



MICHAEL S. STEELE

LT. GOVERNOR OF MARYLAND  
2003-2007

February 22, 2021

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin  
Chairman  
Committee on the Judiciary  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley  
Ranking Member  
Committee on the Judiciary  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Grassley:

I am writing in strong support of the nomination of Kristen Clarke to serve as the Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division at the U.S. Department of Justice. I have come to know Ms. Clarke during her tenure as the President and Executive Director of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (Lawyers' Committee), and I have found that she is an exemplary lawyer and national leader, focused on the advancement of justice and committed to working in partnership with groups from across the ideological spectrum. Her willingness to engage and work with people regardless of partisan affiliation is precisely what makes her uniquely qualified to serve in this critical role.

As the former Lieutenant Governor of Maryland, I worked closely with then-Governor Robert Ehrlich to address one of the most critical issues in education—the failure to provide adequate funding and equal educational opportunities for students at Maryland's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). By 2000, the State of Maryland entered into a settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights to bring our state into compliance with what had been settled law since *Brown v. the Board of Education*: the state cannot operate separate and unequal schools.

For over a decade, the Lawyers' Committee has represented the Coalition for Equity and Excellence in Maryland Higher Education, who are graduates from Morgan State University, Coppin State University, Bowie State University, and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, as well as students and faculty from these HBCUs, a case that is being handled by the Lawyers' Committee. The way that Ms. Clarke led the Lawyers' Committee work on this issue was holistic and thoughtful, and ended up uniting people across our state in a shared commitment to adequately fund our state's HBCUs. I strongly believe that she will bring this same empathetic, thoughtful, and open leadership to enforcing our nation's civil rights laws in communities like mine across the country.

February 22, 2021

Page Two

Indeed, that commitment to bringing people together to work on advancing justice and equality is evident in Ms. Clarke's leadership in advocating for re-authorization of the Voting Rights Act. During the last re-authorization in 2006, Ms. Clarke worked closely with other voting rights attorneys and advocates to assemble an impressive bi-partisan coalition that ultimately resulted in overwhelming passage by both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate—including a 98-0 vote in favor in the Senate. On so many issues that I have discussed with her, she always looks for opportunities to forge common ground, and to bring different communities of people closer together while tackling our nation's thorniest challenges of inequality. I know that she will bring that same unifying leadership to the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, and that our nation will be stronger and more cohesive with her strong and steady hand guiding the work.

I strongly support Ms. Clarke's nomination to lead the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice and look forward to celebrating the historic nature of her confirmation in the coming weeks.

Thank each of you for your continued leadership and service to our nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Steele". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Michael Steele