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APALA and SEARAC Oppose Executive Orders Signaling Intent to Fuel Mass Incarceration, Criminalization

Last week, the Trump administration released three new [executive orders](#) signaling the administration's intent to double down on "tough on crime" policies that have fueled mass incarceration and police violence for decades. The Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO (APALA) and the Southeast Asian Resource Action Center (SEARAC) strongly condemn the latest executive actions, which send the message that this administration intends to scapegoat and criminalize communities of color, including Southeast Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities, under the false pretenses of "public safety."

The executive orders call for the attorney general, former Senator Jeff Sessions, to set up a "Task Force on Crime Reduction and Public Safety," and empower Sessions to report on whether existing laws adequately punishes individuals who commit crimes against law enforcement, opening the door to tougher sentencing laws.

The Trump administration has repeatedly tried to stoke fear among Americans by claiming that violent crime has surged when in fact, crime in the U.S. is at an all time low. The 2014 murder rate was lower than at any point during a 44-year period since 1965, and increased only slightly in 2015.¹ The orders also threaten to worsen relations between law enforcement and communities they serve as police could exploit their power over communities with little consequence. Further, it counter acts recent bipartisan efforts to address mass incarceration through sentencing reform.

"It's not surprising that these orders came hand in hand with the newly confirmed Attorney General Jeff Sessions, whose track record shows his opposition to worker, immigrant and civil rights," stated APALA National President Johanna Puno Hester, Assistant Executive Director of the United Domestic Workers, AFSCME Local 3930. "These 'safety' task forces that are to be created will make our communities *less* safe overall. We're not fooled by these directives, and we will continue to resist, organize, and fight back."

"What's worrisome is the expansion of the police, military and prison state, where crimes--or those perceived to be--against law enforcement are more severely punished," stated APALA Executive Director Gregory A. Cendana. "The executive orders that seek to prevent violence against law enforcement represents an effort to institutionalize the misguided 'Blue Lives Matter' and 'All Lives Matter' platforms and could have disastrous consequences for our families and friends who encounter police whose power over our bodies will go practically unchecked."

Quyen Dinh, Executive Director of the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, added, "As a community of refugees, Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese youth are subject to some of the highest arrest and incarceration rates in states such as California. Our community needs restorative justice policies that nurture trust between vulnerable communities and law enforcement. Instead, the Trump administration has chosen to drive a bigger wedge between them. We call on Congress to reject baseless fearmongering and get back to work finding solutions that will make our communities stronger through new models of restorative justice, police accountability, and community healing."

For more information on our criminal justice work, please check out the "[A APIs Behind Bars: Exposing the School-to-Prison-to-Deportation Pipeline](#)" by APALA, SEARAC, Advancing Justice Los Angeles, Asian Prisoner Support Committee, and the National Education Association.

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¹ FBI Uniform Crime Report, <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2015/crime-in-the-u.s.-2015/tables/table-1>