

**Bipartisan Letter of Support from Texans and Individuals Familiar with  
the Tulia, Texas Case on Behalf of Vanita Gupta**

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Majority Leader, United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader, United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin  
Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley  
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

March 5, 2021  
Via Electronic Mail

**Re: Group letter in Support of Vanita Gupta, nominee for United States  
Associate Attorney General**

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Chairman Durbin, and  
Ranking Member Grassley:

The undersigned are lawyers and advocates who endorse Vanita Gupta's  
nomination as Associate Attorney General based on our familiarity with the legal  
work Ms. Gupta led in connection with the Tulia, Texas drug cases in the early  
2000s.

Tulia was not a drug "case" in the way that lawyers use that word to refer to a  
single client with problems. It centered around a bad cop who arrested a large  
percentage of the African-American population in a small town in Texas using  
shoddy practices and false evidence. The litigation was an enormous, sprawling  
campaign that involved dozens of client victims with different interests and a  
determined set of opponents, some in the courtroom and plenty outside of it. It was  
a war, not a battle, and it required more of the lawyers involved in it than any of  
them foresaw at the beginning.

Ms. Gupta, who was working at that time for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, rose to this rare challenge. She played a key role in what ultimately became a large team of pro-bono lawyers—not because of her organizational affiliation but because of her own abilities, insight, and discipline. As a habeas case, the case involved complicated substantive and procedural elements, including an incredibly dense factual record and thorny legal issues that required keen judgment, rigorous analysis, and expertise. Ms. Gupta proved herself over and over to be a strategic thinker and actor and established herself as one to watch.

At the time, Ms. Gupta ushered in groundbreaking reforms in her advocacy, exposing racial injustice and prosecutorial abuses. The case also resulted in so much more: thirty-five Texans, upon the unanimous recommendation of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, were pardoned by Governor Rick Perry, who expressed that his grant of the pardons was “both appropriate and just.” The issues from the case continue to be emblematic of reforms needed around the country. We have been heartened by how the Tulia case has helped lead to bipartisan criminal law reform that has made Texas a pioneer in demonstrating how reforms can be adopted and implemented effectively.

More recently, Ms. Gupta has continued to demonstrate leadership and effective action as an Acting Assistant Attorney General and head of the Civil Rights Division in the Obama Administration, and then while heading the Leadership Conference.

Ms. Gupta has amassed an impressive body of work over her career thus far, and is poised to be instrumental in a renewed Department ready to meet this moment. This is precisely the time to bring in seasoned and bold leaders who can ensure we make good on the mandate to truly transform a justice system to one aligned with the values of our democracy.

Signed,

Rebecca Bernhardt, Contract Lobbyist, Innocence Project of Texas;\* then-Managing Attorney, Individual Rights/Border Issues, Texas RioGrande Legal Aid

Jeff Blackburn, counsel, Tulia campaign; Founder of Innocence Project of Texas and Chief Counsel, 2006-2016

Ron Chapman, Presiding Judge over the Habeas Proceedings in Tulia, Texas, 2002-03

Denise Davis, Partner, Davis Kaufman PLLC; then-House Parliamentarian and Special Counsel to the Texas House of Representatives

---

\* Affiliations throughout this list are included for identification purposes only.

Hanna Liebman Dershowitz, then-General Counsel to Texas Senator Rodney Ellis

Commissioner Rodney Ellis, Harris County, Precinct One; then-Texas State Senator

Ramanjeet Gill, Attorney, Sumpter & González

Steve Hall, criminal justice reform advocate

Lisa Kaufman, Partner, Davis Kaufman PLLC; then-General Counsel to State  
Senator Robert Duncan

Annette Lovoi, founding executive director of Texas Appleseed

Andrea Marsh, Founder, Texas Fair Defense Project