

Statement of
The Honorable Benjamin L. Cardin

United States Senator
Maryland
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Senator Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD)
Opening Statement
Department of Justice Civil Rights Division Oversight Hearing
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Good Morning. Let me begin by thanking Chairman Leahy for asking me to chair this hearing today it is always great to welcome a fellow Marylander to the Senate Judiciary Committee. For more than 50 years, the Civil Rights Division has been charged with protecting all Americans against discrimination throughout our society. The Division is our nation's moral compass. As my good friend Ted Kennedy said, "civil rights is the unfinished business of the nation" and there is much work to be done. Whether it is discrimination in employment, education, housing, voting, personal liberties or hate crimes; the Civil Rights Division must take action and not stand on the sidelines against those that violate our laws.

The Civil Rights Division has a proud tradition of fighting to enforce antidiscrimination laws in the areas of voting rights, civil rights, housing, elections, employment, and hate crimes. However, during the last administration the Division had an alarming lack of civil rights enforcement and multitude of politicization; so much so that their own Office of Professional Responsibility and the Office of the Inspector General began independent investigations of the political appointees at the Department of Justice.

Year after year more evidence of corruption and lack of enforcement came to the surface. Between 2001 and 2006, the voting section failed to file any cases on behalf of African American voters. During that same time period there was one case - just one case - filed for minority vote dilution. In 2008, in the height of the economic downturn and housing collapse, the Division played no role in holding lenders accountable for discrimination. Disability lawsuits declined almost 50% under the Bush administration and in 2006, only 10 hate crimes were prosecuted; the lowest number of hate crimes cases brought in more than a decade. There is a lot to be done in the Civil Rights Division to restore its role in protecting civil rights.

When President Obama nominated Tom Perez to be Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, I was confident he would restore the Division to its traditional role. I was confident you would restore the morale in the Division because you came from the Division. You served for 10 years beginning as a trial attorney in the Criminal Section. Through the years, you moved up the ladder, first as a trial attorney and eventually as Deputy Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. So you knew the importance of setting aside political and ideological affiliations when hiring new attorneys. You knew from firsthand experience the need to ensure protections and legal recourse for those who had been discriminated against. For all these reasons as well as the leadership from Attorney General Holder and President Obama, I was confident that in your hands the Division would return to its roots of providing a voice for the voiceless, and help to

our most vulnerable citizens - because that is what civil rights attorneys do.

This administration is taking action and I look forward to hearing about what the Civil Rights Division is doing under your new leadership. Specifically, what types and how many cases have been initiated, filed and brought within the Housing and Civic Enforcement Section, the Fair Housing Section, the Criminal Section, the Voting Section, the Employment Section and the Disability section has done to enforce of our civil rights laws.

I look forward to the testimony today.