



Written Statement of Asian Americans Advancing Justice

To the Senate Judiciary Committee

**For a Hearing on the Nomination of Jeffrey Beauregard Sessions III
to be Attorney General**

January 10 - 11, 2017

Asian Americans Advancing Justice writes to express our strong opposition to the nomination of Senator Sessions for Attorney General of the United States. Senator Sessions' poor record on civil and human rights¹ and close relationships with white supremacist and anti-Muslim organizations and people make him unqualified and inappropriate to be the chief law enforcement officer of the United States.

Asian Americans Advancing Justice (Advancing Justice) is a national partnership of five non-profit, non-partisan organizations that work to advance the human and civil rights of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) through advocacy, public policy, public education, and litigation. We are based in Washington D.C., Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco. While Asian Americans have been part of the fabric of American society for centuries, in recent years AAPIs have become the fastest growing minority group in the U.S. surpassing Latinos.² Today, 92% of Asian Americans are immigrants or the children of immigrants.³

In 1986, Senator Sessions' nomination for a federal judgeship was rejected by a Republican-controlled Senate due to racist statements he made as a US Attorney and the wrongful prosecution of Black civil rights activists for "voter fraud." Since that time, there has been little evidence that Senator Sessions has changed, only that he has learned to be more careful about the words that he uses. Instead, Sessions has allied himself with white supremacist organizations that seek to maintain the white and Christian majority in the U.S.

¹ See The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights organizational sign-on letter to Majority Leader McConnell, Democratic Leader Reid, Chairman Grassley, and Ranking Member Leahy dated Dec. 1, 2016.

² Sanam Malik, Asian Immigrants in the United States Today, Center for American Progress (May 21, 2015) <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2015/05/21/113690/asian-immigrants-in-the-united-states-today/>.

³ Second Generation Immigrants, Chapter 2: A Demographic Portrait of Adult Children of Immigrants, Pew Research Center (2013).

Sessions has consistently expressed his opposition to, and raised alarmist concern regarding, patterns of immigration post-1965 – a watershed year in which the United States dismantled its explicitly racist national origin quotas (including the remaining vestiges of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882) and finally allowed larger numbers of non-Europeans into the U.S., creating the diversity we see in America today. Sessions has been the standard bearer for a nativist vision of America, sounding the alarm regarding the “unprecedented” percentage of the American population that is foreign-born⁴ – without regard for the fact that the current percentage is lower than during the late 1800s, when the foreign-born were overwhelmingly from Western Europe. Senator Sessions has also questioned birth-right citizenship, which is protected by the Constitution.

Senator Sessions has close relationships to white supremacist, anti-immigrant organizations – the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) and NumbersUSA -whose views he represents in the Senate are central to the dangerous resurgence of nationalism and scapegoating of immigrants that we are witnessing in this country. The FAIR founder, John Tanton, is a white supremacist who wrote in 1993, “I’ve come to the point of view that for European-American society and culture to persist requires a European-American majority, and a clear one at that.” Tanton also founded the Center for Immigration Studies, whose staff have been called as favorable witnesses in hearings that Sessions has presided over.⁵

Senator Sessions’ words and opinions echo the white supremacist views espoused by these organizations though in a somewhat more sanitized version. For example, Dan Stein, FAIR’s president, has stated that supporters of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act wanted to “retaliate against Anglo-Saxon dominance” and that the policy is causing “chaos and will continue to create chaos.”⁶ Senator Sessions has similarly bemoaned the last 40 years as a period of “record, uncontrolled immigration to the United States.”⁷

Senator Sessions has similar close relationships to anti-Muslim organizations and has supported a proposal to ban Muslims from entering the country. Sessions has received awards from anti-Muslim organizations and spoken at their events, including the David

⁴ Senator Sessions’ full quote states, “Nearly 59 million immigrants have arrived in the United States since 1965 and currently constitute a near record 14% of the U.S. population – this is a, reaching the largest proportion in history and will surge beyond that 14% unless law in the United States is changed – we are really on an extreme unprecedented pattern of immigration into the United States, I think it’s unlike most established countries in the world.” Hearing: “The Impact of High Levels of Immigration on U.S. Workers” Senate Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest (March 16, 2016) <http://www.judiciary.senate.gov/meetings/the-impact-of-high-levels-of-immigration-on-us-workers>.

