



PRESIDENT  
RAKIM BROOKS

CHAIR  
PAULETTE MEYER

October 11, 2022

The Honorable Richard Durbin  
Chairman  
Senate Judiciary Committee

Dear Chairman Durbin:

On behalf of the Alliance for Justice (AFJ), a national association representing 151 public interest and civil rights organizations, I write to strongly support the confirmation of Justice Adrienne Nelson to the United States District Court for the District of Oregon. A seasoned judge with exceptional experience and deep ties to Oregon, she would also make history as the first Black woman to serve on the District Court of Oregon.

Even as a young person, Justice Nelson made a habit of pursuing justice and breaking barriers. As a teenager in Arkansas, Justice Nelson's high school unjustly bestowed the honor of valedictorian onto a white student with a lower GPA than her. Although she had earned the distinction, she became her school's first Black valedictorian only after her mother sued the school and students threatened to stage a walkout in support of her. Inspired by these events to help others and fueled by an interest in the rule of law, Justice Nelson graduated *summa cum laude* from the University of Arkansas in 1989 and earned her J.D. from the University of Texas in 1993.

Justice Nelson has experience in both public interest law and private practice, making her a well-rounded candidate for the federal bench. Before joining the bench, she was a public defender with Multnomah Defenders, Inc., litigated at a private law firm, and then served as a senior attorney in Student Legal and Mediation Services for Portland State University. As a demonstration of her commitment to justice for all, Justice Nelson also tirelessly provided pro bono representation in the areas of family, employment, trust and estates law throughout her career. This abundance of experience gives Justice Nelson important perspective as a judge, as well as the keen ability to understand how both parties to a case interact with the justice system.

In addition to her vast experience, Justice Nelson is a history maker. In 2006, she became the second ever Black woman judge in Oregon when she was appointed to the Multnomah County Circuit Court. In a testament to Justice Nelson's reputation as a fair-minded and knowledgeable jurist, Gov. Katie Brown elevated Justice Nelson to the Oregon Supreme Court in 2018, where she again made history as the court's first ever Black

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justice and the first Black judge to sit on any appellate court in Oregon. When she was elected for a six-year term the following November, Justice Nelson became the first Black woman to be *elected* statewide in Oregon.

Further, Justice Nelson's impressive experiences and dedication to justice aren't limited to her own career. She is also deeply involved in the Oregon legal community and works to uplift other demographically diverse lawyers. In addition to her engagement with numerous organizations, she currently serves as Chair of the American Bar Association's (ABA) Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Council, Chair of the ABA's Center for Diversity and Inclusion, and as the Oregon State Delegate to the ABA. Notably, Justice Nelson also has a deep commitment to fostering the future of the legal profession and of Oregon. She serves as a mentor to other Oregon lawyers in two separate mentorship programs. Additionally, a local chapter of the NAACP has created a scholarship in her name and in 2021, Adrienne Nelson High School, opened in the North Clackamas School District.

If confirmed, Justice Nelson will continue to make history as the first Black woman to serve in the United States District Court for the District of Oregon. A fair-minded judge, she understands the importance of the rule of law in the pursuit of justice. Her experiences as a public defender, private litigator, and judge make her aptly prepared for the District Court of Oregon and will bring important perspective and insight to the seat. For all of these reasons, I urge you to make the federal bench stronger, and to make history, by expeditiously confirming Justice Nelson to this seat.

Sincerely,

*Rakim H.D. Brooks*

Rakim Brooks  
President, Alliance for Justice