



**National  
Urban League**

*Empowering Communities.  
Changing Lives.*

120 Wall Street  
New York, NY 10005  
P 212 558 530  
F 212 344 5188  
[www.nul.org](http://www.nul.org)

January 10, 2019

Honorable Lindsey Graham  
Chairman  
Committee on the Judiciary  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Dianne Feinstein  
Ranking Member  
Committee on the Judiciary  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Graham, and Ranking Member Feinstein:

As President and CEO of the National Urban League, and on behalf of its 90 affiliates in 36 states and the District of Columbia, we call upon members of this committee and the entire Senate to reject the nomination of William Barr as the next Attorney General of the United States.

As the nation's top law enforcement officer and leader of the U.S. Department of Justice, the Attorney General is responsible for safeguarding our civil and constitutional rights. That is a core and enduring mission of the Justice Department. Our nation desperately needs and deserves an Attorney General who is committed to that mission and to our country's ongoing progress toward equal justice and racial equality. The Attorney General must also operate with integrity and independence in service to the people, not the president.

For the past two years, the Justice Department has been led by an Attorney General intent on restricting civil and human rights at every turn. From rollbacks in voting rights enforcement to a return to failed and harmful criminal justice policies, Attorney General Jeff Sessions used his office to carry out the extreme, anti-civil rights agenda he had advanced for decades in the U.S. Senate. Under Jeff Sessions, we also witnessed extreme anti-immigrant policies and rollbacks in LGBTQ rights.

The Justice Department and the nation need an Attorney General who will make a dramatic course correction and begin to enforce our federal civil rights laws with vigor and independence. Based on his alarming record, William Barr will not do so. Indeed, in a recent op-ed<sup>i</sup>, Mr. Barr called Jeff Sessions "an outstanding attorney general" and offered praise for his policies, many of which undermined civil rights. This is a telling indication that Mr. Barr would continue the deeply disturbing anti-civil rights policies and priorities of the past two years.

Mr. Barr has a troubling record on a number of civil rights issues. Of special concern to the National Urban League and the constituents that we serve is his record on criminal justice. African Americans face racial bias at every stage of the justice process. Therefore, federal civil rights enforcement in our justice system is critical to families and communities of color. Studies have found that Blacks are more likely to be stopped by the police, detained pretrial, charged with more serious crimes, and sentenced more harshly than white people.<sup>ii</sup> In 2018, after years of arduous work, we saw enactment of bipartisan legislation that finally begins to reform our criminal justice system through the *First Step Act*, as well as long overdue reauthorization of the *Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974* through the *Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2018*. William Barr's record on criminal justice places these achievements at serious risk and gives us no assurance that these hard-fought reforms would be implemented:

- As Attorney General under George H.W. Bush, Barr pursued harsh criminal justice policies that furthered mass incarceration and the "war on drugs". More recently and alarmingly, he has been a supporter of mandatory minimum sentences and latitude for abusive police officers.
- In 1992, Barr published a book by the Department of Justice called "The Case for More Incarceration," which argued that the country was "incarcerating too few criminals."<sup>iii</sup>
- After serving as attorney general, Barr led efforts in Virginia to abolish parole in the state, build more prisons, and increase prison sentences by as much as 700 percent.<sup>iv</sup>

The Attorney General is one of the most important positions in the entire Federal government. The Justice Department has the responsibility to vigorously enforce some of our nation's most critical laws; to protect the rights and liberties of all Americans; and to serve as an essential independent check on the excesses of an Administration. The evidence is overwhelmingly clear that William Barr is unfit to serve as chief enforcer of our civil rights laws. We therefore strongly urge the Senate Judiciary Committee and the entire United States Senate to reject the nomination of William Barr as our next Attorney General.

Respectfully,



Marc H. Morial  
President and CEO

Cc: Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee

---

<sup>i</sup>See, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/jeff-sessions-can-look-back-on-a-job-well-done/2018/11/07/527e5830-e2cf-11e8-8f5f-a55347f48762\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.6996b10fe367](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/jeff-sessions-can-look-back-on-a-job-well-done/2018/11/07/527e5830-e2cf-11e8-8f5f-a55347f48762_story.html?utm_term=.6996b10fe367).

<sup>ii</sup>*An Unjust Burden: The Disparate Treatment of Black Americans in the Criminal Justice System*, By Elizabeth Hinton, Assistant Professor, Department of History and Department of African and African American Studies, Harvard University, LeShae Henderson, Special Assistant, Research, Vera Institute of Justice, and Cindy Reed, Senior Editor, Vera Institute of Justice, May 2018, Accessed at [https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/for-the-record-unjust-burden/legacy\\_downloads/for-the-record-unjust-burden-racial-disparities.pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/for-the-record-unjust-burden/legacy_downloads/for-the-record-unjust-burden-racial-disparities.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> See, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/139583NCJRS.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup>"William Barr Is Out of Step on Criminal Justice Reform, Trump's nominee for attorney general would continue Jeff Sessions's hardline approach, his record suggests," by Tim Lau, Brennan Center for Justice, December 7, 2018.