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CONTACT:
Greg Wright
202.336.8324
gwright@naswdc.org

NASW opposes confirmation of Sen. Jeff Sessions to be next U.S. Attorney General
Sessions has dismal record on legislation and policies that protect civil and human rights

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) opposes the confirmation of Alabama Sen. Jeff Sessions to be the next U.S. Attorney General over deep concerns that during his tenure the United States could lose ground on important advances made during the past 50 years in civil and human rights.

NASW for more than 60 years has advocated for social justice and civil rights legislation and policies that move our nation toward being a more just and fair society.

Sessions' record, over the course of his career as a state prosecutor and federal legislator, is troubling to civil and human rights advocates. He has a record of opposing legislation and national policies that protect the civil and human rights of people of color, women, and people who are LGBTQ.

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), headed by the Attorney General, is perhaps second only to the presidency in importance in affecting domestic policy.

The DOJ oversees dozens of important civil liberties, criminal justice, national security, drug enforcement, immigration, and intelligence agencies, including the FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration, and the immigration courts. The DOJ is the primary agency charged with protecting the civil liberties of children, women, victims of crime, elders, and juvenile and adult justice-involved individuals.

Perhaps more importantly, the Attorney General has the potential to influence and advise the president on the use of executive orders and related actions that do not require congressional approval. Sen. Sessions' 30-year record, including his past and current statements, positions, legislative actions, and prosecutorial decisions, are reflective of a litany of dubious civil and human rights positions he seems to have embraced.

Thus, NASW must stand in opposition to Sessions' confirmation based on his record:



Appointment to a Federal Judgeship Rejected by U.S. Senate: The Senate in 1986 rejected President Ronald Reagan's nomination of Sessions as a federal judge after colleagues testified about racially offensive comments Sessions made as a U.S. Attorney in Alabama.

Voting Rights: Sessions led a 1985 effort to charge three Alabama residents, one of whom was 92 years old, with felony voter fraud for helping black Americans who were older vote in Alabama. The three were acquitted on all counts. Sessions famously stated that the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was a "piece of intrusive legislation" and voted for an amendment requiring a government-issued photo ID to vote.

Civil and Human Rights: Sessions in 2015 voted against Sen. John McCain's bipartisan amendment reaffirming the prohibition of torture. In 2013 he voted against the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act. He also voted against a bill that would have enabled broader federal prosecution of hate crimes, amendments to increase funding for Hispanic education programs, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Workers' Rights: Sessions was in favor of retaining a U.S. Department of Labor rule that would have stripped six million workers of the right to overtime pay. During the 2008 economic crisis, Sessions voted against the temporary extension of unemployment benefits. He has voted against increasing the minimum wage numerous times.

The Environment: Out of 220 votes on legislation involving the environment, Sessions has only taken a pro-environmental stance 15 times. He voted in favor of the Keystone XL pipeline and against an amendment that would have identified climate change as real.

LGBTQ Issues: Sessions voted for a constitutional amendment prohibiting same-sex couples from marrying, voted against an amendment prohibiting discrimination against LGBT students and voted against the Employment Non-Discrimination Act and repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

Immigration: Sessions was strongly against President Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (also known as DACA and DAPA) reforms. He also voted against the DREAM Act and the Senate's bipartisan immigration reform bill and called for the end of birthright citizenship.

Criminal Justice: Sessions has long taken a harsh stance on criminal justice reform. He openly says that the federal government no longer leads the way in reforms such as eliminating mandatory minimum sentences and does not support passage of the bipartisan Sentence Reform and Corrections Act. He has consistently argued that marijuana use merits severe punishment, claiming that "good people don't smoke marijuana."

In determining whether to support Sessions's nomination—and likely confirmation—to be the Attorney General of the United States, NASW reviewed his history in the context of this association's civil rights, human rights, and social justice priorities.

On behalf of the social work profession, NASW strongly recommends that should he be confirmed, Sessions must sustain the momentum in criminal justice reform and be willing to listen to the civil rights and social justice community on the need to strengthen monitoring of voting rights violations.

Sessions must also continue a collaborative and bipartisan effort to institute meaningful reforms in community policing, especially as it relates to use of force policies and procedures. Unless Sessions expresses willingness to have open communication with the community on these issues, we fear that his confirmation would jeopardize the many civil and human rights gains that have been achieved over the last 50 years.

Should he be confirmed, NASW will vigilantly observe the course of his tenure as the U.S. Attorney General and will speak out forcefully if there are shifts and reversals of policies and laws that the civil and human rights community have fought for decades to have implemented.

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The [National Association of Social Workers](#) (NASW), in Washington, DC, is the largest membership organization of professional social workers with more than 125,000 members. It promotes, develops, and protects the practice of social work and social workers. NASW also seeks to enhance the well-being of individuals, families, and communities through its advocacy.