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Former Senator

Puerto Rico Senate 2017-2021 | 2013-2016

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The Honorable Dick Durbin
Chair, Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
711 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Confirmation of Judge Gina R. Méndez-Miró to the U.S. District Court

Dear Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Grassley:

I hope this letter finds you well.

I am proudly writing in support of the confirmation of Gina R. Mendez-Miró to the U.S. District Court for the district of Puerto Rico, therefore it seems relevant that you know some about me.

I am a retired U.S. Air Force Officer, who served as a combat pilot in two combat tours in Vietnam, followed by a judge advocate appointment (1976-1988). I am the proud holder of a Purple Heart, a Silver Star and an Airman's Medal for Heroism, among other medals.

After the Air Force I joined the Department of Justice, Washington, D.C. as a trial attorney stateside, and as an assistant USA attorney (AUSA), for the District of Puerto Rico, under General William P Barr (1992) and General Janet Reno (1998), (1992–2001 full term). During the 10 years

I served as an AUSA, my main role was as violent crime and drug trafficking prosecutor. In 2001 I was invited to serve the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico by Governor Sila M. Calderón, occasion upon which I resigned to the DOJ. Under Gov. Calderón, I became the Executive Director

of the Ports Authority (2001), Superintendent of the Puerto Rico Police Department (2002), and Secretary of Corrections and Rehabilitation (2002-2008).

In 2013 I served as Senator for the Puerto Rico Legislature until 2020, when I withdrew from electoral politics.

Enough about me.

I feel proud to support Judge Mendez-Miró's candidacy to the U.S. District Court of Puerto Rico. She is a smart, dedicated, responsible, and demonstrably fair person. What else can be said about a candidate to this honorable judicial position?

What follows forms the basis of my opinion:

Judge Méndez-Miró's stellar credentials and diverse legal experience make her an exceptional candidate to serve on the federal judiciary. From the outset of her career as a law firm associate to her high-level leadership in all three branches of state government, as well as her time on the bench, she has consistently demonstrated a commitment to the rule of law, equal justice, and fairness.

I came to know Judge Méndez-Miró when she was the Chief of Staff of the Puerto Rico Senate, and I was serving my first term as Senator from 2013 to 2016. During that period, I served as Chairman of the Puerto Rico Senate Judiciary, Ethics, Veterans, and Security Committees, and her work as policy and legal advisor was instrumental for drafting, presenting, and approving some of the most significant pieces of legislation of the administration regarding the justice system and equal rights for the most vulnerable populations.

Moreover, I would like to emphasize her extraordinary work towards a historic criminal justice reform in Puerto Rico. As Co-Chair of the the Permanent Joint Commission for the Revision of the Penal Code of the Legislative Assembly, I worked closely with her to introduce Senate Bill 1210, which was perhaps the most relevant piece of legislation presented by the Puerto Rican government regarding the criminal justice system. Among other things, she played a leading role in putting together a team of renowned jurists like criminal law experts Dora Nevares and Luis E. Chiesa to temper the Puerto Rican Penal Code to social realities and our constitutional mandate of rehabilitation. In addition to her substantive work and demonstrated passion and knowledge of criminal law, while drafting this letter, I remembered my multiple conversations with her regarding the legislative proposal and how difficult it would be to pass such legislation. Yet, her diplomacy, eloquence, skill as a consensus builder, and keen legal intellect were key to present and explain the bill to legislators. Without her presence, dedication and hard work—even overextending hours—it would have been impossible to convince senators and representatives that the reform was necessary. The legislation was approved, and a new Penal Code was adopted as Act No. 246-2016.

But, her work pushing for major reform did not stop there, we also worked together to present Senate Bill 1710 seeking to adopt a new civil code and introduce modern legal concepts that would impact the life and rights of Puerto Rican society. Throughout her work in the Senate, she also

advised on other civil and criminal justice legislation, ethics investigations, executive and judicial appointments, education, and energy reforms, among others, always demonstrating to be a sharp attorney, with people skills and most importantly, a deep social conscience of the impact of the law in people's lives.

Based on my experience and first-hand knowledge of Gina's strengths and capabilities, it was not difficult for me to recommend her nomination as judge to the Puerto Rico Court of Appeals in 2016. As Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, it was my honor to present her credentials on the floor and share with fellow Senators a favorable report of the nomination that included extensive recommendations and validation of her experience and qualifications from respected jurists of the likes of now First Circuit Court of Appeals Judge, Hon. Gustavo A. Gelpí, U.S. District Court for the District of Puerto Rico Judge, Hon. Pedro A. Delgado Hernández, former Chief Justices of the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico, among many more.

After six years in the state appellate bench, we have reconfirmed that she was always meant to be a judge. Since her appointment, Judge Méndez-Miró has authored over seven hundred opinions involving a wide variety of legal issues. Her rulings reflect a fair and impartial jurist with an abiding commitment to equal justice, no matter the litigants before her. To my particular interest, as former Superintendent of the Puerto Rico Police Department and Secretary of the Puerto Rico Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, I have noted her sincere concern for access to justice for indigent self-represented litigants —specially inmates— and a much-needed emphasis on rehabilitative measures and fair treatment, as opposed to stigmatizing criminals in the revolving door of the penal system.

Gina is built for civic duty, public service, and social justice. Her commitment is unmistakable when you talk with her and especially when you review her work as an attorney and judge. Her impressive career is due to competency coupled with a high work ethic derived from her passion for justice. I can attest to the value she would add to the federal judiciary both, from a legal and substantive standpoint and personally, as she possesses the highest standard of empathy and integrity, that commands my trust, confidence, and respect.

In addition to all the above, Judge Méndez-Miró would bring critical diversity to the Puerto Rico District Court and to the federal judiciary. Given her exemplary qualifications, I wholeheartedly recommend her nomination to the U.S. District Court for the District of Puerto Rico and urge the members of the Committee on the Judiciary and the Senate to confirm her without delay.

Respectfully,



Miguel A. Pereira-Castillo
Attorney at Law