

The Honorable Dick Durbin
Chair
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
152 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

April 26, 2021

Dear Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Grassley:

We write to voice our strong and enthusiastic support for the nomination of Candace Jackson-Akiwumi to the United States Circuit Court for the Seventh Circuit, and urge her confirmation to the court.

Candace has had a diverse and distinguished career as a practicing lawyer in Chicago, and we have all had the opportunity to work with Candace as colleagues, co-counsel, opposing counsel or fellow leaders of the Chicago bar. We are a diverse group, including large law firm attorneys, former prosecutors, in-house corporate counsel, criminal defense lawyers, former members of the judiciary and legal advocates. We are unified in our support for Candace's nomination, as we know from our experience with her that she is a talented lawyer, a dedicated public servant, and will serve the court as a champion of justice and the rule of law.

These qualities of Candace have been evident from the earliest days of her career. As a lawyer at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher and Flom LLP, she exhibited the ability to address complex legal issues, respond to fast-paced litigation, and exercised mature judgment well beyond her years of experience. She was also an active participant in the firm's pro bono program, representing domestic violence victims, indigent litigants and criminal defendants; in fact, her first argument before the Seventh Circuit was as part of the court's program to provide representation for indigent criminal defendants on appeal.

Candace went on to a full-time career of criminal defense work, spending a decade as a staff attorney for the Federal Defender Program in the Northern District of Illinois in Chicago. While there, she represented more than 400 indigent clients, from investigation and indictment to trial to appeal. She continued to argue before the Seventh Circuit, appearing before the court a total of six times in her career. Throughout her career, she earned a reputation of working respectfully with co-counsel and adversaries alike, fostering the culture of collegiality and dignity that marks the bench and bar of the Northern District of Illinois. Throughout her service as a public defender, she was a vigorous advocate, a compassionate attorney, and demonstrated the commitment to justice that she will bring to her role as a judge on the Circuit Court.

Candace has also been a leader in the Chicago legal community. She has been an active member of the Federal Bar Association and the Black Women Lawyers Association, serving as a leader, mentor and advocate for justice.

In sum, Candace has demonstrated the legal acumen, judgment and dedication necessary to serve as an outstanding judge on the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals. In addition to her personal integrity and excellence, the experience she will bring as a former corporate litigator and public defender will expand the diversity so critical to the decision-making of a bench as important as the Seventh Circuit. If confirmed, she will be the only federal defender ever to sit on the court, and will be the only judge of color on the court. The Seventh Circuit is long overdue for diversifying the judges who sit on the court, and this nomination will start addressing this critical need.

We strongly urge the Committee to promptly review Candace's nomination and vote to confirm her appointment, so that the full Senate can promptly confirm her to the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. We are available to provide any additional information or to answer any additional questions.

Sincerely,

*References to law firms, corporations, or other institutions are for identification purposes only and do not constitute endorsements by those entities.

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