



Southern Poverty Law Center  
400 Washington Ave  
Montgomery, AL 36104  
splcactionfund.org

February 22, 2023

United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: SPLC and SPLC AF 118<sup>th</sup> Congress Policy Priorities

Dear Senator,

On behalf of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and the SPLC Action Fund, we write to share our legislative priorities for the 118th Congress. Established in 1971, the SPLC is dedicated to creating a fair, equitable, inclusive, and unified nation. Headquartered in Montgomery, Alabama, our organization works in deep partnership with communities of color to dismantle white supremacy, strengthen intersectional movements through transformative policies and initiatives, and advance the human rights of all people.

The SPLC employs a three-pronged strategy: litigation, policy advocacy, and public education. We work within the judicial system to compel systemic reforms for victims of bigotry and discrimination. Through “Learning for Justice,” our organization provides free resources to caregivers and educators to help advance human rights and inclusive democracy. We have deep expertise in monitoring the activities of domestic hate groups and promoting voting rights, criminal legal system reform, and international human rights.

Separately, the SPLC Action Fund advocates for the implementation of policies and laws to eliminate the structural racism and inequalities that fuel the oppression of people of color, immigrants, young people, women, low-income people, and the LGBTQ+ community. The Action Fund is dedicated to fighting for racial justice in partnership with communities of color to pursue equality and opportunity for all people.

The SPLC Action Fund has identified five priority areas for our federal work and in the five Deep South states (MS, LA, AL, GA, FL) in which we operate:



- Strengthen democracy by increasing voter turnout, challenging voter suppression measures, and ensuring representational diversity.
- Relegate white supremacy out of the mainstream, reduce its impact on American democracy, and prevent violent harms inflicted on Black and Brown people.
- Reduce the incarcerated and detained population by decriminalizing and decarcerating Black and Brown people.
- Eradicate poverty by expanding access to opportunity and eliminating racial economic inequality.
- Increase power and capacity for multiracial, inclusive democracy in the South.

The SPLC Action Fund legislative priorities below reflect our belief that robust civic engagement and strong civil rights protections for Black people, Indigenous people, and all people of color — those historically left behind — will foster a society where people from all walks of life can thrive.

### **Combatting Hate and Extremism**

Our nation is at an inflection point. For more than half a century, the Southern Poverty Law Center and the SPLC Action Fund have tracked extremist groups across the country, but the mainstreaming of extremist ideas represents a new threat to our democracy.

#### **Improve Hate Crime Data Collection**

- The incomplete and unreliable 2021 FBI HCSA report underlines the need for legislative, administrative, and regulatory work to improve the data. We support legislation to mandate hate crime reporting. Until the enactment of that legislation, we are working toward conditioning federal funding for law enforcement agencies on credible reporting or meaningful community policy, education, and awareness efforts.

#### **Improve Hate Crime Prevention and Response**

- While enforcement of federal and state hate crime laws is crucial, it is insufficient. We are working to improve government and community-based training, education, and awareness to support victims of hate violence, emphasizing prevention, research, and alternative, non-carceral initiatives.

#### **Improve Government Response to Domestic Extremism**

- We are working to ensure that the planners and perpetrators of the deadly January 6 insurrection at the Capitol — and those who funded and inspired their attack — are held accountable, with serious consequences.



- We are working to expand interagency coordination for tracking and assessing the nature and magnitude of domestic extremism, including mandating regular public reports. We support initiatives and funding for community-based resilience and early intervention programs for youth that center on social-emotional learning, not punishment.

#### Promote Anti-Bias and Anti-Hate Education Initiatives

- Because prevention of hate and extremism is the priority, we support long-term anti-racism education initiatives, as well as federal, state, and local initiatives to promote democracy and civics education, digital literacy initiatives, teaching truth through inclusive education, and culturally competent conflict resolution programs. We fiercely oppose anti-Black and anti-LGBTQ initiatives in schools and communities.

#### Decriminalization and Criminal Legal System Reform

The heart of the SPLC's and SPLC Action Fund's decriminalization and decarceration goal lies in dismantling systems rooted in white supremacy and anti-Black history. Reducing the incarcerated and detained populations in our target states means reforming the criminal legal system and immigrant detention system to create anti-racist, equitable, and life-affirming alternatives.

#### End the Incarceration of Children in Adult Prisons

- We are working to condition federal funding on requiring states to no longer confine youth in adult prisons and jails. Children are currently incarcerated in Louisiana's notorious adult maximum security prison, Angola State Penitentiary. These children face an increased risk of mental, physical, and sexual abuse in an adult prison. More than half the states have banned this practice, but 23 states continue to place children in adult facilities.

#### Eliminate Marijuana as a Driver of Incarceration

- We are working to pass legislation descheduling marijuana and include provisions aimed at remedying the collateral consequences of marijuana convictions. Marijuana is a significant driver of arrest and incarceration in the Deep South.

#### End Police Abuses and Policing for Profit, and Improve Transparency

- We are working in coalition to pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act and implement policing reforms to ensure oversight and accountability.



