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The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Grassley
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Nomination of Debo Adegbile to be Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division

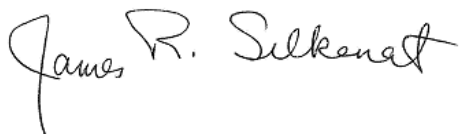
Dear Senators Leahy and Grassley:

As the Senate Judiciary Committee prepares to deliberate over the nomination of Debo Adegbile to be Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division, I write to address the criticism this nominee has received regarding the legal representation he provided to a death-sentenced prisoner.

A fundamental tenet of our justice system and our Constitution is that anyone who faces loss of liberty has a right to legal counsel. Lawyers have an ethical obligation to uphold that principle and provide zealous representation to people who otherwise would stand alone against the power and resources of the government – even to those accused or convicted of terrible crimes. The American people understand this obligation, and the corollary principle stated in rule 1.2(b) of the ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct that “[a] lawyer’s representation of a client does not constitute an endorsement of the client’s political, economic, social or moral views or activities.”

I was alarmed to learn that there is some opposition to Mr. Adegbile’s nomination based solely on his efforts to protect the fundamental rights of an unpopular client while working at the Legal Defense Fund. His work, like the work of ABA members who provide thousands of hours of pro bono legal services every year, is consistent with the finest tradition of this country’s legal profession and should be commended, not condemned.

Sincerely,



James R. Silkenat