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Indian-American Association of Lehigh Valley

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PA Bureau of Corporations & Charitable Organizations Entity # 651358
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www.iaalv.org

April 7, 2017

The Honorable Josh Shapiro
Attorney General of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General
16th Floor, Strawberry Square
Harrisburg, PA 17120

RE: Concerned Indian-American Citizens of Pennsylvania

Dear Attorney General Shapiro,

Please be advised that I serve as legal counsel for the Indian-American Association of the Lehigh Valley ("IAALV"). Founded in 1972, the IAALV is a non-profit organization serving and representing over 7,000 Indian-Americans in the greater Lehigh Valley region. The IAALV is integral to maintaining cultural, educational, social and community service for not only our own members but for the community at large. We are not a political organization, but part of our mission is to develop and foster working relationships with political leadership to address certain issues of importance.

As you are surely aware, the results and sentiments of our latest Presidential election appear to have spurred a wave of several racially motivated crimes across our country. While such hate crimes are certainly not a new phenomenon, we as a country have recently witnessed a string of alarming incidents particularly aimed against people of South Asian descent. The recent spate of violence in 2017 is rightfully linked to the hateful rhetoric and racist policy that we believe the current Presidential administration has perpetrated.

Over the span of just two weeks there have been four such attacks, two of which were fatal. These violent incidents in Kansas, Washington, South Carolina and Florida all targeted Indian-American men. The shootings in Kansas and Washington were preceded by the assailant shouting: "Go back to your country!" The perpetrator in Florida believed he was targeting an Arab and was mad

*A non-profit social, cultural, educational & community service organization
Serving Lehigh Valley Americans of Indian descent & the community at large
An award winning organization - founded 1972*

for “what they are doing in the Middle East”. The victims, Srinivas Kuchibhotla, Deep Rai and Harnish Patel, did absolutely nothing to provoke these attacks.

The difference between these recent hate crimes and those of the past (for example, post-9/11), is that for the first time in several generations we are beginning to question whether America will remain the same beacon of hope and opportunity for immigrants as it was when many IAALV members and/or their parents immigrated to this country. Indian-Americans are now the second largest group of immigrants per year after Mexican-Americans. We fear the President is trying to create a new America where racial hostility may once again be normalized and institutionalized – whether he is the product or the cause of this movement is debatable.

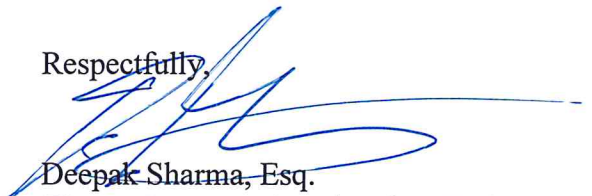
Of course, Indian Americans are not alone in suffering a recent wage of discrimination, hate and violence. Women, African-Americans, Latino-Americans, Asian-Americans, Jewish-Americans, Muslim-Americans and members of the LGBTQ community, to name a few, have all been attacked and vilified. Although our judiciary has blocked the proposed “Muslim Ban”, the damage from such a proposal and hateful rhetoric continues to be felt. People of all races, ethnicities, etc... must band together in an effort to develop a long-term infrastructure and legal framework for a sustained and systematic response to not just every hate crime, but every policy that tends to promote intolerance. As stated by New York Congresswoman Grace Meng: “It remains critical for elected officials to speak out early, loudly and often against hate violence and policies that fan the flames of violence.”

Under Pennsylvania law, a hate crime is committed when the crime is motivated by the victim's real or perceived race, color, religion, national origin. Such acts can include but are not limited to physical assault, property destruction, criminal trespass, terroristic threats and harassment. When such acts are perpetrated, it is incumbent upon our law enforcement officials and prosecutors to recognize any possible indicia of a hate crime and fully investigate any potential matter as such. It is essential to maintaining the spirit of our Constitution and American freedom that our elected officials remain immune to the current wave of nationalistic rhetoric and racial intolerance that is becoming endemic in certain segments of our society.

On behalf of the IAALV, I hereby request the honor of your company and cooperation to further discuss and bring these issues to the forefront in Pennsylvania. As IAALV's legal counsel, I and other IAALV board members would appreciate a brief meeting and press conference to be hosted by your office expressing to the citizens of the Commonwealth that we stand united against hateful bigotry.

We appreciate your attention to this matter.

Respectfully,



Deepak Sharma, Esq.
Florio, Perrucci, Steinhardt & Fader, LLC

cc: The Honorable Lisa Boscola
The Honorable Pat Browne
The Honorable John Morganelli
The Honorable Jim Martin
Mr. Ashim Bhowmick