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May 5, 2021

VIA EMAIL

The Honorable Dick Durbin
Chair
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20510

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
152 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20510

Re: *Letter in Support of Candace Jackson-Akiwumi for the U.S Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit*

Dear Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Grassley:

On behalf of the National Women's Law Center (the "Law Center"), I write to express support for the confirmation of Candace Jackson-Akiwumi for the U.S Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. The Law Center fights for gender justice – in the courts, in public policy, and in society – working across the issues that are central to the lives of women and girls. The Law Center uses the law in all its forms to change culture and drive solutions to the gender inequity that shapes society and to break down the barriers that harm women and girls – especially those who face multiple forms of discrimination, including women of color, LGBTQ people, and low-income women and families. For nearly 50 years, the Law Center has been on the leading edge of every major legal and policy victory for women.

Ms. Jackson-Akiwumi is incredibly qualified to be a circuit court judge, possessing extensive criminal and civil litigation experience.¹ She started her career clerking for Judge Coar of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois and Judge Gregory of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit. While working as a public defender in Chicago for a decade, she represented over 400 indigent defendants in all stages of litigation accused of federal crimes– fraud, firearms, immigration, employment discrimination, sentencing, and Fourth Amendment cases– including cases before the Seventh Circuit and the U.S. Supreme Court. She also has significant civil litigation experience involving contracts, patents, securities, and white-collar crime as a partner at Zuckerman Spaeder LLP and associate at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP. She worked on several pro-bono cases when she was in private practice, including advocating successfully for an immigrant mother seeking Violence Against Women Act protection and representing an employment discrimination plaintiff in an EEOC mediation.

Ms. Jackson-Akiwumi would also add much needed diversity to the Circuit Courts of Appeals, which has historically failed to reflect the rich diversity of this country. Currently, women make up only

¹ Candace Jackson-Akiwumi, Senate Judiciary Committee Questionnaire

34 percent of the federal judiciary, and women of color a mere 7 percent.² We have not had a Black woman confirmed to the Circuit Courts in almost 10 years.³ In fact, the court she is nominated for, the Seventh Circuit, serves more than 7.5 million people of color but is the only all-white circuit in the country. Additionally, as a career public defender for the most vulnerable and underserved communities, Ms. Jackson-Akiwumi's embodies the mission and values of equal justice for all. Only about one percent of sitting circuit judges have spent the majority of their career working as public defenders or within a legal aid setting.⁴ This Circuit deserve a court that is representative of its community, and Ms. Jackson-Akiwumi's lived experiences and steadfast commitment to equal justice makes her the ideal nominee for this Circuit.

Moreover, Ms. Jackson-Akiwumi showcased her intellect, even-handedness, and qualifications during her nomination hearing. She gave thoughtful and well-reasoned answers and proved that she is ready to apply her invaluable experience as a public defender to become a phenomenal jurist who is grounded in the rule of law.

The Law Center offers its support of Candace Jackson-Akiwumi for the U.S Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit and urges the Committee to approve her nomination quickly. Please feel free to contact me, or Theresa Lau, Senior Counsel, at (202) 956-3064 should you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Fatima Goss Graves
President and CEO

² CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS, *Examining the Demographic Compositions of U.S. Circuit and District Courts*, Feb. 13, 2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/courts/reports/2020/02/13/480112/examining-demographic-compositions-u-s-circuit-district-courts/>

³ LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS, *We Need More Black Women on Our Federal Appellate Courts*, Feb. 25, 2021, <https://civilrights.org/blog/we-need-more-black-women-on-our-federal-appellate-courts/>

⁴ Maggie Jo Buchanan, *Pipelines to Power: Encouraging Professional Diversity on the Federal Appellate Bench*, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS, Aug. 13, 2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/courts/reports/2020/08/13/489312/pipelines-power-encouraging-professional-diversity-federal-appellate-bench/>