



April 27, 2016

Mr. Gary Kelly  
Chairman of the Board, President, & CEO  
Southwest Airlines

Dear Mr. Kelly:

On behalf of the 26 undersigned Asian American and Pacific Islander organizations—including some who receive financial support from Southwest Airlines—we write to express our serious concerns regarding multiple reports of racial and/or religious profiling directed toward Arab, Muslim, and South Asian passengers on Southwest Airlines flights.

During the past five months, there have been four well-publicized incidents involving Southwest Airlines removing or preventing the boarding of Arab, Muslim, and South Asian passengers, and in our experience, there likely have been similar incidents that were not reported or are not as well known.

On November 18, 2015, Southwest personnel blocked two Arab passengers from boarding their plane at Chicago Midway International Airport because a fellow passenger was afraid to fly with them after hearing them speak Arabic. That same day, also at Chicago's Midway airport, six Arab passengers were removed from their Southwest flight after fellow passengers complained about their behavior. Just last week, a young Arab American student was removed from a Southwest flight in Los Angeles after a fellow passenger reported his phone conversation in Arabic as threatening. Also last week, a Muslim woman wearing a hijab was removed from a Southwest flight in Chicago after asking another passenger to switch seats.

In each of these cases, Southwest claims that a passenger safety issue was involved, and we are concerned that passenger safety issues disproportionately escalate when Arab, Muslim, Sikh or South Asian passengers are involved.

Regardless of the specifics of any of these cases, there is at least the appearance of a systemic problem, and we urge Southwest to conduct a comprehensive review of your policies and practices. In particular, we believe that Southwest should develop, implement, and enforce the following practices, protocols and policies:

- (1) Southwest's established procedures for responding to a perceived passenger safety issue must be clear and include training for how front-line personnel can de-escalate situations—especially when the complaint is raised by a fellow passenger against a passenger who is, or is perceived to be, Arab, Muslim, Sikh, or South Asian. This training must include specific examples and scenarios.

- (2) Southwest's trainings for personnel—and front-line personnel in particular—must go beyond diversity and cultural competency to include instruction on anti-racism and implicit bias. This training must be mandatory, conducted often enough to accommodate staff turnover, and include follow-up such as checks or testing. This will allow Southwest to more effectively combat stereotypes around race, faith, and ethnicity—including the perception that Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim are potentially dangerous.
- (3) Southwest's policies on anti-profiling and anti-harassment must be clear. Passengers who feel harassed or intimidated by fellow passengers must better understand how Southwest personnel can assist them, and those passengers who experience profiling or harassment by Southwest personnel should know how to register their complaints to seek recourse.

These recommendations compose a starting point to address our concerns and prevent future incidents. We believe that ensuring passenger safety does not conflict with preserving the rights and dignity of all passengers or with thoughtful customer relations.

As Asian American and Pacific Islander organizations that represent and stand in solidarity with our Arab, Muslim, Sikh, and South Asian community members, we appreciate your personal leadership in clarifying Southwest's commitment to diversity and equal treatment. We look forward to working with you to serve our communities in a responsible manner. Please contact Christopher Kang at [chris@ncapaonline.org](mailto:chris@ncapaonline.org) if you have any questions or would like to discuss this issue further.

Sincerely,

Asian American Psychological Association (AAPA)  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | Asian Law Caucus  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | Atlanta  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | Chicago  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | Los Angeles  
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum (APIAHF)  
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO (APALA)  
Asian Pacific Partners for Empowerment, Advocacy & Leadership (APPEAL)  
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO)  
Boat People SOS (BPSOS)  
Center for Asian American Media (CAAM)  
Hmong National Development, Inc. (HND)  
National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association (NAAPIMHA)  
National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA)  
National Asian Pacific American Families Against Substance Abuse (NAPAFASA)  
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)  
National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development (National CAPACD)  
National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA)  
National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA)  
National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC)  
National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance (NQAPIA)  
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF)  
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)  
South Asian Bar Association of North America (SABA)  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)

CC: Ms. Ellen Torbert, Vice President, Diversity and Inclusion, Southwest Airlines  
Ms. Kim Delevett, Corporate Community Affairs Manager, Southwest Airlines