

November 9, 2022



**SUPPORT THE CONFIRMATION OF JUSTICE ADRIENNE NELSON
TO THE U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF OREGON**

Dear Senator:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 230 national organizations committed to promoting and protecting the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, we write to express our strong support for the confirmation of Justice Adrienne Nelson to the U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon. The Leadership Conference intends to include your position on the confirmation of Justice Nelson in our voting record for the 117th Congress.

Justice Nelson's significant legal career and experience as a fair-minded judge will make her a great addition to the federal bench. Currently, Justice Nelson serves as an associate justice on the Oregon Supreme Court. Prior to this, she spent 12 years as a circuit court judge on the Multnomah County Circuit Court. Before joining the bench, she was a coordinator and senior attorney with Student Legal and Mediation Services at Portland State University, an associate attorney with Bennett, Hartman Morris & Kaplan, LLP, and a public defender with Multnomah Defenders, Inc. Justice Nelson also worked as a compliance analyst with Standard Insurance Company, a legal advocacy coordinator with the Texas Council on Family Violence, and a law clerk with the Office of the Texas Attorney General. She has helped to train future lawyers at Lewis & Clark Law School. Justice Nelson is a graduate of the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville and the University of Texas Law School. Additionally, she is dedicated to serving her community. For instance, Justice Nelson served on the board of directors for the Multnomah Bar Association and the Oregon Law Foundation, and she is a member of the Lawyers' Campaign for Equal Justice Advisory Committee, all of whom assist several legal aid organizations with funding and other resources. Throughout her career, Justice Nelson has shown a strong dedication to public service and equal justice, and she will be a tremendous district court judge.

Throughout her legal career and her tenure on the state bench, Justice Nelson has demonstrated her commitment to the rights of all people. For example, she began her career as the legal advocacy coordinator with the Texas Council on Family Violence, where she supported their efforts to eradicate domestic violence through public policy and direct services. Additionally, Justice Nelson served as a public defender for three years with Multnomah Defenders, Inc., providing those unable to afford an attorney with qualified counsel. Public defenders play a critical role in our legal system, yet they are underrepresented on the federal bench. Currently, only one other active judge on this court has experience as a public defender, and there have only ever been two in the court's history.¹

¹ [Biographical Directory of Article III Federal Judges, 1789-present](#), FEDERAL JUDICIAL CENTER (Accessed November 2022) (Search includes all judges for the District of Oregon who listed "community defender", "public defender" or "federal defender" as non-volunteer work experience).



On the bench, Justice Nelson has also been an exceptional jurist dedicated to a fair and just legal system. For example, during her time on the Multnomah County Circuit Court, she served as the presiding judge over their Mental Health Court. As an alternative to incarceration for those experiencing certain mental health conditions, participants in this program receive appropriate resources, including counseling, substance abuse treatment, and/or housing and employment assistance.² Justice Nelson's entire career demonstrates her commitment to upholding the rights of all people, which will be an asset to the district court.

Justice Nelson has been breaking barriers her entire judicial career, and her confirmation to the U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon would also mark a significant and much overdue milestone. Justice Nelson was the first Black woman to serve on an Oregon circuit court and the Oregon Supreme Court,³ and if confirmed, she will be the first woman of color, and indeed the first Black woman, to ever sit on this court.⁴ In this court's 163-year history, there have only ever been two judges of color,⁵ and the only Black judge was confirmed more than 30 years ago.⁶ To strengthen public trust in the judiciary, our courts should reflect the communities they serve.⁷ Diversity of experience, both personal and professional, helps improve judicial decision-making.⁸ The confirmation of Justice Nelson would be an important step towards ensuring that our federal courts reflect and represent the diversity of our nation.

Justice Nelson is an excellent choice for this position, and we strongly urge the Senate to confirm her nomination. If you would like to discuss this matter further, please contact Lena Zwarenstejn, senior director of the fair courts program, at (202) 466-3311. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Maya Wiley
President & CEO

Jesselyn McCurdy
Executive Vice President of Government Affairs

² [What is Mental Health Court?](#), Multnomah County Mental Health and Addiction Services (June 15, 2020).

³ Erica Morrison, [North Clackamas School District Breaks Ground On High School Named After Black Oregon Justice](#), OREGON PUBLIC BROADCASTING (June 26, 2019).

⁴ [Biographical Directory of Article III Federal Judges, 1789-present](#), FEDERAL JUDICIAL CENTER (accessed November 2022).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ See Maya Sen, [Diversity, Qualifications, and Ideology: How Female and Minority Judges Have Changed, or Not Changed, Over Time](#), 2017 WIS. L. REV. 367 (2017).

⁸ See Kate Berry, [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).