

**Testimony of South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
to Democratic and Republican National Convention Platform Drafting Committees
June 2016**

South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) is a national, nonpartisan, non-profit organization that elevates the voices and perspectives of South Asian individuals and organizations to build a more just and inclusive society in the United States.

The South Asian community has been greatly impacted by our broken immigration system, racial profiling, and hate violence. Almost 75% of the 4.3 million South Asians in the United States are foreign born and possess a range of immigration statuses. The South Asian American community includes undocumented immigrants, dependents and temporary workers on various visas, refugees and asylum-seekers, lawful permanent residents, and United States citizens. There are over 450,000 undocumented immigrants in the Indian community alone. Over 40% of them stand to benefit from DACA and DAPA, which must move forward unobstructed once the Supreme Court decision is announced.

As of May 1, 2016, fees to apply for an H-1B visa or any L visa have increased by \$4,000 - \$4,500. Additionally, significant processing delays afflict South Asian communities, many times keeping families separated for upwards of ten years. Under the H-2B visa program, workers lose their immigration status if they leave or change their employer. As a direct result, workers are subjected to exploitation and abusive work environments. The DNC must focus on addressing increased fees by the USCIS, extreme delays in the process of reviewing immigration applications, and the exploitation of immigrant workers. Finally, ICE raids are entirely ineffective in addressing the larger issue of our broken immigration system. Interior enforcement of immigration laws through ICE raids are disrupting local businesses and tearing apart families of mixed immigration statuses. These raids criminalize workers who are simply seeking financial security and a better life. As a result of varying immigration statuses, many South Asians cannot access affordable health care. Congress should enact legislation permitting states to provide the option of coverage of immigrants under the Medicaid program and eliminate restrictions to state-supported medical insurance based on immigration status. The DNC should support the President's Executive Action programs and ensure DACA and DAPA move forward once the Supreme Court decision is announced.

It is imperative that Comprehensive Immigration Reform legislation be put back on the table. Without it, we will continue to separate families, deny crucial American rights to immigrants, and target them for deportation. While some states support immigrants with detainer laws and policies that provide drivers licenses and access to higher education, all immigrants must be protected under federal legislation. We support a bill that also clears our unacceptably long visa backlogs and continues to raise the visa caps so that our family members can join us here.

South Asians are also often the victims of hate crimes and bias incidents. From 9/11 to March 2007 alone, the DOJ and FBI have investigated over 750 incidents involving violence, threats, vandalism, and arson against Arabs, Muslims, Sikhs, and South Asians in the United States. Beyond the 9/11 context, hate crimes and bias incidents continue to occur at an alarming rate. In 2014, SAALT published "Under Suspicion, Under Attack," which among many things documented 76 hate violence incidents targeting our communities between 2011 - 2014. Over

80% of these incidents were motivated by anti-Muslim sentiment. The report also showed 78 incidents of xenophobic political speech, which is also more likely to occur on a national platform. Over 90% of the xenophobic political comments were motivated by anti-Muslim sentiment. We ask our allies in Congress to ensure their colleagues also stand up against xenophobic political rhetoric. Congress and state legislatures should increase funding for civil rights agencies and community-based organizations to investigate hate crimes. Additionally, the *Hate Crimes Statistics Act* should be amended to require the DOJ to disaggregate data collected on hate crimes based on national origin and religious affiliation.

In addition to hate violence and bias incidents, since 9/11 South Asians have reported even higher incidents of racial profiling. Airport security, immigration enforcement agencies, and state and local law enforcement have singled out South Asians for additional scrutiny and investigation based on characteristics related to national origin, ethnicity, religion, and perceived immigration status. Additionally, Sikh travelers who wear turbans and Muslim women who wear headscarves are frequently subjected to additional secondary screening by TSA officers simply based upon their attire.

Since November of 2015, SAALT has been tracking incidents of xenophobic rhetoric and racial backlash that specifically targets the South Asian community. In less than seven months, SAALT has recorded 45 incidents of xenophobic rhetoric and over 70 incidents of racial backlash. Congress must pass the End Racial Profiling Act and address the negative and dangerous implications of racial profiling. Congress should additionally ensure individuals affected by profiling can bring legal challenges against law enforcement agencies engaging in such practices.