



**STATEMENT TO FINANCE COMMITTEE OF COOK COUNTY BOARD OF  
COMMISSIONERS REGARDING FILE NUMBER 15-0712,  
SWEATFREE PROCUREMENT ORDINANCE**

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**April 29, 2015**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony today. My name is Ami Gandhi, and I am an attorney and the executive director of South Asian American Policy and Research Institute (SAAPRI), a non-profit, non-partisan organization established in 2001 to improve the lives of South Asian Americans in the Chicago area, by using research to formulate equitable and socially responsible public policy recommendations.

We are pleased that the Cook County Board of Commissioners is considering an ordinance advancing sweatfree procurement. SAAPRI is proud to join our partners at Chicago Fair Trade in urging Cook County to adopt this sweatfree procurement ordinance that will make a positive impact on garment workers around the world who sew uniforms and clothing purchased by the County with our tax dollars. Even though the vast majority of our apparel is produced in other countries, U.S. companies often claim no responsibility for its production because they work through subcontractors. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of workers earn unfair wages for long hours of work under poor conditions, in violation of international labor and safety laws. This unacceptable reality was glaringly revealed by a string of tragedies in recent years including the Ali Enterprises fire in Pakistan, as well as the Tazreen Fashions fire and Rana Plaza building collapse in Bangladesh. Over the course of only seven months, these three incidents – all of which could have and should have been prevented – resulted in the horrific deaths of over 1,500 workers and injured thousands more.

Speaking at the recent April 24 press conference announcing this ordinance, SAAPRI volunteer Fatema Zohara stated, "I am a Bangladeshi American community member and adjunct professor at College of DuPage. When I heard about efforts to pass anti-sweatshop laws in Chicago and Cook County, I was happy, because finally Chicago and Cook County are taking a stand against this type of injustice. I was also surprised because, to bring about such laws, it took thousands of preventable deaths in [Bangladesh and Pakistan]. Our South Asian community is diverse and includes business owners as well as low-wage workers, *but improving labor conditions benefits all of us.*"

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