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January 30, 2024

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

The Honorable Lindsey O. Graham
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

**Re: Letter of Support for Magistrate Judge Sunil R. Harjani's
Confirmation as United States Federal District Judge for the
Northern District of Illinois**

Dear Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Graham:

The Asian American Bar Association of Greater Chicago (AABA) strongly supports the nomination of Magistrate Judge Sunil Harjani to serve on the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois and urges swift confirmation of his nomination.

Judge Harjani has exemplified how hard work can pay off throughout his career and has overcome the barriers that have limited many Asian Americans from rising in the legal profession. According to a *Portrait of Asian Americans in the Law 2.0* (Portrait 2.0) published by the American Bar Foundation and the National Asian Pacific American Bar Foundation in 2022, Asian Americans remain grossly underrepresented in government attorney roles, particularly at supervisory levels. Judge Harjani has fought against this trend. Over 15 years as a government attorney, Judge Harjani rose through the ranks of the U.S. Securities & Exchange Commission and then the United States Attorney's Office to become Deputy Chief for the Securities & Commodities Fraud Section. Per Portrait 2.0, Asian Americans have also long faced barriers to joining the judiciary. As a magistrate judge since 2019, Judge Harjani has again fought against the tide and is at the forefront of a growing diversity within the judicial bench that better reflects the many communities that make up our district. Over the last five years, Judge Harjani has proven himself as an effective judge, and AABA is happy to support Judge Harjani in becoming a district judge.

Judge Harjani serves as a strong role model for the Asian American legal community. He understands the importance of being active and present in the Asian American legal community and focuses on mentoring and encouraging young lawyers to achieve success in the legal profession.

Judge Harjani also has a deep commitment to civic education of legal issues that Asian Americans have faced and actively facilitates building trust in the judiciary through his community work. For example, Judge Harjani was one of the organizers of last year's Asian American Heritage Month event at the district court in Chicago. The event featured a reenactment of two U.S. Supreme Court cases – *Ozawa* and *Thind* – where the Supreme Court denied citizenship to Asian Americans because of their race. Judge Harjani helped bring together all the Asian bar associations in Chicago to support this event along with the District Court and the Federal Bar Association Chicago Chapter, and the event had a capacity crowd of more than 200 individuals in the ceremonial courtroom. This celebration, which to our understanding is the largest event hosted by the Northern District of Illinois welcoming the Asian American community to participate, provided valuable education to the public about the discrimination experienced by Asian Americans under the law. It was well received by everyone who attended and covered by the local media. This event brought positive exposure to the district court to many who have had little to no interaction with the court beforehand.

The judiciary represents the epitome of justice in our country, embodying our country's commitment to the ideal of equal justice under the law. For the legal profession, judges also serve as role models, inspiring us to be the best lawyers we can be. Yet, for generations, the judiciary has not been reflective of our Asian American community, in the Greater Chicago area or generally across the country. It is our sincerest hope that the Senate will support continued growth of Asian American representation on the bench in our district, especially when it comes to particularly qualified candidates like Judge Harjani, who would be the Northern District of Illinois's fifth Asian-American district judge as well as its second South Asian American district judge if confirmed.

AABA strongly supports Magistrate Judge Sunil Harjani's nomination for United States District Judge and urges the swift confirmation of his nomination.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sang Yup Lee".

Sang Yup Lee
AABA President