

1 February 2021

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators:

This letter is in support of Kristen Clarke's appointment as Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice. Kristen became a member of Prep for Prep in December 1988 when she was thirteen years old. Prep for Prep is a non-partisan, educational, leadership development program that prepares and places New York City's most able students of color into independent schools and provides them with on-going support and life-changing opportunities. PREP 9 is the boarding school branch of Prep for Prep. Known for its community of highly intelligent and motivated students, its rigorous preparatory component which requires students to attend full-day classes for seven weeks in the summers before and after seventh grade, as well as on Saturdays during the academic year in between as they continue to attend public school, for assisting students in their applications to some of the nation's most selective independent schools, and for the support the program gives its students once they enter those schools. Prep for Prep has been extraordinarily successful in its forty-three-year history. Prep for Prep's motto is: Excellence, Integrity, Commitment, Courage. Kristen Clarke fully embodies those words, and she has endeavored to perfect her personification of them ever since we have known her.

Like all Prep for Prep students, Kristen was admitted based partially on an outstanding school record. Excellence was no stranger to her, but she adapted quickly to the increased demands of our classes and began to achieve at a level that would prove she understood what Prep for Prep meant by the word "excellence." Throughout her education, Kristen always strove for superior results. Seeing her record of

achievement, as well as her personal qualities, the admissions office of Choate Rosemary Hall eagerly vied for Kristen and they celebrated when Kristen chose them. Her record of excellence at Choate propelled her to Harvard, and her accomplishments there helped open the door at Columbia Law, but wherever she is, Kristen is always about excellence.

In addition to the values expressed in the words of its motto, Prep for Prep stresses the value of hard work. Because students who are admitted to the program have been blessed with superior intelligence, more often than not, they have outperformed all of the rest of the students in their public-school classes. As highly motivated as they are, Prep students have faced little competition in their previous academic lives. In order to succeed in the world for which we prepare them, however, they have to increase their effort significantly, and so Prep teaches that "being smart is not enough." As the child of immigrants, Kristen grew up understanding the value of hard work, but her experience at Prep for Prep compounded the lesson. Kristen demonstrated her diligence starting on the first day of her PREP 9 classes, and she stood out as someone who would never quit. As a student at Choate Rosemary Hall, Kristen's advisor once called her mother to say that he was concerned that her daughter might be working *too* hard. The typical Choate student takes five courses a trimester, sometimes four, and on the rarest of occasions, six. Kristen insisted on taking six courses every trimester, and it was that insistence that led to the advisor's concern. Needless to say, Kristen's mom brushed him off.

Once Prep for Prep students enter independent schools, the program keeps in touch with them, monitoring their progress, assisting with issues that might come up, and counseling them on negotiating their very wealthy, mainly white environments. As students advance in their grades, Prep offers them leadership opportunities. The mission of Prep for Prep is to develop leaders, the goal to nurture a generation of leaders. In Kristen's day this aspect of Prep for Prep had not yet developed into the full-scale curriculum of later years, but the program did provide leadership training to the students, usually juniors and seniors in high school. The training always started by emphasizing the importance for students returning to their local communities to begin their leadership trajectories. The notion of "giving back" was presented as an option, not a requirement, but for students like Kristen going back to work in and for communities of color seemed like an obvious conclusion to the Prep experience.

As a junior at Choate, Kristen went on a school trip to a Hartford courtroom to observe a desegregation case. She says that experience "lit the spark." Kristen's commitment to social and racial justice only grew during her years at Harvard which included a semester in South Africa. When she was a college freshman, Kristen joined the Black Students Association and there recognized an opportunity both to serve and to lead. As she saw it, issues of inequity and inequality loomed large for Black undergraduates, and most upperclassmen/women seemed reluctant to take up the challenge of trying to improve the situation for Black students. According to a close friend from PREP 9, a fellow student at Harvard, Kristen's peers recognized her brilliance, her determination, and her courage, and consequently elected her as President of the Black Students Association, giving her the rare distinction of leading such a group as a sophomore.

By the time she reached graduation, she knew that public service would become her life's work. Armed with acceptances from several of the nation's leading law schools, Kristen asked Prep for Prep for advice in making her choice. She approached this decision as always with a thorough examination of all factors, but she wanted our opinion. She worried that if she chose one over another, her loans would be larger and that she would need to work in the corporate world for some time in order to pay her debt. Clearly, such a course would keep her from her real goal which was to work in public service. We deliberated together and gave the best advice possible but there were no easy answers. Ultimately, Kristen chose Columbia Law. Given that she decided to work at the Justice Department as her first job after law school, she clearly had made the right choice.

Kristen achieved academic excellence throughout her life. She is a person of the highest integrity, someone who is so genuine and authentic that anyone who is sentient must recognize those qualities in her. Kristen committed herself to her life's work, to the cause of social and racial justice, from an early age, and she has never wavered in that commitment, even to the point of rejecting the high corporate salaries available to her when she received her law degree. She has demonstrated her courage in small and large ways throughout her life from her decision to join Prep for Prep, in spite of its demands, to assuming a position of leadership at a young age at Harvard, to raising a wonderful son as a single mother, first in New York and then in Washington, to accepting every challenge put before her throughout her legal career. Prep for Prep is justly proud of Kristen Clarke, an ideal standard bearer for our program. She is just the kind of student we set out to serve, just the type of leader we hoped to foster. We urge you to vote to confirm her as the Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice.

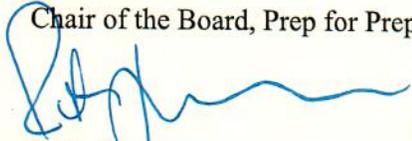
Sincerely,



Peter Bordonaro
Deputy Executive Director and
Director of Academic Programs
(Retired)



Lisa Cashin
Chair of the Board, Prep for Prep



Ruth Jurgensen
CEO, Prep for Prep