

Felipe Rodriguez

*Via email to [Maggie Hopkins@judiciary-dem.senate.gov](mailto:Maggie_Hopkins@judiciary-dem.senate.gov)
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The Honorable Richard Durbin
Chair, Committee on the Judiciary
The Honorable Chuck Grassley
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, DC

RE: Nina Morrison's Nomination as United States District Judge

Dear Chair Durbin and Ranking Member Grassley:

Nina Morrison saved my life. She will be the best judge I could ever imagine.

In 1990, I was wrongfully convicted of a horrendous murder in Queens, New York. I was 24 years old at the time, working as a handyman, and had a baby son. The judge didn't really believe the trumped-up charges against me so I was freed on bail after I passed a lie detector test. The day of the conviction, I was taken into custody. Altogether I served almost 27 years. The real killer is still out there because instead of doing their job, detectives from the 104 Precinct in Queens framed me. My heart goes out to the family of the victim, Maureen Fernandez, and I pray every day for them to get the justice they deserve.

From the day I was convicted I did everything I could to get out. I wrote to everyone. I first contacted the Innocence Project in 2000. In 2002, they sent me a questionnaire which I filled out. Finally, on March 6, 2007, I was assigned to Nina Morrison as my lawyer. She answered my call. Once Nina was assigned to my case it was only a matter of time before the truth would come out. She put me in touch with investigators and interns. She studied the file, which was enormous because the investigation went on for 18 months before the cops got so frustrated they decided to frame me rather than solve the murder. Nina met with me countless times. She was patient, kind, understanding in a way that great judges always are.

She was also tireless. By 2014, we had exhausted all paths forward involving DNA evidence.

Normally, the Innocence Project would be required to close the case once it was clear that there was no DNA. But Nina thought outside the box. I did not want to apply for parole because people in prison always said the parole board will never grant parole unless a person admits he or she is guilty. So Nina convinced me to ask for clemency instead. Teaming up with attorney Zachary Margulis-Ohnuma, she wrote a brilliant letter to Gov. Andrew Cuomo, explaining in detail why she thought I was a candidate for a sentence commutation and, more importantly, why she believed I was innocent of the crime. It worked: I walked out of Otisville Correctional Facility on January 26, 2017. I reported to parole for a year, then was fully exonerated by Justice Zayas in Queens on December 30, 2019. Today, thanks to Nina, I am a free man. Since my release I have worked, gotten married and have the pleasure of raising two young men, the children of my wife. I have re-connected with Felipito, my son who lost his dad when he was only two years old. I count Nina and her beautiful daughter Anya among my most revered friends.

Here is why I think Nina would be a great judge. She knows how to listen. She heard my story like no one else could. She is patient and methodical. She went through everything I threw at her and organized it in a way that made sense, which worked to convince both the governor and the Queens District Attorney's Office that I was innocent and that my conviction was a terrible injustice. She is blunt and honest. She never told me anything that did not turn out to be true, she did not raise false hopes, but she did not give up on me either. She knows how to talk to all sorts of people. From intellectual debates with the other lawyers to street talk with witnesses, she could relate to everyone she needed to communicate with. She is brilliant. She quickly absorbed all the details of my incredibly complicated case.

President Biden was wise to nominate Nina Morrison to a district court judgeship. If you confirm her, the people whose disputes she presides over will be lucky to have her. The Eastern District will be just a bit more fair.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide further information about anything in this letter.

Sincerely yours,

Felipe Rodriguez