



April 13, 2021

The Honorable Richard Durbin, Chairman
Senate Judiciary Committee
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Grassley, Ranking Member
Senate Judiciary Committee
152 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: NOMINATION OF KRISTEN CLARKE FOR ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

Dear Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Grassley,

On behalf of the National Panhellenic, comprised of over 2.5 million predominantly African American, college-educated members representing nine Black Greek Letter Organizations (Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc., Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc., Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Inc., Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc., Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Inc., Iota Phi Theta Fraternity Inc.), we urge you to support the nomination of Kristen Clarke to be Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Justice.

The Justice Department's mission is to ensure equal justice on behalf of all Americans. Kristen Clarke is exactly the leader we need at the helm of the Civil Rights Division, just as multiple civil rights crises have surfaced at this moment in time. Historical disparities across racial lines continue to plague our nation and police violence continues to loom over people of color, especially the Black community.

Communities across the country continue to be targets of hate-filled assaults. And while we continue to forge ranks and publicly denounce these assaults, we are forced to also defend against a renewed assault on our democracy that has now produced literally hundreds of state-sponsored voter suppression bills. After the previous Administration's wholesale reversal of civil rights advancements, it is the Civil Rights Division that must lead the way to repair and restore our nation's federal civil rights enforcement programs.

Importantly, Kristen Clarke will go down in history as the first Senate-confirmed woman to lead the Civil Rights Division. As the daughter of Jamaican immigrants, she will be the first woman of color to serve in this position. Women of color have always been an integral part of the civil rights movement and many are leading the civil rights battles of today. The Senate should seize this opportunity to correct this glaring gap in representation that has continued for far too long.

Kristen Clarke's civil rights credentials for this leadership position at the Justice Department are unassailable. She is a graduate of Harvard University and Columbia Law School. She began her legal career in the prestigious Honors Program within the Civil Rights Division, which she will now lead. Working primarily under the George W. Bush administration, Ms. Clarke spent the first years of her legal career prosecuting hate crimes, domestic violence, human trafficking, police brutality, and voting rights cases.

Kristen Clarke possesses considerable leadership experience in state civil rights enforcement. As Chief of the Civil Rights Bureau in the New York Attorney General's Office, she supervised a broad range of civil rights enforcement activity in areas such as voting rights, fair housing and lending, equal opportunity in education, anti-discrimination in the workplace, access for individuals with disabilities, religious rights, LGBTQ rights, and hate crimes. Under her supervision, the Bureau focused on barriers to reentry for individuals with criminal convictions, the school-to-prison pipeline, and police misconduct, including overseeing preparation of a comprehensive report regarding the New York City Police Department's Stop & Frisk Program.

Notably, Ms. Clarke has held leadership positions with our nation's most prominent civil rights litigating organizations. Early in her career, she managed the political participation project at the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, which was founded by Thurgood Marshall. Currently, she serves as president and executive director of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, which was established at the request of President John F. Kennedy to engage the legal profession in the protection of civil rights. The Lawyers' Committee represents the largest national effort to collaborate with the private bar to ensure that victims of discrimination everywhere can secure the legal representation they need to pursue and redress their civil rights claims.

It is extremely noteworthy to us that Ms. Clarke has litigated in every civil rights area in which the Civil Rights Division is involved, including voting rights, equal educational opportunity, fair housing, equal employment, environmental justice, and criminal justice. Just as importantly, she has represented the full range of communities protected by our nation's federal civil rights laws, including people of color, women, people with disabilities, members of the LGBTQ community, people of faith, older Americans, service members, and victims of hate crimes.

A powerful and enduring thread through Ms. Clarke's illustrious career has been the protection of voting rights for communities of color. She began her legal career litigating voting rights cases at the Department of Justice. She headed the NAACP Legal Defense Fund's voting rights docket, even participating in the oral argument in Shelby County v. Holder, in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. Voting rights cases were among Ms. Clarke's docket when she headed New York's Civil Rights Bureau. Finally, the organization she now leads—The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law—operates the largest election protection program in the country, ensuring that every eligible voter in every election can safely cast a vote and have that vote count. Additionally, the Lawyers' Committee has litigated seminal voting rights cases throughout the country in recent years. There is no question

whatsoever of Kristen Clarke's commitment to democracy and to ensuring that all citizens can participate.

We also know Kristen Clarke to be a bridge-builder, who listens carefully, reaches out, and can bring sides together to advance the cause of justice. She is supported by a wide range of law enforcement groups and officials such as the Major Cities Chiefs Association, the National Association of Police Organizations, the executive director of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, and the National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives. She enjoys the support of hundreds of United States Attorneys, State Attorneys General, former top Justice Department officials, and local police chiefs and sheriffs. Of course, national civil rights organizations, including the NAACP and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and others, strongly stand with Kristen Clarke and have urged her swift confirmation by the Senate.

Today, our nation faces tremendous challenges in many areas of civil rights. We need a brilliant, visionary, and experienced leader like Kristen Clarke to lead the national effort to ensure that our nation's many diverse communities receive the full protection of our federal civil rights laws. We trust that the Senate will recognize that Kristen Clarke is an extraordinary candidate to lead the Civil Rights Division and confirm her as quickly as possible so that she may begin this critically important job to pursue justice on behalf of the American people.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

The National Council of Presidents

Dr. Willis L. Lonzer, III
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Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

Reuben A. Shelton, III, Esq. Vice Chairman
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Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.

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