

February 24, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

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

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

Re: Nomination of Vanita Gupta for the United States Associate Attorney General

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

I write to share information relevant to the confirmation hearing for Vanita Gupta, nominee for the United States Associate Attorney General.

By way of background, I am a Kentucky native and spent much of my career in the Commonwealth working as a Republican political operative. In 2015, I exited traditional politics and became President and Executive Director of the Justice Action Network, and later, Executive Director of the Coalition for Public Safety, which together comprise the country's largest bipartisan coalition to advance criminal justice reform. We provide resources to, and partner with, groups and individuals committed to working across the aisle to advance common goals at the state and federal levels.

In this space, I have been privileged to work alongside Ms. Gupta, most recently as she served as President and CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. And while Ms. Gupta and I hail from different backgrounds and generally have divergent political ideologies, I experienced first-hand Ms. Gupta's willingness to put partisan politics aside to advance bipartisan legislative reforms that would help countless Americans.

Ms. Gupta played an integral part in our bipartisan coalition, working with both conservative and progressive lawmakers and advocates to advance critical bipartisan reforms that also garnered the support of noted conservative organizations such as Americans for Tax Reform, Faith & Freedom Coalition, FreedomWorks, and Right on Crime. While the progressive and conservative groups endorsing this legislation were on different sides of many other issues, they worked together on criminal justice reform, driven by shared values of fairness, redemption, and equality under the law.

Many times, Ms. Gupta would proactively reach out to me to discuss areas we could work together. Her approach was always direct, warm, and professional, always with an eye toward common ground. Most recently, Justice Action Network closely collaborated with Ms. Gupta

and the Leadership Conference to pass the bipartisan Fair Chance to Compete for Jobs Act, sponsored by Senators Ron Johnson (R-Wis.), Cory Booker (D-N.J.), Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.), and Joni Ernst (R-Iowa), and the late Chairman Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) and Rep. Doug Collins (R-Ga.). Signed into law by President Trump as part of the National Defense Authorization Act, this measure allows people applying to work for the federal government or federal contractors the chance to present their qualifications for employment before inquiry is made into their criminal history.

This legislation was modeled on similar measures enacted in 35 states, including red states such as Ohio, Louisiana, Tennessee, and my home Commonwealth of Kentucky. These initiatives were informed by empirical data demonstrating the positive impact of employment on reducing recidivism and crime rates. In other words, fair chance hiring makes us safer, while also broadening the pool of skilled labor, which is why many private businesses and corporations have also implemented fair chance hiring policies.

Although red, blue, and purple states demonstrated the merits of fair chance hiring policies, federal legislation stalled in Congress for several sessions. Ms. Gupta's expertise in law and advocacy and her willingness to put partisanship aside were crucial to the bill's ultimate success. During the years leading up to the passage of the Fair Chance Act, she continuously worked with Republican Members of Congress and with conservative partners to reach consensus on how best to draft and implement a federal hiring policy that provided second chances to those who have paid for their mistakes, while continuing to protect public safety. Without her persistent efforts, this legislation might still be stalled, leaving thousands of qualified, hard-working Americans who have turned their lives around locked out of employment.

I am confident that Ms. Gupta will uphold the integrity of the Department of Justice, reach out to, and solicit input from, people of all different backgrounds and ideologies, and continue to seek bipartisan solutions to our justice system's most significant challenges. Should her confirmation prove successful, I look forward to continuing to work with Ms. Gupta, and the esteemed lawmakers and leadership on both sides of the aisle, on bipartisan reforms that expand second chance opportunities, improve public safety, and ensure the fair administration of justice for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Holly Harris', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Holly Harris
President & Executive Director
Justice Action Network
Coalition for Public Safety