

OFFICE OF THE DEFENDER GENERAL

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Matthew F. Valerio, Defender General

June 7, 2024

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin, Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
711 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Linsey Graham, Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
211 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Support for Attorney Mary Kay Lanthier's appointment to the United States District Court for the District of Vermont

Dear Senate Judiciary Committee Members:

I am writing to enthusiastically support Attorney Mary Kay Lanthier for the position of United States District Judge Court for the District of Vermont.

Attorney Lanthier was a part-time public defender in Addison County when I was first appointed Defender General in 2001. At that time she had been working as a public defender in the system for three years after completing her Vermont trial court clerkship and two years in a general practice law firm. In 2003 Attorney Lanthier left the state public defense staff office to work for a general practice firm with a contract with the Defender General's office before returning to the state system in 2006. When she returned to the state public defense system I made her managing attorney of the Rutland County office, and she has been there ever since.

During her tenure in the public defense system, Attorney Lanthier has been the attorney I turned to most often to fill committee positions created by the Vermont Legislature, the Vermont Supreme Court, or the Executive Branch on substantive law, rules, and ethical issues representing the Office of the Defender General.

I have known Attorney Lanthier for more than 23 years. She was always extraordinarily intelligent, personable, and passionate about her work. She has been a tremendous lawyer for the public defense system and brought great experience from private practice with her to the system. I know her husband and her kids. I have attended many American Legion Baseball games together with her and her family, as our sons played on the same team for years.

In coming to know Attorney Lanthier over the years, it is apparent that she has a special gift for evaluating issues and people in the course of her legal practice and policy work. She is uniquely empathetic to the concerns of clients, witnesses, victims, prosecutors, law enforcement, and the general public while ultimately respecting the paramount importance of the rule of law in our constitutional system.

Attorney Lanthier and I had a mutual client who was a terrible alcoholic. He was occasionally transient, but always around town. At one time he was a business owner, a musician, and always a very hard worker. But alcohol had gotten ahold of him. I would see him around town in Rutland, Vermont, sometimes on cold rainy days and sometimes in the dead of winter. I would routinely pick him up and give him a ride to somewhere warm. Without fail every time I picked him up, he would thank me for “giving him Mary Kay” to handle his relatively minor criminal legal concerns because, in my current position, I was unable to do that. He would say that she was the only person who understood what he was going through.

He would say to me, “I’m doing okay because I know that at least two people in the world care for me, you and Mary Kay.”

Our mutual client was killed in a hit-and-run accident a couple of years ago trying to walk to town to get some groceries. I spoke to Mary Kay and we lamented that our criminal justice and social justice system ultimately could not help our friend and client. She saw all sides of this client – the defendant, the alcoholic, the citizen, the businessman, the musician, the victim – and truly believed before he died that our criminal justice system provided a chance to turn his life around.

What was important is that Attorney Lanthier saw the client in the context of the greater justice system, but never failed to see him as a human being first.

When Attorney Lanthier came back to the public defense system in 2006 from a three-year hiatus in private practice, I appointed her to be the managing attorney of the Rutland County public defender office. That office had gone through some turmoil internally with very difficult personalities, together with significant change as the County was developing the State’s first drug court. She was the perfect selection to make the changes that were necessary to make the office a cohesive unit that worked together by consensus.

Attorney Lanthier was similarly successful in engaging with the Rutland County judges and court staff and worked closely with the State’s Attorney’s Office, the court, law enforcement, and other community stakeholders to try to improve access to justice in Rutland County, always centering the needs of the Public Defender clients – including expertly pivoting to adjust the systems of the office during the first year of the pandemic.

It is particularly notable that Attorney Lanthier was able to engage with community partners and constituencies in a way that was positive and inclusive. Her attendance, participation, and leadership at community meetings with underrepresented and often marginalized citizens and organizations advanced the interests of fair access to justice for those groups and improved the standing of our office in the community.

Attorney Lanthier demonstrated an easy confidence and ability to engage with a wide range of people, gain their trust, and support them to do their best in whatever their role. She has the ideal temperament and experience for the bench and should be a highly regarded candidate for the position.

It is a great honor and privilege to write to you on behalf of Attorney Mary Kay Lanthier. Thank you for considering my recommendation. I am confident that Attorney Lanthier will continue to serve the citizens with honor and distinction as a Judge for the United States District Court for the District of Vermont.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew Valerio". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Matthew" and last name "Valerio" clearly distinguishable.

Matthew F. Valerio,
Vermont Defender General