



Attorney General Sessions
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Sessions,

We write in response to reports describing a draft of Strategic Plan of the Department of Justice, setting forth the priorities that will be the focus of the Department's work for the coming four years. Enforcing the nation's civil rights laws does not appear among the priorities reportedly identified in this Plan.

As you know, the Civil Rights Act of 1957 created the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, which is responsible for "uphold[ing] the civil and constitutional rights of all Americans," by "enforc[ing] federal statutes prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, disability, religion, familial status and national origin."¹ These include the statutes that have come to define the Civil Rights Movement: the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Vigorous enforcement of these statutes remains essential to remedying the persistent discrimination that denies millions of Americans equal opportunities to work, to vote, to send their children to good schools, and to live in neighborhoods where their families have the chance to thrive. More recent civil rights legislation has continued to depend on the Department of Justice for enforcement, including the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, the Law Enforcement Misconduct Statute—which empowers the Attorney General to take action to eliminate patterns and practices of police misconduct—and the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act.

Nearly a year ago we met in your office to share with you our sense of urgency about the need for your office to affirmatively undertake its obligation to lead in enforcing the nation's civil rights laws. We spoke specifically about voting rights, the investigation of unconstitutional patterns of policing, and the prosecution of hate crimes. You indicated at the end our meeting that you would take our concerns under consideration.

Nevertheless, in the ensuing year you have taken actions that clearly reflect a lack of concern about the matters we raised, or in some instances, affirmative hostility to the very

¹ Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, "About the Division," *available at* <https://www.justice.gov/crt>.

civil rights protections you are charged with enforcing. Under your leadership, the Department reversed its long-held position supporting our constitutional challenge to Texas' voter ID law notwithstanding a federal court's ruling in our favor, rolled back federal policing reform efforts, and expressed interest in relitigating the constitutionality of affirmative action despite repeated Supreme Court rulings upholding it. Despite a 57% rise in hate crimes and our explicit request at our meeting that you speak out unequivocally against hate crimes and commit increased resources to investigating groups and individuals engaged in white supremacist violence, you have failed to articulate any measures directly addressed to violent white extremism.

In failing to prioritize civil rights enforcement, your draft Strategic Plan suggests that each of these actions reflects your now explicit intention to abandon one of the most important imperatives of the Department you lead.

In closing, we remind you of the words you spoke at the confirmation hearing for former Attorney General Loretta E. Lynch. You stated, "This is the top law enforcement job in America, not a political position, and anyone who holds this position must have total fidelity to the laws and Constitution of the United States." Indeed, at your own confirmation hearing, you committed to aggressively enforcing all federal laws, even those you voted against and with which you disagreed. As you work to finalize your Strategic Plans for the Department, we call on you to deploy the resources of the Department of Justice to fulfill its historic role in enforcing the nation's civil rights laws.

Sincerely,

Melanie Campbell, President and CEO,
National Coalition on Black Civic
Participation

Kristen Clarke, President and Executive
Director, Lawyers Committee for Civil
Rights Under Law

Sherrilyn Ifill, President and Director-
Counsel, NAACP Legal Defense and
Educational Fund, Inc.

Derrick Johnson, President and CEO
NAACP

Marc Morial, President, National Urban
League

Rev. Al Sharpton, Founder and President,
National Action Network