

November 20, 2017

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley, Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein, Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Feinstein,

My name is Jessica Jones, and I am a transgender woman. Six years ago, in the summer of 2011, before I transitioned, I had the privilege of serving as an intern in the chambers of Justice Don Willett. My name then was Chris Jones, and at the time I identified as a man.

I had finished my second year at the University of Texas Law School, where I served as executive editor of the Texas Review of Law and Politics (TROLP). It was through TROLP that I had the opportunity to meet Justice Willett, who served on TROLP's advisory board.

Justice Willett was a frequent and popular guest at our student meetings and events. He spoke to us about his career in public service and the joys of doing what you love in the law. These were rare reminders of what matters in a legal environment that often emphasized big bonuses over selfless service. That summer, I had already lined up a paid position at a Houston law firm, but I yearned for a work experience more encouraging of my passion for politics. I had just finished a semester interning at the Texas Attorney General's Office. The logical next step was to go next door to the Texas Supreme Court where I could understand firsthand how judges resolved high-stakes legal questions. After I approached Justice Willett with my interest, he kindly offered me an opportunity to join his chambers staff as a legal intern. I eagerly accepted.

For me, the internship provided an opportunity to decide whether I wanted to clerk for a judge after graduation or go straight to a law firm. In one of my assignments, I worked closely with Justice Willett and his law clerks on editing his 100-page concurrence on *In Re Coy Reece*. This opinion urged the Texas Legislature to consider modernizing the state judicial system, including merging Texas' bifurcated high courts. It was a marvelous learning experience, substantively and procedurally, and one that convinced me I should apply for judicial clerkships after law school. After graduation, I went on to work for the Honorable Ronald B. King, Chief Judge of the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Western District of Texas. I now practice law at a small litigation boutique in Dallas.

I saw firsthand how Justice Willett doted on his three young children. Genevieve, the youngest at two years, was a regular and entertaining guest in chambers. She was and continues to be the apple

of Judge's eye. Justice Willett treats his staff in much the same way he does his children—with exceeding patience and goodheartedness. He took the time to lunch frequently with his interns, to mentor us on our post-law school plans. Perhaps because he came from such humble beginnings, he is driven to help others regardless of their circumstances. This generous, giving spirit is what characterizes Justice Willett.

Having worked alongside Justice Willett, I can say that he is a man of surpassing decency and kindness. I experienced his magnanimity up close, and it is unthinkable that he intended to disparage the LGBTQ community with his A-Rod or bacon tweet. I know Justice Willett, and speaking as a trans woman, it is inconceivable that he was making light of the LGBTQ community. The suggestion is at odds with Justice Willett's heart, whose kindness and decency are impossible to overstate. I legally changed my name and gender in March of this year, and Justice Willett has been a supportive friend and mentor regardless of my gender.

Justice Willett accepts all individuals for who they are and cherishes his friendships with those in the LGBTQ community. For me, he has gone the extra step to encourage me to make a difference, not just a living. He is precisely the sort of judge all Americans should want on the federal bench. I urge the Committee to act swiftly to confirm him to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Respectfully,


Jessica Jones