

March 5, 2024

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
Chairman

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Ranking Member

Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Graham:

As former law clerks to the Honorable Eric N. Vitaliano, United States District Judge for the Eastern District of New York, we write to offer our enthusiastic support for President Biden's nomination of one of our number, **Sparkle L. Sooknanan**, to serve as a United States District Judge for the District of the District of Columbia. Our group includes members with experience as private law firm attorneys, public defenders, in-house counsel, enforcement counsel, environmental lawyers, federal and state prosecutors, academics, appellate counsel, entertainment attorneys and many other roles in the legal community. Our professional experiences are diverse. But for the purposes of this letter, two things unite us.

The first is an abiding admiration and fondness for Sparkle Sooknanan. In a sense, the nomination that occasions this letter is not a surprise. Ever since arriving in the United States from Trinidad and Tobago, largely alone at age 16, Sparkle has succeeded at everything she has touched. From putting herself through St. Francis College (undergrad), Hofstra University (MBA) and Brooklyn Law School, maintaining a 4.0 average at the latter as a night student while working a full time job; to successive clerkships with Judge Vitaliano; the revered Hon. Guido Calabresi, United States Circuit Judge for the Second Circuit Court of Appeals; and Justice Sonia Sotomayor of the Supreme Court; to the Civil Appellate Division at the United States Department of Justice and law firm partnership at Jones Day; to her current position as Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the DOJ's Civil Rights Division, Sparkle has distinguished herself at every single step of her compelling career. Whether we got to know her up close as her immediate co-clerks, met her at Vitaliano clerk reunion events (which, typically, she volunteered to organize), or heard tell of this legendary clerk's journey from Judge Vitaliano himself, we have all marveled at what she has accomplished in each of the early chapters of her career in the law.

The second thing that unites us is an appreciation of what it means to have been a law clerk to Judge Vitaliano. It is in this respect that this letter may be of greatest use to the Committee. Although Sparkle has clerked for luminaries at every level of the federal judiciary, she has been nominated for the position of District Court judge. We can share that, with respect to her candidacy for that specific job, she has learned from the best.

To have served as a law clerk to Judge Vitaliano is to have received a yearlong education in fairness and work ethic, preparation and courtesy – all amidst the daily hustle and bustle of a trial court docket of hundreds of active civil and criminal cases in the nation’s largest city. Judge Vitaliano is a formidable legal mind whose background as a former state legislator generates a palpable and contagious respect for statutory text and legislative intent, and whose years as a state court judge and practitioner honed a remarkable instinct for practical solutions. As was perhaps previewed by his nomination by a Republican president with strong support from a Democratic senator, his time on the bench has been utterly devoid of partisan political considerations. He is a scholar by inclination and a Staten Island pragmatist at his core. He runs an orderly courtroom, but is forever courteous and kind, such that many of our fellow lawyers, upon learning for whom we clerked, almost reflexively remark that he is among the most pleasant judges in the region. All who appear before Judge Vitaliano are his brethren, and those lucky enough to spend time as his law clerks are family. Judge Vitaliano is also the picture of courage and perseverance, having only plunged himself deeper into his work amidst declining vision caused by glaucoma. Armed with specialized equipment and still working away at his desk on his opinions with classical music playing in the background, no one in the judiciary works harder to create a courtroom where parties and litigants feel seen and heard.

If judges model themselves after the jurists for whom they were fortunate enough to serve as law clerks, we can all expect Judge Sooknanan to become one of the leading lights of the federal judiciary before very long. She will bring a commitment to justice and the rule of law that mirrors that of her, and our, mentor. She will employ the same ravenous work ethic that fueled her meteoric rise. And her intellect and integrity will make her a tremendous addition to the District of the District of Columbia federal bench. We enthusiastically support and celebrate her nomination, and urge her swift confirmation.

Respectfully Submitted,

Martin S. Bell
Law Clerk to Judge Vitaliano, 2007-08

Tracy Chin
Law Clerk to Judge Vitaliano, 2008-09

Nicholas Connor
Law Clerk to Judge Vitaliano, 2014-15

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Law Clerk to Judge Vitaliano, 2014-15

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Law Clerk to Judge Vitaliano, 2011-12

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Law Clerk to Judge Vitaliano, 2006-07

Scott J. Woods
Law Clerk to Judge Vitaliano, 2022-23