teachers
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)
Americans for Financial Reform
Americans United for Separation of Church & State
Anti-Defamation League
Arab American Institute
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF)
Asian Americans Advancing Justice – AAJC
Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote
Augustus F. Hawkins Foundation
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Bend the Arc Jewish Action
Brady
Center for American Progress
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Center for Responsible Lending
Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism, California State University, San Bernardino
Clearinghouse On Women's Issues
Coalition on Human Needs
Constitutional Accountability Center
Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)

Demand Justice
Demos
Drug Policy Alliance
Earthjustice
End Citizens United//Let America Vote Action Fund
Equal Justice Society
Fair Elections Center
Family Equality
Feminist Majority Foundation
Freedom From Religion Foundation
Futures Without Violence
Generation Progress
Girls for Gender Equity
Hispanic Federation
Human Rights Campaign
Indivisible
Japanese American Citizens League
Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies
Justice for Migrant Women
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement
Lambda Legal
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
League of Conservation Voters
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
League of Women Voters of the U.S.
MALDEF
March For Our Lives
Matthew Shepard Foundation
Muslim Advocates
Muslim Public Affairs Council
NAACP
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF)
NARAL Pro-Choice America
National Action Network
National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE)
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
National Association of Social Workers
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC)
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council on Independent Living

National Education Association
National Employment Law Project
National Fair Housing Alliance
National Health Law Program
National Hispanic Media Coalition
National Immigration Law Center
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Redistricting Foundation
National Women's Law Center
Not In Our Town
OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates
People For the American Way
PFLAG National
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
POWER Interfaith
Protect Our Care
Public Advocacy for Kids
Public Citizen
Public Justice
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Sierra Club
Sikh Coalition
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
SPLC Action Fund
Supermajority
The Center for Policing Equity
The National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA)
UnidosUS
United State of Women
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity
Voices for Progress
Voto Latino
YWCA USA