

March 10, 2021

Dear Senator,

On behalf of the Union for Reform Judaism whose 850 congregations encompass 1.8 million Reform Jews, we write to convey our strong endorsement of Kristen Clarke who has been nominated to lead the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division. It is not our usual practice to weigh in supportively on nominations. We have done so only three times in our history, and none in over a decade. Nonetheless, we are committed to adding our voices to the chorus of others who are supporting Ms. Clarke's nomination.

As our colleague Rabbi Jonah Pesner, director of our Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, shared with Judiciary Committee members, during Ms. Clarke's tenure as chief of the New York Attorney General's Civil Rights Bureau she oversaw many achievements, including 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, Ms. Clarke led a lawsuit against white supremacists who were harassing an African-American student leader at American University and fought the proliferation of online antisemitism. Each of these examples and many others testifies to the depth of Ms. Clarke's commitment to advancing and protecting civil rights and ensuring the well-being of members of the faith community, including the Jewish community.

As the nation's largest Jewish denomination, we have heard the voices from the fringes of the Jewish community who have hurled accusations of antisemitism at Ms. Clarke – and we reject them. They do not comport with the record of the colleague we have worked with throughout her career: as the President and CEO of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, as the head of the New York State Attorney General's Civil Rights Bureau, or at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. At every turn, Ms. Clarke has been a steadfast ally to the Jewish community and a trusted partner in the fight against white supremacy and antisemitism.

Make no mistake: we disagree vehemently with the decision Ms. Clarke made while leading Harvard's Black Students' Association to invite a speaker who espoused antisemitism. But we have also heard Ms. Clarke's affirmation that she erred in her decision. Our experience working alongside Ms. Clarke to oppose hate in all its forms makes clear that her life has been dedicated to the civil rights values that should and must be reflected within the Department of Justice.

We are deeply pained that there are some who are weaponizing antisemitism in their effort to derail Ms. Clarke's nomination. The violence at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life synagogue and at Poway's Chabad synagogue, the gathering of neo-Nazis in Charlottesville, and the growing participation in online hate forums demonstrates that the threat from anti-Semites is real. We cannot be distracted from our shared mission to defeat these hateful forces by spurious claims of antisemitism. The real ones are all too prevalent.

We urge you to swiftly confirm Kristen Clarke to lead the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Rick Jacobs

President

Jennifer Brodkey Kaufman

Chair