

February 3, 2021

Dear Senator:

As you consider the nomination of Kristen Clarke to lead the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, I write to add my voice to the chorus of others who have worked positively and productively with Ms. Clarke over her many years as a civil rights leader.

The Reform Jewish Movement, the largest denomination in American Jewish life with more than 1.8 million congregants, 2000 rabbis, and 850 congregations, has long worked to address the many civil rights challenges facing our nation. Indeed, the Religious Action Center, where I serve as the director, was founded during the height of the Civil Rights Movement to ensure we had a permanent presence and voice on these issues. In our earliest days, we were proud to provide workspace for Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. when he came to Washington. We continue to celebrate the fact that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965 were drafted largely in the building that remains our home today. In the more than six decades since our founding, we have worked alongside generations of civil rights leaders to ensure equity and opportunity for all, no matter race, religion, gender, national origin, and ability or disability.

Kristen Clarke has taken her place among those leaders whose voices have been essential to ensuring that every individual's civil rights are affirmed and protected. That was true during her tenure at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, as the leader of the Civil Rights Bureau within the New York State Attorney General's office, and more recently as President and Executive Director of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. We were especially proud to partner with Ms. Clarke and the Lawyers' Committee on our nonpartisan civic engagement campaign focused on ensuring every eligible American could cast their vote and have that vote counted.

The civil rights challenges facing the nation are so significant, and a leader of Ms. Clarke's experience is so vital, that I believe it is important to share with you our conviction that her nomination is of the utmost importance.

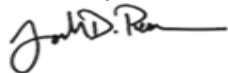
During Ms. Clarke's tenure as chief of the New York Attorney General's Civil Rights Bureau, among the many achievements she oversaw was a Religious Rights Initiative that was a critical tool in enforcing anti-discrimination statutes. That effort, along with her strong fight for religious accommodations, was of particular consequence to us as

Jews. In the same spirit, while at the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, she led a lawsuit against white supremacists who were harassing an African American student leader at American University while also fighting the proliferation of online antisemitism.

Americans' civil rights are at a critical moment. Antisemitism and hate crimes are rising. More than four centuries of systemic racism have left a widening gap between the lived experiences of white Americans and Americans of Color. In education, health care, employment, wages, and all areas of life, we have yet to realize the promise of civil rights for Americans of Color. LGBTQ individuals, women, and people with disabilities also continue to experience civil rights violations that inhibit the United States from achieving its highest aspirations. A strong and experienced leader at the helm of the DOJ Civil Rights Division, like Kristen Clarke, can help address these injustices.

As you consider the nomination of Kristen Clarke, I hope you will consider her outstanding record, her partnership with us and others in the Jewish community on issues of shared importance, and act in the best interests of a strong DOJ Civil Rights Division.

Sincerely,



Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner