

February 17, 2022



**SUPPORT THE CONFIRMATION OF NINA MORRISON
TO THE U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK**

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 Nina Morrison to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York.

Ms. Morrison has dedicated her career to pursuing equal justice for all, and her experience more than qualifies her to serve on the federal bench. Since 2002, Ms. Morrison has worked at the Innocence Project, currently serving as a senior litigation counsel and previously as a senior staff attorney and executive director. At the Innocence Project, she represents people who were wrongly convicted in state and federal court. Prior to this, she worked as a contract attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union and in private practice as an associate with Emery, Cuti, Brinckerhoff & Abady. Ms. Morrison has also worked to train future lawyers, teaching at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law at Yeshiva University. A graduate of Yale College and New York University Law School, she clerked for Judge Pierre N. Leval on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. Ms. Morrison's experience makes her an excellent addition to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York.

Ms. Morrison's commitment to defending the rights of those wrongfully convicted and significant experience practicing in civil rights law make her an exceptional choice to serve on the federal judiciary. For 20 years, Ms. Morrison has worked to exonerate those serving time for crimes they did not commit. As a result of her tireless efforts, 30 people in more than 10 states have been freed from prison or death row.¹ In many cases, clients have been imprisoned for decades, with Ms. Morrison representing them for several years through numerous stages of post-conviction litigation.² In addition, Ms. Morrison represented clients in their subsequent civil rights suits, seeking redress for the years they spent wrongfully incarcerated.³ The importance of this work is crucial to creating a more fair criminal-legal system and highlights the devastating disparities that currently exist. Wrongful convictions disproportionately impact Black and Brown communities, with 69 percent of all people exonerated by DNA evidence being people of color, and 60 percent being Black people.⁴ Ms. Morrison's commitment to

¹ *Questionnaire for Judicial Nominees*, United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary (2022).

² See e.g., *People v. Denny*, Ind. No. 2953/1988 (Kings Cty. S. Ct. 2017); *Ex Parte Morton*, No. AP-76,663, 2011 WL 4827841 (Tex. Crim. App. Oct. 12, 2011); *People v. Deskovic*, Ind. No. 90-00192 (Westchester Cty. S. Ct. 2006).

³ See *Jones v. Williams*, No. 2:18-CV-0503-JTM-JCW (D. La. 2021); *In re Anderson*, No. 12-0420-K26 (Williamson Cty. Cts. Div. 2013).

⁴ *DNA Exonerations in the United States*, THE INNOCENCE PROJECT (2022).



defending the rights of those who have been wrongfully convicted is important experience that is much-needed on the bench.

The confirmation of Ms. Morrison would also bring crucial lived experience to our federal judiciary. If confirmed, Ms. Morrison would be only the second openly LGBTQ person to ever sit on this court. A diverse bench improves decision-making and ensures that rulings reflect a broad set of viewpoints — especially from perspectives that have too often been excluded from the federal judiciary.⁵ Until 2011, there had only ever been one openly LGBTQ judge on the federal bench; currently, fewer than 2 percent of active judgeships are held by openly LGBTQ people.⁶ Public trust in the judiciary is crucial to its function, and this trust is bolstered when the bench better reflects the communities it serves.⁷ Ms. Morrison’s important lived and professional experiences would be an asset to the Eastern District of New York.

Ms. Morrison would be a wonderful addition to the federal bench, and we strongly urge the Senate to confirm her to the Eastern District of New York. 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,

Wade Henderson
Interim President & CEO

Jesselyn McCurdy
Executive Vice President of Government Affairs

⁵ 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).

⁶ *In a Record-Breaking Year for Judicial Nominations, the Biden Administration Fell Short on LGBTQ+ Representation*, LAMBDA LEGAL (Feb. 2022).

⁷ Sen, Maya, *Diversity, Qualifications, and Ideology: How Female and Minority Judges Have Changed, or Not Changed, Over Time*, Wis. L. Rev. 367 (2017).