



April 16, 2024

**SUPPORT THE CONFIRMATION OF JUDGE REBECCA PENNELL  
TO THE U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON**

Dear Senator:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 240 national organizations committed to promoting and protecting the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, we write to express our strong support for the confirmation of Judge Rebecca Pennell to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Washington. The Leadership Conference intends to include your position on the confirmation of Judge Pennell in our voting record for the 118th Congress.

Judge Pennell’s impressive experience protecting the rights of all people makes her well qualified to serve on the federal bench. Since 2016, she has served as a fair-minded judge on the Washington State Court of Appeals. Prior to this, Judge Pennell was an attorney with Federal Defenders of Eastern Washington and Idaho. She also spent a year as a fellowship attorney with TeamChild, protecting the rights of currently or formerly incarcerated youth and providing them with needed resources. A graduate of the University of Washington and Stanford Law School, she clerked for Judge Robert Whaley on the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Washington. Judge Pennell is also dedicated to her community and has served on the board of directors of Federal Defenders of Eastern Washington and Idaho and the Yakima YWCA. Throughout her career, Judge Pennell has shown a strong commitment to equal justice and would be a tremendous asset to our federal courts.

Judge Pennell’s experience as a public defender will be a valuable addition to this court. Prior to becoming a judge, she spent most of her legal career with the Federal Defenders of Eastern Washington and Idaho, representing clients who could not afford an attorney and ensuring they had access to justice. Judge Pennell’s work as a public defender is particularly notable, as public defenders play a critical role in our legal system, yet they are vastly underrepresented on our federal courts. If confirmed, she would be only the second public defender to ever serve as a lifetime judge on this court.<sup>1</sup>

While serving as a public defender, Judge Pennell helped create two reentry drug court programs — the Sobriety Treatment and Education Program (STEP) — in Richland and Yakima. These courts provided support services to formerly incarcerated people with a history of substance abuse as they transitioned out of prison.<sup>2</sup> She also regularly trained Criminal Justice Act attorneys, who accepted cases from the court representing clients who could not afford representation. Judge Pennell’s career has been dedicated to

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<sup>1</sup> [Biographical Directory of Article III Federal Judges, 1789-present](#), FEDERAL JUDICIAL CENTER (Accessed April 2024) (Search includes all judges for the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Washington who listed “community defender,” “public defender,” or “federal defender” as non-volunteer work experience).

<sup>2</sup> [Sobriety Treatment and Education Program](#), U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Washington (January 8, 2024).



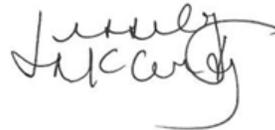
making sure people have access to qualified counsel and trying to strengthen our legal system, and she would bring much needed experience to the bench.

Judge Pennell will continue to be a fair-minded judge and is an excellent choice for this position, and we strongly urge the Senate to confirm her to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Washington. If you would like to discuss this matter further, please contact Lena Zwarenstejn, senior director of the fair courts program, at (202) 466-3311. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Maya Wiley  
President & CEO



Jesselyn McCurdy  
Executive Vice President of Government Affairs