

March 19, 2024

United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: The Nomination of Ms. Sparkle Sooknanan to the United States District Court for the District of Columbia

Dear Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Graham, and Committee Members:

On behalf of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (“LDF”), I write to express LDF’s support for the nomination of Sparkle Sooknanan to serve as a judge on the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

Founded in 1940 by Thurgood Marshall, LDF is the country’s first and foremost civil rights law organization. Through litigation, advocacy, and public education, LDF seeks structural changes to expand democracy, eliminate disparities, and achieve racial justice in a society that fulfills the promise of equality for all Americans.

Ms. Sooknanan’s professional record demonstrates that she is well qualified to serve as a federal district court judge. Ms. Sooknanan has demonstrated an exceptional work ethic. She put herself through Brooklyn Law School at night while working a full-time job during the day. An immigrant to the United States, Ms. Sooknanan graduated summa cum laude from law school, while also serving as president of Moot Court and an editor on the Law Review, and winning her law school’s highest academic award. Ms. Sooknanan then worked at the Justice Department as a staff lawyer in the Civil Division and clerked at all three levels of the federal judiciary, including for Justice Sonia Sotomayor.

Following her clerkships, Ms. Sooknanan worked as an associate at the global law firm Jones Day before eventually becoming a partner there. One of the few women of color partners at the firm, Ms. Sooknanan maintained an extensive pro bono docket of impactful litigation. Over six years, she spent more than 3,000 hours on pro bono (or 34% of her hours overall) and was named to the District of Columbia Courts’ Capital Pro Bono Honor Roll with High Honors every year while in private practice. Such pro bono representation plays an important role in bringing legal resources to underserved communities.

One notable case was Ms. Sooknanan’s representation of members of the Charlottesville City Council who were sued in their personal capacities for voting to remove the Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson statues in Charlottesville, Virginia. The plaintiffs invoked state laws that they claimed protected the statues as war memorials

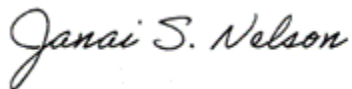
and entitled them to recover damages and significant attorneys' fees from the City Councilors. Ms. Sooknanan's team argued that the hostile message conveyed by the statues violated the equal protection clause. Ultimately, the court dismissed the plaintiffs' claims against the City Councilors on immunity grounds. Claims against the City itself were later decided by the Virginia Supreme Court, with the City prevailing. See *Payne v. City of Charlottesville*, No. CL17000145-00 (Va. Cir.) (Moore, J.), *rev'd and vac'd*, *City of Charlottesville v. Payne*, 299 Va. 515, 520, No. 200790 (Va. Supreme Court).

Ms. Sooknanan has also contributed significantly in the area of indigent defense, representing multiple criminal defendants at the trial and appellate levels on a pro bono basis. She has taken on complex criminal cases in D.C. Superior Court and in the federal district court in D.C., litigating complicated procedural and substantive issues and providing excellent representation. Ms. Sooknanan has also argued pro bono criminal appeals in the Sixth and Seventh Circuits, and was actively involved in Jones Day's pro bono immigration practice.

Ms. Sooknanan returned to government service in January 2021 as Deputy Associate Attorney General. She today serves as the Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General of the Civil Rights Division—the Division's second highest ranking official. As LDF's history shows, this country faces great challenges in the ongoing struggle to achieve equal justice for all. In both of these roles, Ms. Sooknanan has helped lead the Justice Department's response to these issues, including assisting with the management of the Division's civil and criminal litigation docket.

LDF strongly believes that our country is strengthened by a judiciary that reflects the full professional and demographic diversity of the people our courts are called upon to serve. Ms. Sooknanan's confirmation will further that important goal. We urge the Committee to swiftly advance Ms. Sooknanan's nomination.

Sincerely,



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