⁵ The Southern Poverty Law Center, Jeff Sessions: Champion of Anti-Muslim and Anti-Immigrant Extremists (November 18, 2016), <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2016/11/18/jeff-sessions-champion-anti-muslim-and-anti-immigrant-extremists>.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ A Memo For Republican Members From Sen. Jeff Sessions, [Immigration Handbook for the New Republican Majority](#)

Horowitz Freedom Center and the Center for Security Policy.⁸ In 2015, Sen. Sessions accepted the “Keeper of the Flame” award from the anti-Muslim hate group the Center for Security Policy, whose leader Frank Gaffney has asserted his belief in the conspiracy theory that President Obama is Muslim, writing “...there is mounting evidence that the president not only identifies with Muslims, but actually may still be one himself.”⁹

Senator Sessions has indicated support for excluding Muslims from entering the United States as immigrants or refugees. At a 2016 hearing on the refugee resettlement program, Sessions said in regards to Syrian refugees that, “We have a right and a duty to favor the admission of immigrants who support and celebrate our pluralist western values... If we cannot ensure the adequate screening of any individual, we must not admit them to the United States. Period.”¹⁰

Sessions has also given over a dozen radio interviews with Steve Bannon when he was with Breitbart News, a platform for white nationalists and other extreme right-wing groups. The former head of Breitbart, Steve Bannon has stated that “When two-thirds or three-quarters of the CEOs in Silicon Valley are from South Asia or from Asia, I think ...” After a pause, he continued, “A country is more than an economy. We’re a civic society.”¹¹ Senator Sessions and Steve Bannon have expressed their mutual admiration for each other¹² and hold similar views on immigration policy. Additionally, Sessions’ nomination was praised by Richard Spencer, president of the National Policy Institute and a leader of the white nationalist movement.¹³ These facts taken together indicate that Senator Sessions seeks to limit immigration to the U.S. in order to maintain a white and Christian majority in the U.S.

We also echo the concerns of our allies working to end domestic violence and sexual assault, who have raised serious doubts about Sen. Sessions’ commitment to victims of such crimes. We are particularly concerned that Sen. Sessions opposed the most recent reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act in 2013, against 78 of his Senate colleagues. Over its 22-year history, VAWA has provided a coordinated national response to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking, including critical provisions that protect immigrant women who are particularly vulnerable to abuse.

⁸ The Southern Poverty Law Center, Jeff Sessions: Champion of Anti-Muslim and Anti-Immigrant Extremists (November 18, 2016), <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2016/11/18/jeff-sessions-champion-anti-muslim-and-anti-immigrant-extremists>.

⁹ Frank Gaffney, America’s First Muslim President?, The Washington Times (June 9, 2009) <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jun/9/americas-first-muslim-president/>

¹⁰ Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing, “Oversight of Administration’s FY 2017 Refugee Resettlement Program,” 24:28 (September 28, 2016).

¹¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/how-bannon-flattered-and-coaxed-trump-on-policies-key-to-the-alt-right/2016/11/15/53c66362-ab69-11e6-a31b-4b6397e625d0_story.html?utm_term=.ebb60e661ac9

¹² Marge Baker, “Jeff Sessions’ Relationship With Breitbart, ‘The Platform’ For The White Nationalist Alt-Right, Should Be Disqualifying.” Huffington Post (Jan. 3, 2017) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/marge-baker/jeff-sessions-relationships_b_13941372.html.

¹³ David Weigel, “Alt-right leaders praise Sessions as attorney general pick” Washington Post (Nov. 19, 2016).

Senator Sessions affinity for white supremacist organizations and persons combined with his anti-civil rights record, and nativist vision of America make us seriously doubt that he would enforce civil rights in our communities or those of other communities of color, immigrants, women, people with disabilities, religious minorities or LGBT people. We strongly encourage you to oppose his nomination.