



Key Priorities for the Civil and Human Rights Coalition A Shared Statement on Achieving Equal Justice and Opportunity

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The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights is a coalition of more than 200 national advocacy organizations that, together, represent tens of millions of Americans from all walks of life. We are united by our shared commitment to making America a more just, fair, and inclusive nation for everyone, most especially for vulnerable communities who are too often left behind in social and economic opportunities. The Leadership Conference was founded on the firm conviction that the struggle for civil rights would be won, not by one group alone, but through coalitions that augment and multiply our partners' strength. Our civil and human rights coalition stands as an exemplar of what the United States should be – a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious country with a government that works for the good of all.

Since our founding in 1950, The Leadership Conference has played a vital role in every debate over legislation affecting civil and human rights. For decades, we have led efforts to ensure equal opportunity in education, employment, credit, and housing; encourage strong and vigorous voting rights protections; protect religious freedom; address hate violence as well as racial disparities in the criminal justice system; advance economic security and health care and wellness as basic civil and human rights; ensure a fair-minded and independent judiciary; defend against discrimination in all its forms; and resist efforts to reverse the nation's civil rights progress.

We share a vision of an America as good in practice as it is in promise. Our strength lies in our history of welcoming peoples from around the world and of righting the wrongs of our past as we strive for an inclusive society in which we see our fates as linked together. But this vision is threatened by an emerging national agenda from the new administration and Congress, and a tone and tenor in our civic discourse, which tear at the very fabric of what has made America so strong for so long.

We believe our nation should honor equal protection for all of its people, view its diversity as its strength, and strive to be a place where all people can live, work, and study as free and equal Americans. We are prepared to stand with and for all Americans in support of the rights guaranteed in our Constitution and laws, and to resist any attempt to discriminate against, oppress, or marginalize any members of our communities, including efforts to use religion to thwart laws that protect their rights, welfare, and well-being. We will stand against any efforts by the new administration and Congress to politicize civil and human rights, and intend to meet every challenge with the values and principles that animate our cause.

The choices that elected officials make will go a long way in determining whether the promise of the American Dream still exists for everyone – or for only some. We call on political leaders and public officials to provide positive political and civic leadership in

support of policies that promote inclusion and respect for basic rights of every person in America.

For America's communities still on the margins of full and equal opportunity and a life free from discrimination, this must include stronger voting rights for a stronger democracy; reforms to the nation's justice system; stronger communities that provide workplace fairness and affordable, high-quality health care for all; educational equity across all communities; and core human rights and dignity.

Strengthening Our Democracy

All Americans must have the ability to equally and meaningfully participate in our democracy. We therefore support reforms that ensure robust voter participation. We support legislation to restore the Voting Rights Act (VRA) protections struck down or rendered inoperable by the Supreme Court's *Shelby County, Alabama v. Holder* decision. We also support aggressive enforcement by the Department of Justice of the remaining provisions of the VRA, including the language assistance provisions, and vigorous defense of the provisions of the VRA against constitutional challenge. We support enforcement of the National Voter Registration Act and the Help America Vote Act. We support efforts to improve accessibility, and to protect and modernize the nation's voting systems, including the full funding of the Election Assistance Commission. We also support a fair and accurate census, and therefore, key decisions on U.S. Census operations and methods must advance the most accurate census possible and the funding necessary to address and eliminate the ongoing disproportionate undercount of historically undercounted communities. We support efforts to rescind or overturn felony disenfranchisement laws, which disproportionately prevent African Americans and other communities from fully restoring their civil rights after completing their sentences—in some cases for the rest of their lives.

Reforming our Justice System

Our country's criminal justice system must be reformed to ensure it operates in a just, equitable, and fair manner. We support the demilitarization of law enforcement and police reforms that protect civilians and improve accountability and transparency. We support criminal justice reform that addresses the use of entrapment tactics, informants, and racial and religious profiling. We support conditioning federal funding on the collection of hate crime data, data on the use of lethal and non-lethal force and other police-civilian encounters, and mandatory training on implicit bias and de-escalation, including proper interactions with persons with disabilities and mental illness. We support sentencing reform legislation that addresses the drivers of mass incarceration, racial disparities in incarceration, overcrowding in the federal Bureau of Prisons, and provides for alternatives to incarceration to reduce spending. We support the removal of barriers to the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals back into society through access to employment opportunities, voting, education, and public benefits.

Building Stronger Families and Communities

Shared prosperity in the 21st century means that every person in the United States has a fair opportunity to achieve the American Dream. We support investments in good quality jobs and equitable infrastructure – both physical and human – that create long-term economic opportunity for the unemployed and low wage workers and in the communities that need them the most. This requires raising the minimum wage, requiring earned paid sick days, creating a sustainable system for paid family and medical leave, ensuring women access to comprehensive, reproductive health care that allows them to decide whether and when to start a family, and addressing the gender pay and racial wealth gaps. It requires strengthening – rather than decimating – the right to bargain collectively and workplace health and safety standards. It also requires expanded access to affordable, high-quality child care and a fairer tax system for low-and middle-income families.

Moreover, every person in the United States needs full and equal access to comprehensive, high-quality, affordable health care, without discrimination. Robust implementation of the Affordable Care Act, Medicaid expansion, and Medicare, as well as funding for Planned Parenthood health centers, will ensure that low-income families and seniors have continued affordable access to comprehensive health services and specialists.

We support the social safety net and critical programs like Social Security, Medicaid, CHIP, Medicare, SNAP, and Title X Family Planning Program, which together have worked to reduce poverty in our nation for generations.

Creating the economic foundation communities need to thrive also means we support robust implementation of the consumer protection and fair housing reforms enacted after the 2008 financial crisis. In addition, we support ensuring that the nation's telecommunications systems and technology are available to all people, and that media is accountable to local communities.

Ensuring Educational Equity

American education must ensure that all young people attend and are fully included in responsive, welcoming, rigorous, and fairly resourced schools that prepare all of them for careers, civic engagement, and life through high quality early childhood, K12, and higher education. We support the continued advancement of public, federally funded education and protection of students' educational and civil rights, the two central responsibilities of the U.S. Department of Education. We support action to address inequities in school discipline and climate, including reporting and interventions regarding high and disproportionate rates of exclusionary discipline, bullying and harassment, and seclusion and restraint with particular attention to the need to limit police contact for students in schools. We support providing educators with appropriate supports and tools to create and maintain a positive school climate. We support continued enforcement of civil rights laws and clarifying guidance, both in response to specific complaints and in compliance reviews, and continued improvement of the Civil Rights Data Collection.

Promoting Human Rights at Home

At the heart of the civil rights movement is a recognition of the basic human dignity of all people and their right to live freely and to have justice and equal opportunity. The U.S. government must be held accountable for implementing its international human rights obligations and commitments here at home and for protecting and advancing civil and human rights for all who live in America. We support immigration policy that welcomes and values immigrants and refugees of all backgrounds, protects the rights of immigrant and citizen workers alike, promotes family reunification, strengthens due process in detention and removal proceedings, and ends the use of profiling and mass surveillance, the criminalization of immigrants, the deputization of local police, and other abusive enforcement practices. We support humane prosecutorial discretion initiatives, such as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). We also support ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).