

February 14, 2022

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Chair, Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, DC

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, DC

Re: Nomination of Nina Morrison for United States District Judge

Dear Chair Durbin and Ranking Member Grassley:

My name is Jeffrey Deskovic. I spent 16 years in prison- from age 17 to 32 - for a murder and rape that I did not commit. My wrongful conviction, which occurred despite DNA tests excluding me from important crime scene evidence, was caused by a host of factors: a coerced false confession, improper forensic testimony, an inept public defender, and prosecutorial misconduct. I lost 7 appeals and got turned down for parole. In 2006, Nina Morrison, an attorney with The Innocence Project, took on my case. She secured the cooperation of the then Westchester County District Attorney Janet DiFiore for further DNA testing to be performed with advanced technology that enabled a search of the crime scene evidence from my case in the federal CODIS DNA Databank. The testing and DNA database match not only exonerated me – my verdict and life sentence were vacated and all charges were dismissed against me on actual innocence grounds on Nov. 2, 2006. But, importantly, the testing also led to the arrest and conviction of the actual perpetrator, whose DNA was only in the databank because while I was doing time for his crime he was free and killed a second victim three and a half years after killing the victim in my case.

Nina was one of my champions- without whom I would simply not be free. She communicated empathetically with me while I was powerless, in prison. She was understanding, and most importantly she helped me find justice, while working in the framework of the law- traits that would no doubt come into play should she be confirmed. Nina could clearly make a ton of money in the private sector, but she has instead chosen a life of service, freeing many other people in the same position I was once in. I see her nomination as a continuation of that trait.

Nina did not forget about me after I was exonerated. She has celebrated various social occasions and milestones for me as I have rebuilt my life over the last fourteen years, offering me advice and encouragement. She does that for many exonerees. Over the years, Nina and I have engaged in some deep conversations. She replies to my thoughts directly, commenting on them, and sometimes she verbalizes a point of view that I had not considered. I always felt understood when I have spoke to Nina. Again, I know that these traits that would serve her well on the bench.

Since my exoneration fourteen years ago, I have taken the negative that happened to me and turned it into a positive. I launched The Jeffrey Deskovic Foundation for Justice, a non-profit organization which has freed eleven wrongfully convicted people, using some of the compensation I received. While I was wrongfully imprisoned, I obtained my GED, an Associates Degree in Liberal Arts, and I completed an additional year towards a Bachelor of Arts before funding was cut for college education for prisoners. Upon my release, I completed my Bachelor of Arts in Behavioral Science from Mercy College. I went on to obtain a Masters Degree in Criminal Justice from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, with my thesis written on wrongful conviction causes and reforms. In pursuit of my dream of exonerating others as an attorney, I attended law school, and two years ago I became a lawyer admitted to the New York State Bar. Just like Nina has worked with law enforcement to obtain justice for her clients, I too have worked with law enforcement. For the last six years, twice a year I have co-taught ethics to police cadets at a police academy. I served on the Peekskill Police Taskforce Reform Group; served on the transition team of the then incoming Westchester District Attorney, helping to write memos about best practices for the Conviction Review Unit. I have served as a Continuing Legal Education instructor for groups of prosecutors, and I have spoken on several occasions at judicial gatherings, addressing a number of wrongful conviction related topics.

In closing, Nina changed the trajectory of my life. She embodies the best of what a lawyer should be, and has served as an inspiration and example for me in my advocacy work. I urge you to confirm her.

Best,

Jeffrey Deskovic, Esq., M.A.