- We are working to implement the Death in Custody Reporting Act. Deaths in jails, prisons, and detention facilities are occurring at an alarming rate throughout the South. The problem cannot be addressed without reliable, accurate data.
- The corrupt practice of civil asset forfeiture incentivizes federal and local police to engage in policing for profit. We are working to pass legislation to end the federal “equitable sharing” loophole that allows state law enforcement to turn seized property over to federal officials for forfeiture for 80 percent of proceeds.
- We are working toward ending immigrant detention by reducing the government’s reliance on carceral facilities and addressing systemic abuses within them through *effective* federal oversight protections.

#### Reauthorize and Support Existing Reforms

- We support reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, with increased juvenile justice funding levels.
- We support increased funding for Second Chance Act grant programs and Reentry Employment Opportunities grant programs.
- We are working to increase funding for due process procedures to transform the immigration system from lawless assembly-line injustice to a fair consideration of each person’s case on the merits. We will work to ensure adequate access to legal counsel in immigrant detention by removing barriers for those who have counsel (such as the ability to have private legal conversations and contact visitation at every facility) and broadening access to counsel for those who cannot afford representation, including but not limited to government funding.

#### Voting Rights

Our democracy is in a crisis moment. There are efforts underway to undermine the voices of communities of color historically disfranchised and disempowered. As America's populations grow larger, younger, and more diverse, we must be vigilant in protecting voting rights and thwart attempts to silence their voices. We must strengthen our policies and laws to ensure a representative, multiracial democracy.

#### Protect Democracy and Secure Access to the Ballot Box

- We are working to pass voting rights legislation to restore and strengthen laws to end voting discrimination, guarantee equal access to the ballot, and ensure fair representation for communities of color. This legislation includes but is not limited to restoring and modernizing the preclearance provisions of the Voting Rights Act in jurisdictions with a history of enacting legislation and policies that

result in a denial or abridgment of the right to vote for racial and language minorities.

- We support increased funding for federal agencies to engage in activities designed to increase voter registration and expand and protect voting access.
- We are promoting increased federal assistance to states and work to implement safeguards to ensure that funding for election administration improvements is allocated based on need and population. Amid U.S. population increases, increased funding will allow localities to purchase voting machines, address staffing shortages, reduce long lines and waiting times at polls, and increase the number of polling place locations.
- We are working to pass legislation to restore the voting rights of citizens with criminal convictions. In three states — Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee — more than 8 percent of the adult population, one of every 13 adults, is disenfranchised.
- We are working to pass legislation to hold tech companies accountable for disseminating mis/disinformation that harms voters, particularly voters of color, and chips away at the foundation of our democracy.

### **International Human Rights**

Despite many recommendations from international human rights bodies, its allies, and fellow UN member states, the United States has never established a national human rights institution (NHRI) or similar coordinating mechanism to monitor and promote the implementation of its human rights obligations under ratified international treaties. The nation's failure to establish an NHRI is a global outlier, particularly among more developed, democratic nations and has greatly hindered implementation of treaty obligations.

### **Implement U.S. Human Rights Obligations**

- We will work to establish a national human rights institution to coordinate and monitor implementation of U.S. obligations under previously ratified international human rights treaties.

### **Eradicating Poverty**

The SPLC and the SPLC Action Fund seek to eliminate wealth-based discrimination by eradicating modern-day debtors' prisons, stopping the predatory profiteering of private companies in Black and Brown communities, and creating pathways for opportunity and prosperity. Our communities in the Deep South are still grappling with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and a series of natural disasters and government failures such as



the Jackson water crisis. We urge Congress to marshal the full resources of the federal government to eradicate poverty in our nation.

Ensure Access to Social Safety Net Programs for Families in Need

- We are working to ensure Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds reach the families who will most benefit. Congress must statutorily define “needy” to determine financial eligibility for TANF. Congress should also encourage states to provide direct cash assistance, invest in other areas to meet basic needs, lift income thresholds and asset limits for assistance, increase benefits with adjustments for inflation, remove barriers rooted in racism, and provide strong oversight of the funds distributed to states.
- We are working with lawmakers to expand the Child Tax Credit to alleviate poverty for the estimated 19 million children in the lowest-income families. It is a bold policy investment that can change the trajectory of the most vulnerable children and end the cycle of generational poverty.
- We support legislation such as the Ending Homelessness Act and the Rent Relief Act to bridge the gap between income and housing costs. Investing in the National Housing Trust fund will expand the supply of affordable housing for low-income households and provide housing rental assistance for every eligible household.
- We encourage Congress to establish a permanent version of the pandemic-era Emergency Rental Assistance program by creating a national housing stabilization fund. We support legislation such as the Eviction Crisis Act and the Stable Families Act.

While not an exhaustive list, focusing on the core issues outlined above will help move the country closer to the American ideals of equality, justice, fairness, and opportunity. Please consider SPLC and the SPLC Action Fund as resources as you explore effective ways to address these critical issues. We look forward to working with you during the 118th Congress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Margaret Huang'.

Margaret Huang  
President and Chief Executive Officer

**SP** **ACTION**  
**LC** **FUND**



LaShawn Warren  
Chief Policy Officer