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Chairman Chuck Grassley  
Senate Judiciary Committee  
United States Senate

Ranking Member Dianne Feinstein  
Senate Judiciary Committee  
United States Senate

Re: Testimony on the nomination of Senator Jeff Sessions to serve as  
United States Attorney General

Dear Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Feinstein:

Advocates for Youth ("Advocates") is a national nonprofit organization that partners with youth leaders, adult allies, and youth-serving organizations to advocate for policies and champion programs that recognize young people's rights to honest sexual health information; accessible, confidential, and affordable sexual health services; and the resources and opportunities necessary to create equity for all youth. ***We urge the Senate Judiciary Committee ("Committee") to reject Senator Jeff Sessions' nomination for Attorney General.***

Young people, particularly low-income youth, young people of color, immigrant youth and LGBT young people, face significant barriers to accessing safe community environments, and information and care related to their own health and well-being. We believe the potential nomination of Senator Jeff Sessions will do nothing but exacerbate obstacles for young people in the United States and we urge the Committee to oppose his nomination.

Advocates partners with youth activists from across the country on a number of reproductive and sexual health/rights issues. The following are testimonies from our youth activists stating the reasons why they urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to reject Senator Jeff Sessions' nomination.

**Youth Testimony**

*Sam St. John, age 16, Birmingham, Alabama:*

I am a high school student and a current constituent of Senator Jeff Sessions. I am also a member of the Alabama Alliance for Healthy Youth. As an advocate for the LGBT+ community in particular, and the promotion of sexual health and reproductive rights for all people, I doubt Senator Sessions' past actions and statements display a regard for the protection of civil and human rights and individuals' bodily autonomy. Sessions, in fact, dismisses those who work to protect these rights: as Attorney General of Alabama, Senator Sessions attempted to bar the

Southern LGBT College Conference from meeting at the University of Alabama on the basis of a defunct and discriminatory anti-LGBT law that was later ruled unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court.<sup>i</sup> I do not trust Senator Sessions to support such safe spaces, institutions, or even laws protecting young people, especially LGBT young people.

In my opinion, a candidate with no experience whatsoever would be far preferable to hold the venerable office of the Attorney General than Senator Jeff Sessions, a man with a long career founded upon the repression of civil liberties. After the 2015 Supreme Court Decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the Supreme Court Case establishing the right of same-sex couples to marry, Senator Sessions stated that the case was “part of a continuing effort to secularize, by force and intimidation, a society that would not exist but for the faith which inspired people to sail across unknown waters.”<sup>ii</sup> This type of negative rhetoric has very serious implications on the lives of those in my community.

There are few places more historically infamous for oppression *de jure* than Alabama. As a person born in Northport and raised in Birmingham, I feel that this affiliation grants me a great opportunity to comment on the state of civil liberties in Alabama. People in Alabama have not forgotten Senator Sessions’ actions, such as his opposition to a lawsuit brought by the poorest, most marginalized schools in Alabama for receiving unequal funding.<sup>iii</sup> Actions like this make me feel that Senator Sessions does not have the interest of the most marginalized young people at heart.

Sessions has done all that he can to prevent institutions including schools, ACLU, Southern Poverty Law Center, and the state government from protecting these liberties and will almost certainly subject LGBT+ people, people of color, and women to discrimination. Therefore, I cannot, and do not, support the nomination of Jeff Sessions as Attorney General. I urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to consider my testimony and the impact of this nomination on the lives of people like me and ultimately reject this nomination.

*Kristen Marion, age 20, High Point, North Carolina:*

My name is Kristen Marion. I am a youth advocate from North Carolina with Advocates for Youth. Because of my love for politics and my concern for the current state that our country is in, I am very anxious about Senator Jeff Sessions’ nomination to the Attorney General position. If Senator Sessions becomes the Attorney General, as an African American woman, I am afraid that everything my parents and ancestors have worked for in the civil rights realm will be disregarded. We know that in 1986, testimonies given by Senator Sessions’ own colleagues recalled his use of “hate speech,” against the African American community, and this is one example of why Senator Sessions is not fit for the role of Attorney general.<sup>iv</sup>

Senator Sessions has continually opposed the rights of African Americans in our country. He has claimed that organizations such as the NAACP and the ACLU were forcing civil rights “down the throats of people.”<sup>v</sup> Yet, these are the types of organizations that protect the rights of my community. However, if that is not enough, his attempts to prosecute activists that have tried to register black voters in response to changes in the Voting Rights Act are absolutely

unacceptable.<sup>vi</sup> Any government official who cannot bring themselves to acknowledge statistically proven disenfranchisement should not be awarded the responsibility of overseeing the proceedings of justice for the entire country.

I feel very strongly that to appoint this man to Attorney General is to ignore the needs of an entire demographic of people who have been fighting for freedom and acknowledgement for a very long time. We are paying attention; and we will remember the political decisions that are made by this Congress today. More than anything, what this country needs right now is to focus on unity. Appointing a man who has a record of singling out African Americans and denying them their rights will only succeed in causing more friction and polarization. I do not support the nomination of Jeff Sessions as Attorney General. I urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to consider my testimony and the impact of this nomination on the lives of people like me and ultimately reject this nomination.

