

March 1, 2023

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Chairman
Senate Judiciary Committee

Dear Chairman Durbin:

We, the undersigned organizations, write to express our support for the nomination of Judge Charnelle Marie Bjelkengren to the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Washington and to urge your committee to promptly report her nomination favorably to the full Senate for a vote.

Throughout her career as a dedicated public servant in Washington state, Judge Bjelkengren has worked extensively with state agencies and institutions, building a strong repertoire of administrative knowledge and a deep familiarity with the issues that impact the district to which she has been nominated. She began her career as an Assistant Attorney General in the Washington State Office of the Attorney General in Spokane where she represented the Department of Licensing, the Employment Security Department, and the Department of Social and Health Services. From 2004 to 2013, Judge Bjelkengren was assigned to the Administrative Law Division where, as a judicial review coordinator, she handled settlements, reviewed and edited briefs, and advised, mentored, and educated Assistant Attorneys General across Washington state. She handled more than 150 cases in superior court and the court of appeals.

After spending nearly fifteen years working as an attorney for the state, Judge Bjelkengren became an administrative law judge for the Washington State Office of Administrative Hearings in 2013. In that capacity, she presided over hearings involving multiple state agencies, including the Department of Social and Health Services, the Department of Children, Youth and Families, the Employment Security Department, the Liquor Control Board, the Department of Licensing, the Department of Labor and Industries and more. Judge Bjelkengren's dedication to public service, her reputation as a skilled attorney, and her experience as an administrative law judge garnered her statewide recognition. As a result, when a vacancy opened on the Spokane County Superior Court, Governor Jay Inslee appointed her to the bench. This elevation made Judge Bjelkengren the first Black woman judge in Eastern Washington.

In Washington, the Superior Court is the highest trial court level within the state. During Judge Bjelkengren's tenure as a Spokane County Superior Court judge, she has already presided over 130 jury or bench trials that have gone to verdict or judgment. She has handled both felony criminal jury and bench trials as well as complex civil jury trials and motions. Her cases have ranged from issues of statutory interpretation and state constitutional protections to criminal procedure and family law. She has also presided in an appellate capacity for decisions from lower trial courts and state administrative agencies. Overall, Judge Bjelkengren's experience as both an administrative judge and a superior court judge makes her especially qualified for the federal bench, where her skills and knowledge regarding a wide range of legal subjects will serve her well.

Out of the courtroom, Judge Bjelkengren maintains close ties to her community in Washington. She is a member of the Washington State Superior Court Judges' Association where she serves on the Equality and Fairness Committee. She is also a member of the Spokane Chapter of the NAACP and a member of the Spokane Valley Kiwanis Club, which is a service organization founded to assist children in need.

Indeed, her connection to her community is made clear by the breadth and depth of support her nomination to the federal bench has earned. Your Committee has received letters of support from every sitting judge on the Spokane County Superior Court, as well as the county clerk and a number of retired superior court and administrative law judges, from a former United States attorney, from the President and the Young Lawyers President of the Spokane County Bar Association, and from the Federal Bar Association of the Eastern District of Washington.

Judge Bjelkengren has dedicated her legal career to public service as an Assistant Attorney General, an administrative law judge, and a superior court judge. She is a seasoned judge with experience in administrative, criminal, and civil matters and has deep ties to the Eastern District of Washington. Notably, if confirmed, Judge Bjelkengren would be the first woman of color to serve on the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Washington as well as the first Black woman to serve on a federal District Court in the state of Washington. For all of the reasons stated above, we urge you to confirm Judge Bjelkengren to the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Washington.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Justice

Catholics for Choice

Demand Justice

Earthjustice

Impact Fund

NARAL Pro-Choice America

National Partnership for Women & Families

People for the American Way

People's Parity Project