June 17, 2016

The Honorable Mazie Hirono
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Hirono:

I am writing on behalf of the American Bar Association and its almost 400,000 members to express our support for S. Res. 373, which recognizes the historical significance of the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and expresses the sense of the Senate that policies that discriminate against an individual based on race, ethnicity, national origin, or religion would be a repetition of past mistakes.

It is sobering to recall that during the war every branch of our government—even the judiciary—justified the exclusion, forced removal, and incarceration of citizens and permanent resident aliens of Japanese descent as necessary for our national defense. This justification failed to distinguish Japanese Americans from the Japanese Empire, thereby turning every Japanese American into a potential enemy of the United States. It took decades for our government to admit that the systematic deprivation of civil liberties was a grave mistake animated by racial prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership.

The ABA concurs with you that Americans need to be educated about, and mindful of, this dark chapter in our history and the circumstances that gave rise to it. Your resolution is a reminder that our national experience has taught us that in times of crisis we must vigilantly guard against the dangers of overreaction and undue trespass on individual rights lest we betray our values and lose the very freedoms we are fighting to protect.

We commend you for introducing this resolution and urge the Senate to adopt it.

Sincerely,

Paulette Brown