

Opening Statement of Debo P. Adegbile
Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing
January 8, 2014

Thank you Chairman Leahy for your leadership of this Committee, Ranking Member Grassley for your years of service to the nation, and thank you to all members of the Committee for your commitment to the important work of the Judiciary Committee. It is a great pleasure to serve as an attorney for the Judiciary Committee, and to do so alongside such talented and committed staff colleagues. I am deeply honored to appear before you today.

I am both grateful for and humbled by the President's nomination. I thank President Obama and Attorney General Holder for the opportunity, if confirmed, to serve the nation as Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights.

I am joined today by my wife, Susan Haskell, whose love, kindness, strength and patience both sustain me and encourage me to become a better person. I am joined as well by our two wonderful daughters, Sela and Devan. They brighten every single day for us, and Susan and I could not be any prouder of them.

I am also joined today by friends from grade school, high school, college, and law school, as well as by former LDF colleagues, and, of necessity, present colleagues. I thank them all for their attendance whether it was compelled or not. In addition, I thank all of those family and friends who could not be present today but have supported me throughout my life and career.

As the child of immigrants who came to the United States with dreams for themselves and later their family, I have a deep appreciation of the opportunities that America can provide. I know too that the road of opportunity can be long, winding, and challenging. At various points, in my life I have lived on different rungs of the socio-economic ladder. I have learned a great deal along the way and taken something positive with me from all of those experiences, and from the people whom I met along the way. I know from experience that that which binds is stronger than that which threatens to divide us.

In particular, I have benefitted from the transformative power of educational opportunity. I know firsthand that in our country, with the benefit of educational opportunity, steadfastness and a bit of good luck, the circumstances of birth or childhood need not limit your aspirations or achievements. If we keep our promises in America, where you start need not determine where you finish.

Because of my personal experiences, I have an unshakable belief in the value that we assign as a nation to protecting civil rights. At the outset, our Constitution sets as its goal building a "more perfect union", words that are both inspirational and aspirational. These words summon us to work to improve the conditions of liberty and equality within the framework of our system of government. Over time the United States Congress has taken this goal very, very seriously, and it specifically created the United States Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, and a wide range of laws to advance this cause. Other branches of our government, state and federal, many, many brave individuals, known and unknown, and public interest entities have advanced the cause of equality too.

The Civil Rights Division, through the statutes it enforces, is called upon to protect the liberty and equality of all us. And, over many decades, the commitment and expertise of the public servants in

the Division have dramatically and demonstrably improved our country. With hard work and persistence, we have made tremendous strides together. We are a stronger nation today for these efforts. If we are true to the aspirational goal that the Constitution sets for us, however, our past successes should not limit our future achievements. We can do more to protect civil rights, we must do more to protect civil rights, and the Civil Rights Division stands ready to protect the civil rights of all Americans. It would be a great honor, if confirmed, to contribute to the Justice Department's efforts.

Although I have had the opportunity to work as an attorney in a law firm, not-for-profit, and governmental settings, I have spent the better part of the last twenty years engaged in the work of civil rights. I have seen the impact that enforcing civil rights can have on real peoples' lives. Improved employment options, greater access to educational opportunity, removal of unnecessary barriers for people with disabilities, and ensuring fuller access to the political process, among other important efforts, makes lives more fulfilling. The work has been challenging, engaging and inspiring. Indeed, through the years I have learned that our civil rights laws have a common denominator – regardless of the specific subject matter, these laws guard the dignity of all of us.

If confirmed, I will commit to lead the Division with dedication to its mission, respect for those dedicated public servants who faithfully discharge its work, and with the sensitivity, fairness and integrity that successful civil rights work requires.

It is my great privilege to appear before you this morning and I look forward to your questions.

Thank you.