

CONGREGATION

# B'NAI JACOB

We are family.  
We are community.

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RABBI  
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December 4, 2023

The Honorable Dick Durbin, Chairman  
U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary Member  
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lindsey Graham, Ranking  
U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary Member  
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

**VIA EMAIL**

**Re:** *Nomination of Ms. Nicole Berner for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit*

Dear Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Graham,

We are fifteen rabbis writing on behalf of Nicole Berner who has been nominated by President Biden to the US Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit.

In various ways, we have enjoyed deep and important relationships with Nicole – several of us have known her for decades – from the time she was trained to lead youth tours of Israel after college graduation or after that when she directed an organization in Tel Aviv to protect women and children from domestic violence. Some of us have known Nicole from the period she was in law school at Berkeley and served as a Board Member of Hillel. Some of us have served as her congregational rabbi, where she has always played an important role as a congregant, leading services and teaching in our religious schools. All of us know of Nicole's work through her deep involvement in Jewish social justice work. Together we represent rabbis from a variety of settings across multiple denominations and four decades of Nicole's life. What we all have in common is that we admire and adore Nicole – for her heart and her passion and her deep commitment to others; she epitomizes the Jewish values we all hold dear in every aspect of her life. We revere Nicole for the work she has done at SEIU and in faith-based coalitions together working on issues of economic justice, voting rights, and immigrant rights. We also admire and respect Nicole for being a wonderful mother and devoted friend and community member.

Our diversity notwithstanding, we speak with one voice: we believe Nicole would be an outstanding choice for the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit. Throughout her life, Nicole has dedicated herself to the value of Tikkun Olam, or repairing the world. She was steeped in this value in her childhood home and her synagogue youth group, and from that time forward it has been her north star. Throughout her distinguished career, she has fought for women's healthcare, particularly for poor and at-risk women, as well as for American workers, particularly women and people of color. She has ensured that the voices of these otherwise under-represented Americans be heard and that their stories be told.

Nicole knows from her own life experience what it means to stand outside the mainstream, to be other. Our Torah knows of no more important commandment than its injunction not to oppress the stranger because we were slaves in Egypt, because we know the heart of the stranger. We can hardly think of a person who has internalized that ethic more fully, who has made it her life work to see that those on the margins are given voice, equity and justice.

As a working mother of three, Nicole has always juggled the responsibilities of childrearing and a demanding career. Through it all, however, we have admired Nicole's ability to remain level-headed and even-tempered. She listens deeply and always gives full consideration to the views of others, even or especially when they differ from her own. When she ultimately voices her own view, it is always measured and well-considered. These qualities, in addition to her outstanding work ethic, deep intelligence, kindness, and her commitment and dedication to values of justice for all, will make her an outstanding judge.

Our tradition teaches that the "crown of a good name" exceeds all of life's achievements. We believe that this appellation is meant to apply to a person of integrity, a person who consistently and courageously acts on what they believe, a person for whom there is no dissonance between outward appearance and action and inner constitution, a person of sterling character who is consistently able to discern what is right. Nicole is such a person.

For these reasons, we urge you to pass her name on to President Biden for nomination to the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Rachel Ackerman  
Temple Shalom  
Chevy Chase, MD

Rabbi Fred Scherlinder Dobb  
Adat Shalom, Reconstructionist Congregation  
Bethesda, MD

Rabbi Michael Feshbach  
Congregation Beth Israel  
Northfield, NJ

Rabbi Lauren Holtzblatt  
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