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**Testimony of the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance and  
the Institute for Asian Pacific American Leadership & Advancement  
for Policy Priorities on the Democratic National Convention Platform  
June 18, 2016**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Gregory Cendana, and I am the Executive Director of the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA) and the Institute for Asian Pacific American Leadership & Advancement – the first and only national organization of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) workers and our allies. Since our founding, APALA has played a unique role in addressing workplace issues of AAPI workers and continues to advocate for social, economic and racial justice for all communities of color throughout the country.

Today, I urge that the Democratic Party to include the following agenda items on the 2016 Democratic Platform:

**(1) Stand up for workers everywhere:**

AAPIs are involved in all parts of our nation's economy and workforce, from small business owners to farmers. A large share – 65 percent – of the AAPI community is also foreign born. Yet, we continue to face challenges in the workplace, including exploitation, fear of retaliation for speaking out and/or organizing, impenetrable barriers to citizenship, and discrimination on the job. I recommend the committee to include the following on the platform:

- *Raise the minimum wage.* APALA supports the passage of legislation to raise the wages for 37.7 million minimum wage workers. As the cost of living gradually increases every

year, the current wage of \$7.25 per hour is simply not enough to support a family. Raising the minimum wage for all workers struggling to make ends meet is long overdue.

- *Ensure that all workers have the right to organize and collectively bargain.* The right to organize and collectively bargain is a fundamental right, and research has shown that AAPI union members enjoy higher wages, and are more likely to have employer-provided health insurance and a pension.
- *Value all families.* Workers should not be forced with a choice to risk their jobs to tend to an illness or family emergency, or to go to work sick to keep their jobs. We need to ensure that all workers have paid sick and family leave to take care of their health and the health of their loved ones without the risk of losing their jobs or wages critical to their livelihoods.
- *Champion equal pay for equal work:* Across all ethnicities, AAPI women still lag behind their male counterparts, and more than half a million AAPI women live below the federal poverty line. With women comprising half the population, it is about time women earn the same compensation as men.

## **(2) Oppose the Trans-Pacific Partnership:**

The Obama Administration's Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement will not only lead to further offshoring of jobs, but undermine our food safety, internet freedom, and access to affordable medicines. Just three trade deals – the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), China into the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the U.S.-Korea Trade Agreement – have already resulted in the loss of nearly 4 million U.S. jobs. States with large AAPI populations have been particularly hit hard.

TPP would also reward some countries in Asia that violently suppress civil, human, and workers' rights. For example, one of the countries that would benefit from TPP, Brunei, has adopted a new penal code, supposedly based on Sharia law, which threatens the rights of women, religious minorities as well as members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. The TPP will only worsen the race to the bottom, and the new administration should advance trade justice and stop the TPP.

## **(3) Repair a broken criminal justice system:**

APALA's initiative to expose the school-to-prison-to-deportation pipeline connects issues of mass incarceration and the mass criminalization of our communities. For AAPIs specifically, the prison population has grown **250%** since the 1990s. Our December 2015 report which we co-authored with Asian Americans Advancing Justice—Los Angeles, Asian Prisoner Support Committee, National Education Association, and the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, *AAPIs Behind Bars: Exposing the School to Prison to Deportation Pipeline*, recommends building pathways for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals to have access to a college education, the right to vote, jobs with livable wages, and increased access to healthcare. As a nation, we have to invest in solutions that promote restorative justice and build a sustainable future for working people.

## **(4) Protect all communities with stronger gun control measures:**

From Newtown to Charleston and most recently Orlando, gun violence unnecessarily affects all communities, and disproportionately affects Black communities and other people of color. As an organization dedicated to promoting racial justice, APALA is committed to combating the root causes of systemic forms of racism, which manifests itself not only through gun violence but also through segregation, poverty, lack of jobs, gentrification, discriminatory policing, failing public schools, and U.S. war and militarism. It is long overdue for our nation to enact and enforce stronger gun control measures, such as universal background checks, a ban on assault weapons, and the closing of the loophole that allows suspected terrorists to own and purchase guns. Only then can we start to protect and value the lives of our communities and work to put a stop to the tragic pattern of violence at home.

#### **(5) Disaggregate data on the AAPI community**

The current practice of data collection and analysis aggregates key information on the AAPI community and impedes efforts to target resources to underserved communities, especially in the workforce and education. Currently, the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (DOL) disaggregates data for seven Asian groups: Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Asian Pacific Islander, Filipino, and Vietnamese. Yet, the DOL's last grouping of "Other Asians" overlooks key statistics for some of the most marginalized Asian populations, like Hmong, Bhutanese, and Burmese ethnicities. With regards to education, disaggregated data will help engage limited English proficient families, provide access to higher education and Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs), and employ more diverse educators. Overall, agency-wide standards to disaggregate data on the AAPI community are direly needed to better target and serve our communities.

With AAPIs as the fastest growing population in the U.S. workforce and electorate, our constituency cannot be taken for granted. The AAPI community voted in clear majorities in the 2008 and 2012 elections, a trend that has only moved within a generation. The political power of the AAPI community could very well be the deciding factor in this upcoming election.

I, therefore, urge the Democratic Party to stand up for workers everywhere, advance global trade justice, repair the criminal justice system, strengthen gun control measures, and disaggregate data on the AAPI community, on the 2016 Democratic Platform.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.