

May 24, 2022



**SUPPORT THE CONFIRMATION OF LARA MONTECALVO
TO THE U.S. COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE FIRST 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 strong support for the confirmation of Lara Montecalvo to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit.

Ms. Montecalvo's impressive experience protecting the rights of all people makes her extremely well-qualified to serve on the federal bench. Since 2020, she has served as the Rhode Island Public Defender, overseeing the entire Rhode Island Public Defender's Office. Prior to her confirmation to this role, she held numerous other positions in this office, including chief of the appellate division and trial attorney in both the appellate and trial divisions. Ms. Montecalvo also worked as a trial attorney in the Tax Division of the U.S. Department of Justice. She is a graduate of Swarthmore College and Boston College Law School. Throughout her entire career, Ms. Montecalvo has shown a strong commitment to equal justice and would be a tremendous asset to our federal courts.

Ms. Montecalvo is eminently qualified to serve on the First Circuit, and her background as a public defender and her commitment to pursuing equal justice for all people is a welcome addition to the judiciary. Throughout her 18 years in the Rhode Island Public Defender's Office, she represented clients who could not afford an attorney, ensuring they had access to justice. Now, as the Rhode Island Public Defender, she oversees and manages all staff working in public defender offices across the state, as well as maintaining her own caseload. Ms. Montecalvo has been committed to improving access to justice, testifying before the Rhode Island government about issues such as access to funding for the important work that public defenders do¹ and various criminal defense reforms. For example, she instituted efforts to eliminate the practice of keeping imprisoned those unable to pay fines or fees imposed by courts, which essentially punishes people experiencing poverty,² and she helped form a medical-legal partnership with a local Rhode Island health clinic to help address the underlying health reasons that often precipitate individuals' repeated contact with the criminal-legal system.³ Ms. Montecalvo's career has been dedicated

¹ *Testimony before the Rhode Island House Finance Committee Subcommittee on Public Safety Regarding Budget* (Apr. 27, 2021).

² [Summit on Fines, Fees & Mandatory Assessments In Criminal Cases](#), Rhode Island Public Defender & Rhode Island Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (accessed May 2022).

³ *Criminal Justice Reform: Innovative RI Program Seeks To Break Cycle Of Incarceration*, PROVIDENCE JOURNAL (May 27, 2021).

to making sure people have access to qualified counsel and to rooting out disparities within the criminal-legal system — bringing much needed experience to the bench.

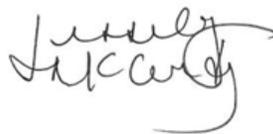
Ms. Montecalvo’s work as a public defender is particularly notable, as public defenders play a critical role in our legal system, yet they are vastly underrepresented on the federal bench. In fact, just over 5 percent of federal appellate judges have experience as a public defender.⁴ If confirmed, Ms. Montecalvo would be only the second public defender to ever serve on this court.⁵ Until last year’s confirmation of Judge Gustavo Gelpí, no public defender had ever been confirmed to the First Circuit.⁶ To strengthen public trust in the judiciary, our courts should reflect the communities they serve.⁷ Personal and professional diversity of experience helps improve judicial decision-making.⁸ Ms. Montecalvo, who has worked to uphold the rights of all people, and in particular those impacted by the criminal-legal system, possesses experience very much needed in our federal judiciary.

Ms. Montecalvo is an excellent choice to serve on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit, and we strongly urge you 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

⁴ [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.

⁵ [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 First Circuit who listed “community defender,” “public defender,” or “federal defender” as non-volunteer work experience.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ 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).

⁸ Sen, Maya, [Diversity, Qualifications, and Ideology: How Female and Minority Judges Have Changed, or Not Changed, Over Time](#), 2017 WIS. L. REV. 367 (2017).