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August 14, 2013

The Honorable Eric Holder
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Holder:

We write to commend you and the Department of Justice for working to preserve and protect the voting rights of all Texans. We applaud your decision to seek a "preclearance" requirement for Texas pursuant to Section 3 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

As citizens of Texas and members of organizations dedicated to working together to support equal treatment for all, we are proud to live in a state that includes Houston, the most diverse metropolitan area in the United States. We know that our diversity serves to support and enrich the quality of life of all Texans, and we all agree that safeguarding the right to vote is essential to maintaining a robust democracy in which everyone's voices and perspectives can be heard.

Texas has been a "covered" jurisdiction, required to preclear its voting laws with the federal government since the 1970's. When the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the formula determining which jurisdictions would be required to preclear their laws in *Shelby County v. Holder* in June, Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott announced within hours that a voter ID law and a redistricting plan, both denied preclearance by the federal government in 2012, would go into place. The three judge panel that had reviewed the voter ID law wrote of the law, "based on the record evidence before us it is virtually certain that these burdens will disproportionately affect racial minorities. Simply put, many Hispanics and African Americans who voted in the last elections will, because of the burdens imposed by SB 14, likely be unable to vote." With regard to the redistricting plan, the federal court denying preclearance in that case declared that plaintiffs had "provided more evidence of discriminatory intent than we have space, or need, to address here."

Unfortunately, as those cases make clear, discriminatory voting practices continue to this day in Texas. Minority populations in Texas, including African Americans, Hispanics and South Asians are detrimentally impacted by the redistricting plan and other voter disenfranchisement tactics. In your recent speech to the National Urban League Annual Conference, when you announced that the Department of Justice would ask a federal court to subject Texas to continued preclearance requirements, you said that "my colleagues and I are determined to use every tool at our disposal to stand against discrimination wherever it is found."

We applaud your determination to end discriminatory voting practices in Texas. We stand ready to work with you on this crucial endeavor, complementing the Department's efforts by using the tools at our disposal to ensure the right to vote to every eligible American.

Sincerely,

Amin Alehashem, Regional Director/Staff Attorney, Texas Civil Rights Project (TCRP) -Houston
Rishi Bhutada, Member, Board of Directors, Hindu American Foundation (HAF)
Terri Burke, Executive Director, American Civil Liberties Union of Texas (ACLU)
Roberta S. Clark, Community Director, Anti-Defamation League (ADL), North Texas/Oklahoma Region
Martin B. Cominsky, Regional Director, Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Southwest
Baldomero Garza III, National Vice President for the Southwest, League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
Renee Lafair, Community Director, Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Austin
Chuck Smith, Executive Director, Equality Texas
Yolanda Smith, Executive Director, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)