*Winnie Ye, age 22, Brooklyn, New York:*

My name is Winnie Ye and I am a youth advocate with Advocates for Youth. The Attorney General is an increasingly important position given rising threats in the United States, and I do not believe Senator Jeff Sessions is qualified to protect citizens like me given his anti-women's health views.

Senator Sessions openly opposes women's health protections and could follow previous administrations in refusing to enforce critical protections, endangering the life of providers, and patients like me. Senator Sessions has stated his strong opposition to abortion rights in the U.S. by repeatedly voting against resolutions that support abortion rights and for anti-choice legislation such as the so called Unborn Victims of Violence Act, a bill that creates legal rights for pregnancies.<sup>vii</sup> He has also voted to defund Planned Parenthood, a healthcare center that is frequently utilized by young people, particularly low-income young people and young people of color. Senator Sessions has also voted to limit the rights of young people from crossing state lines to receive abortion services, which is necessary when clinics in their communities are too dangerous or too far to reach because of unnecessary restrictions.<sup>viii</sup> Young women access these clinics every day, but because of heightened security issues, we often feel unsafe. The Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division is responsible for enforcing federal protections for abortion providers against clinic violence, and based on his record, I do not feel that Senator Sessions will ensure these federal protections.

For the reasons stated above, I do not support the nomination of Jeff Sessions as Attorney General and I urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to consider my testimony and the impact of this nomination on the lives of people like me and ultimately reject this nomination.

### Conclusion

Discrimination against young people has tangible consequences. We are concerned that the nomination of Senator Sessions for the position of Attorney General would make civil rights protections harder to attain for young people, particularly young people most at risk.

We know harms from discrimination are even greater for LGBTQ young people, who may face violence at school or in their homes, may avoid seeking treatment for physical or mental health concerns, and may attempt self-harm or suicide at alarmingly high rates due to discrimination because of their identity.<sup>ix</sup> Yet, Senator Sessions has opposed legislation that would extend federal hate crime protections to LGBT individuals because he does not see the need for such protections.<sup>x</sup>

The U.S. Attorney General has a duty to enforce federal laws that protect the rights of Americans, yet Senator Sessions' record against equity in schools and racial justice, opposition to LGBT protections and civil rights, and disapproval of women's access to healthcare, are only a few reasons why we believe he is unfit to serve as the Attorney General.

Advocates for Youth, along with our youth activists, strongly urge you to oppose the nomination of Senator Jeff Sessions as U.S. Attorney General.

Sincerely,



Diana Rhodes  
Director of Public Policy  
Advocates for Youth

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<sup>i</sup> Andrew Kaczynski, *Jeff Sessions fought as Ala. attorney gen. to keep an LGBT conference from meeting on a pub. campus*, CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/12/01/politics/kfile-jeff-sessions-lgbt-conference/> (Dec. 2016).

<sup>ii</sup> Jeff Sessions for United States Senator for Alabama, *Sessions: The Supreme Court Has Become A Supreme Legislature*, <http://www.sessions.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/news-releases?ID=85FA3DD5-8679-437D-9F52-C4448505D84A> (Jun. 2015).

<sup>iii</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *Jeff Session's Other Civil Rights Problem*, The New York Times, [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/21/opinion/jeff-sessions-other-civil-rights-problem.html?\\_r=1](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/21/opinion/jeff-sessions-other-civil-rights-problem.html?_r=1) (Nov. 2016).

<sup>iv</sup> Scott Zamost, *Sessions dogged by old allegations of racism*, CNN, [www.cnn.com/2016/11/17/politics/jeff-sessions-racism-allegations/](http://www.cnn.com/2016/11/17/politics/jeff-sessions-racism-allegations/) (Nov. 2016).

<sup>v</sup> *Id.*

<sup>vi</sup> Ari Berman, *Jeff Sessions, Trump's Pick for Attorney Gen., Is a Fierce Opponent of Civil Rights*, The Nation, <https://www.thenation.com/article/jeff-sessions-trumps-pick-for-attorney-general-is-a-fierce-opponent-of-civil-rights/> (Nov. 2016).

<sup>vii</sup> Unborn Victims of Violence Act, H.R.1997, 3/25/04.

<sup>viii</sup> U.S. Senate Roll Call Votes 109th Congress, United States Senate, [www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll\\_call\\_lists/roll\\_call\\_vote\\_cfm.cfm?congress=109&session=2&vote=00216](http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=109&session=2&vote=00216) (July, 2006).

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<sup>ix</sup> Laura Davis and Urooj Arshad, *Adolescent Sexual Health and the Dynamics of Oppression A Call for Cultural Competency*, Advocates for Youth, [http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/storage/advfy/documents/adolescent\\_sexual\\_health\\_and\\_the\\_dynamics.pdf](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/storage/advfy/documents/adolescent_sexual_health_and_the_dynamics.pdf) (Aug. 2010).

<sup>x</sup> Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-AL) Part 1 on hate crime bill, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xczq5NLgZAo> (Jul. 2009).