



*The National Voice for Direct-Care RNs*

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Committee on the Judiciary  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Senator Jefferson Beauregard “Jeff” Sessions III (R. Ala.)  
Nominee for United States Attorney General

Dear Senator:

We write on behalf of the more than 150,000 registered nurse members of National Nurses United to urge you to vote against the confirmation of Senator Jeff Sessions, President-elect Donald Trump’s nominee for Attorney General. Much has been said by many others against confirmation of this nominee, so we will be brief.

Our members work as bedside healthcare professionals in almost every state in the nation. We work in every hospital setting, from small rural facilities to large urban public health systems, in prominent research hospitals affiliated with prestigious public and private universities, as well as Veterans Affairs hospitals and clinics. We care for Americans on every point of the demographic spectrum, at their most vulnerable. We provide the best care we possibly can, without regard to race, gender, national origin, religion, socio economic circumstances, or other identifying characteristic. That is what caring professionals do. Unfortunately, that is not what Jeff Sessions has done in his role as a public servant. And to vote in favor of confirming him as the chief law enforcement officer of the United States would abdicate your responsibility to provide the oversight necessary to ensure that basic legal rights are enforced evenhandedly and for the protection of all people.

As Senate colleagues, you no doubt know Senator Sessions’ record as a lawmaker, as well as his record as the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Alabama and as the Alabama Attorney General. It was, of course, his record in the U.S. Attorney’s office and his many publically verified racially insensitive comments that resulted in a majority of the Senate Judiciary Committee voting against confirmation for his nomination to be a U.S. District Court judge in 1986. This ‘no’ vote happened while the Judiciary Committee was majority Republican. Even Senator Howell Heflin, a fellow Alabamian, voted against him, citing “reasonable doubts” over whether he could be “fair and impartial.”

Senator Sessions has oft asserted that his comments over the years were taken out of context, or intended as humor. But his record tells the truth. Early in his career he charged civil right leaders (“the Marion Three”) with voting fraud related to their efforts to assist African American

voters. The fact that the defendants in that case were acquitted didn't deter Mr. Sessions. Later, as Attorney General of Alabama, he initiated another voter fraud investigation involving absentee ballots cast by black voters that, again, resulted in findings of no wrong doing. During that same timeframe, he was criticized for declining to investigate church burnings, and he "joked" that he thought Ku Klux Klan members were "OK, until [he] learned that they smoked marijuana."

Against that background, as one of your colleagues on the Judiciary Committee, Senator Sessions aggressively interrogated Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the Court's first nominee of Latino heritage. Further betraying a deep belief in natural division between racial groups, he grilled Justice Sotomayor about whether she could be fair to white Americans, despite her 17-year record as a jurist and having received the American Bar Association's highest rating. And he expressed grave concerns that she would engage in judicial "empathy" on the high court, favoring persons of certain races or ethnicities over others. He then voted against her confirmation.

Senator Sessions' prejudices are not only against people of color. As an organization representing a predominately female profession we are compelled to express our outrage that Senator Sessions defended Donald Trump's statements about grabbing women by the genitals, by saying that such conduct would not constitute sexual assault. The fact that he took a different position during his Committee hearing last week is of no comfort. It only shows that he will say whatever he believes will help land him in the seat of power to determine whether, and against whom, to enforce our laws. His comments last fall dismissing President-elect Trump's despicable treatment of women is consistent with his vote in 2013 against the Violence Against Women Act. As nurses, we see close up the devastating effects of domestic violence against our patients, and we are disturbed by Senator Sessions' alleged concern that the protection of that statute should not extend to victims of violence on tribal lands.

Moreover, confirming Senator Sessions to the job of the top prosecutor would exacerbate our national crisis over race issues in policing and our criminal justice system. He personally blocked the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act, a bipartisan effort spearheaded by Sens. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), Mike Lee (R-Utah), and John Cornyn (R-Texas), and Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-Wis.). The fact that law enforcement leadership throughout the nation supported the reform effort made no difference to Senator Sessions. And unfortunately, his actions as U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Alabama only further illustrate his indifference to this crisis. For example, drug convictions made up 40 percent of his cases when he served in that position — twice the rate of other federal prosecutors in Alabama<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/analysis-sen-jeff-sessions-record-criminal-justice>.

Despite the current trend of focusing resources on violent crime, and away from out-dated drug war policies, Senator Sessions continues to oppose any attempts to legalize marijuana and any reduction in drug sentences. As Attorney General, he could direct federal prosecutors throughout the country to pursue the harshest penalties possible for even low-level drug offenses, a step that would further exacerbate our national record<sup>2</sup> of incarcerating non-violent offenders — the vast majority of whom could be successfully treated, at far lower cost to society, with appropriate healthcare treatment.

Nor should Senator Sessions be trusted to ensure equal access to voting rights. He has publically called the Voting Rights Act “intrusive,” and has insisted that its proactive protections of racial minorities were no longer necessary. This is especially disturbing as Senator Sessions voiced public support for voter-ID laws, while his home state recently tried to close over thirty DMV offices, many in majority-black areas, shortly after instituting strict voter-ID requirements. We are reminded of the words of Coretta Scott King in her letter opposing Jeff Sessions’ nomination to the federal district court in 1986: “The irony of Mr. Sessions’ nomination is that, if confirmed, he will be given a life tenure for doing with a federal prosecution what the local sheriffs accomplished twenty years ago with clubs and cattle prods.”

We will not attempt to address all the positions Senator Sessions has taken that are out of step with the reality of the difficult times we are in, but as nurses we must include our grave concern that as Attorney General he would not be vigilant in enforcing environmental protections. In a July 2012 Senate hearing on climate science, Senator Sessions dismissed the concerns about global warming expressed by 98% of climate scientists, and asserted that this is “[a] danger that is not as great as it seems.” These positions are frightening. Climate change is a public health issue that cannot be overstated. As nurses we have been seeing for some time increases in the frequency and severity of respiratory diseases such as asthma, bronchitis, and emphysema, as well as an increase in cancers and aggravation of cardiovascular illness. The effects of air pollution are particularly acute in pediatric patients. They have higher respiratory rates than adults, and consequently higher exposure. Our elderly patients are also especially vulnerable. Respiratory symptoms as common as coughing can cause arrhythmias, heart attacks, and other serious health impacts in geriatric patients. As global warming progresses, we are seeing sharp increases in heat stroke and dehydration, both of which are sometimes fatal.

In our disaster relief work through our Registered Nurse Response Network, we have been called upon to assist the victims of Hurricane Katrina and Super Storm Sandy – events that many scientists believe would not have been of the magnitude they were if not for rising temperature.

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<sup>2</sup> According to the statistics released by the Federal Bureau of Prisons on December 24, 2016, available at [https://www.bop.gov/about/statistics/statistics\\_inmate\\_offenses.jsp](https://www.bop.gov/about/statistics/statistics_inmate_offenses.jsp), 46.4% of inmates in federal prisons are serving sentences for drug offenses.

Current and future generations cannot afford to have a fox minding the hen house on the important issues of civil and criminal protections under the control of the Attorney General. We urge you to set aside your personal loyalty to Senator Sessions and evaluate honestly his record and fitness for this critically important job. We urge you to vote against his confirmation.

Sincerely,

Deborah Burger, RN  
Co-President, National Nurses United

Jean Ross, RN  
Co-President, National Nurses United