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February 13, 2015

Larry R. Muncey  
Chief  
Madison City Police Department  
100 Hughes Rd.  
Madison, AL 35758

As a national South Asian American organization supporting communities at the local level, South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) writes to express its deep concerns with the inhumane and excessive use of force that Madison Police Officer Eric Parker used against Sureshbhai Patel on February 6, 2015. As a result of the brutal beating that he experienced at the hands of Madison police officers, Mr. Patel is partially paralyzed.

The police department has indicated that a “communication barrier” led to the use of excessive force. Yet no amount of barriers related to communication can excuse the use of unreasonable force and violence on a resident. Moreover, under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, police departments that receive federal funds are required to take steps that guarantee language access for limited English proficient (LEP) residents. It is vital that the Madison police department put into place practices and procedures that enable police officers to more effectively communicate with LEP residents.

In addition, the terrible tragedy that occurred last week has strained trust between law enforcement and members of the Indian community in Madison and surrounding areas. Mr. Patel’s son, Chirag Patel, understandably feels patently unwelcome in his community, as do many other South Asian residents of Madison, and indeed questions his decision to make the city his home. His remark to the media, “I’m totally devastated that I might have made a big mistake,” reflects his concern that moving his family to Madison for a better life may have been the wrong decision.

We call upon you and the Madison City Police Department to take the following immediate actions:

- Disclose current training procedures with respect to communicating and interacting with limited English proficient (LEP) and immigrant members of the community
- Disclose the criteria used by the police department to determine and respond to tips of “suspicious” activity
- Implement trainings for all police officers to more effectively respond to immigrants and LEP individuals
- Engage regularly with and conduct outreach to South Asian community members in Madison and surrounding areas to foster trust



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SAALT also encourages the Madison City Police Department to continue its relationship with local South Asian organizations, such as AshaKiran. These relationships are critical to ensuring that this case of police brutality is handled appropriately with the community, that this does not happen again in Madison, and that the police force becomes fully prepared to interact with and protect its residents, of whom one in ten speak a language other than English.

Sincerely,

Suman Raghunathan  
Executive Director  
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)

CC:

Vanita Gupta, United States Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights  
Aditi Hardikar, White House Office of Public Engagement  
Representative Mo Brooks  
Senator Jefferson Sessions  
Senator Richard Shelby  
Mayor Troy Trulock