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July 15, 2024

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VIA WEB FORM & US MAIL
The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Pending Nominations to the Superior Court of the District of
Columbia and to the District of Columbia Court of Appeals

Dear Honorable Senator Schumer:

The Washington Council of Lawyers, founded in 1971, is a voluntary bar association that works to encourage pro bono service, access to justice, and the practice of public interest law. We are writing to express our concern about the ongoing judicial vacancies in the District of Columbia's Superior Court and the Court of Appeals. While we applaud you and your colleagues for recently confirming five local judges, we note that the Superior Court is still understaffed by eight judges (out of a full complement of 62), and that there are also two vacancies on the D.C. Court of Appeals. We urge you to quickly schedule votes on the eleven pending judicial nominees.

Judges are vital to our system of government and democratic ideals. Judicial vacancies adversely impact the operation of the District of Columbia courts and the timely administration of justice for people who live, work and do business in the District. When our courts lack a sufficient number of judges, the current judges and their staff are stretched beyond capacity, and litigants encounter significant delays.

These vacancies profoundly strain the courts' judicial resources. For example, a significant increase in divorce case filings increases the time for the court to rule on matters regarding critical issues for families, such as child custody, child support, and marital property. In addition, the caseload in the Domestic Violence Division has more than doubled in the last decade, and in 2023, there were only four judges assigned to 7,580 new cases. A full complement of judges is also vital for the adjudication of criminal, landlord-tenant, and other critical civil cases.

The current judicial vacancies at the Superior Court impair its ability to deliver speedy justice to many of our community's most vulnerable populations. For example, Family Court judges have jurisdiction over issues such as abuse and neglect, juvenile delinquency, and mental health matters. Efficient and effective adjudication in these matters is necessary to protect the District's children, and to provide appropriate services to individuals involved in these cases.

Finally, the D.C. Court of Appeals, our court of last resort and the highest court in our local court system is also impacted by judicial vacancies. A full complement for the Court of Appeals is nine; the Court is down by two judges. Of the two vacant seats, one has not been filled since 2013. As you may know, the Court of Appeals hears numerous matters on a variety of critical issues, including cases that impact businesses, the local economy, contractual obligations, and tort liability, to name a few. Without adequate judicial representation, the Court is less able to address the myriad legal issues facing our District.

We want to impart to you the urgency with which the Senate has to move to ensure the judicial vacancies are filled. We urge you to immediately schedule votes to confirm the pending judicial nominees without further delay.

Should you require any information, or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deborah C. Hill". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Deborah Cuevas Hill
President
Washington Council of Lawyers

We are joined by:

American Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists
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