

April 2, 2024

Senator Richard Durbin, Chairman  
Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
Hart Office Building, SH-711  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Lindsay Graham, Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
Hart Senate Office Building, SH-135  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Support for Judge Rebecca Pennell's Appointment to the District Court for the Eastern District of Washington

Dear Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Graham,

I am writing this letter in personal support of Judge Rebecca Pennell's nomination to the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Washington. As I learned while serving in her chambers as her judicial law clerk, Judge Pennell possess every attribute desirable in a judge, and is dedicated to the people of Eastern Washington.

I served as Judge Pennell's law clerk from 2020-22 while she sat as Chief Judge of the Washington Court of Appeals, Division III. The first thing that struck me about Judge Pennell was her intelligence and work ethic. While it is common for judges to outsource judicial opinions they do not want to write to their law clerks, Judge Pennell always insisted on being the one to personally pen each of her opinions. She always put the same level of thoughtfulness and care into each case, regardless of whether it was a *pro se* criminal appeal, or a lawsuit involving elite attorneys fighting over millions of dollars. In oral argument as well as in chambers, Judge Pennell treated parties and cases equally and fairly.

Judge Pennell's sense of fairness extended to the way she ran her chambers. She insisted upon a blind hiring process for her law clerks, requiring them to complete an anonymized writing assignment so she could evaluate their research and writing skills – the skills most important for the job – without reference to their race, sex, educational background, or other non-merit-based factors. This hiring process led her to having the best and most efficient chambers on the Court while I served for her. Despite living in Yakima, she traveled to Spokane (about a 200-mile drive) whenever possible to provide leadership and guidance to her chambers. Even when she could not make the trip during the pandemic, she held weekly zoom meetings to ensure she was available to her staff and did not become an absentee boss.

Beyond her chambers, Judge Pennell demonstrated her commitment to the people of Eastern Washington throughout her career. Eastern Washington is a rural District mostly comprised of farm and timberlands. It is viewed as a backwater by pretentious West Coast elites, and has more in common with Iowa than it does Seattle. Judge Pennell was born here in Eastern Washington, and despite her Stanford Law School degree opening the door to lucrative opportunities everywhere else, she chose to return to Eastern Washington to serve the people she grew up with. She did so for years as a Federal Public Defender, selflessly representing the lowest in her community in Federal Court to advance the interests of justice for all. As a Judge on the Court of Appeals, she always encouraged her law clerks to likewise remain in Eastern Washington to help enrich the practice of law here.

Outside her work, Judge Pennell always makes an effort to connect with her community as well. When I served as her law clerk, I recall one occasion where we went a youth outreach program in a poor part of Spokane to give a short talk about becoming a lawyer. I understand these kinds of outings are common for Judge Pennell in Yakima, and that she always does her best to make herself available to the people she serves.

Judge Pennell has all of the qualities one could hope for in a high office holder such as a Federal Judge. The Committee would be hard pressed to find a more qualified candidate in all of Eastern Washington, or one as committed to serving her people. For that reason, I ask the Committee to advance Judge Pennell through to the entire Senate, and for the United States Senate to confirm her without delay.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aidan Mathis', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Aidan Mathis