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Interim President & CEO
Wade Henderson

June 15, 2021

**SUPPORT THE CONFIRMATION OF MARGARET STRICKLAND TO THE
U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEW MEXICO**

Dear Senator:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 220 national organizations committed to promoting and protecting the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, we write to express our support for the confirmation of Margaret Strickland to the U.S. District Court for the District of New Mexico.

Ms. Strickland is well qualified and has a proven record of defending civil rights. She currently works in private practice, dividing her caseload between civil rights litigation and criminal defense; half of her criminal defense work is pro bono. Previously, Ms. Strickland served as a trial lawyer at the Law Offices of the Public Defender, New Mexico, representing and defending the rights of clients who could not afford an attorney. She has experience in civil and criminal proceedings in federal court and has tried approximately 90 cases to a jury. A graduate of the University of Texas at El Paso and New York University School of Law, Ms. Strickland is also an involved member of her community. She is a member of the New Mexico Trial Lawyers Association and recently joined their Civil Rights Committee. In addition, she has served as a board member of the New Mexico Criminal Defense Lawyers Association for more than 12 years. Based on her outstanding record, Ms. Strickland would be an asset to the district court in New Mexico.

Ms. Strickland's background as a public defender and civil rights attorney demonstrates her commitment to pursuing equal justice. If confirmed, she would be the second public defender ever to serve on this court.¹ Public defenders play a critical role in our criminal-legal system — ensuring that all people accused of criminal acts have access to justice — yet they remain underrepresented in the federal judiciary. Of nearly 800 currently active federal judges, only 57 are former public defenders.² Judges with diverse professional and personal experiences help increase public confidence in the judiciary and result in better jurisprudence that is more reflective of the experiences of all people.³ By diversifying the bench, judicial

¹ [“Biographical Directory of Article III Federal Judges, 1789-present.”](#) *Federal Judicial Center*. Accessed May 2021. Search includes all judges for the District of New Mexico who listed “public defender” or “federal defender” as non-volunteer work experience.

² *Id.* Search includes all active federal judges who list “public defender” or “federal defender” as non-volunteer work experience.

³ Berry, Kate. [“Building a Diverse Bench: Selecting Federal Magistrate and Bankruptcy Judges.”](#) *Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law and American Bar Association Judicial Division*. 2017.

decision-making is improved.⁴ It is vital that judges who sit on our federal courts for a lifetime reflect all parts of the communities they serve — as well as different parts of the legal community, including the perspectives of those who have worked to uphold the rights of all people impacted by the criminal-legal system.

We urge the Senate to confirm Margaret Strickland to the U.S. District Court for the District of New Mexico. If you have any questions or would like to discuss this matter further, please contact Lena Zwarenstejn, Senior Director of the Fair Courts Campaign, at (202) 466-3311. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Wade Henderson
Interim President & CEO



LaShawn Warren
Executive Vice President of Government Affairs

⁴ Sen. Maya. “[Diversity, Qualifications, and Ideology: How Female and Minority Judges Have Changed, or Not Changed, Over Time.](#)” 2017 Wis. L. Rev. 367 (2017).