

May 24, 2022



**SUPPORT THE CONFIRMATION OF JUDGE SARAH MERRIAM  
TO THE U.S. COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE SECOND CIRCUIT**

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 support for the confirmation of Judge Sarah Merriam to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

Judge Merriam’s significant legal career and experience as a fair-minded judge will make her a great addition to the Second Circuit. Since 2021, Judge Merriam has served on the U.S. District Court for the District of Connecticut. Before her elevation to the district court, she served on the same court for more than six years as a magistrate judge. Prior to this, Judge Merriam spent eight years as an assistant federal defender in the Office of the Federal Defender. She also worked in private practice as an associate for Cowdery, Ecker & Murphy, LLC. A graduate of Georgetown University, Yale Law School, and Duke Law School, she clerked for Judge Thomas Meskill of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit and Judge Alvin Thompson of the U.S. District Court for the District of Connecticut. As her long record as an attorney and judge committed to equal justice demonstrates, she is well qualified for this seat.

Judge Merriam has shown a dedication to public service and the protection of people’s rights throughout her career. Even before her legal career, Judge Merriam was committed to the rights of working people, serving as political director of Connecticut Employees Union Independent/SEIU Local 511.<sup>1</sup> Prior to becoming a judge, she spent most of her legal career as an assistant federal defender, representing clients who could not afford an attorney and ensuring they had access to justice.<sup>2</sup> Judge Merriam’s work as a federal defender is particularly notable, as public defenders play a critical role in our legal system — yet they are vastly underrepresented on the federal bench. In fact, just over 5 percent of federal appellate judges have experience as a public defender.<sup>3</sup> If confirmed, Judge Merriam would be only the third former public defender to ever sit on the Second Circuit.<sup>4</sup> To strengthen public trust in the judiciary, our courts should reflect the communities they serve. Diversity of experience, both personal and

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<sup>1</sup> Committee on the Judiciary, *Questionnaire for Judicial Nominees*, UNITED STATES SENATE (May 2022).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 2

<sup>3</sup> [Biographical Directory of Article III Federal Judges, 1789-present](#), FEDERAL JUDICIAL CENTER (Accessed May 2022). Search includes all judges for the U.S. Courts of Appeals who listed “community defender,” “public defender,” or “federal defender” as non-volunteer work experience.

<sup>4</sup> [Biographical Directory of Article III Federal Judges, 1789-present](#), Federal Judicial Center (Accessed May 2022). Search includes all judges for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit who listed “community defender,” “public defender,” or “federal defender” as non-volunteer work experience.

professional,<sup>5</sup> helps improve judicial decision-making.<sup>6</sup> The addition of highly-qualified jurists — like Judge Merriam — who have worked to uphold the rights of all people impacted by the criminal-legal system are very much needed at all levels of our federal judiciary.

Judge Merriam is an excellent choice to serve on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, and we 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

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<sup>5</sup> 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).

<sup>6</sup> Sen, Maya, [Diversity, Qualifications, and Ideology: How Female and Minority Judges Have Changed, or Not Changed, Over Time](#), 2017 WIS. L. REV. 367 (2017).