

October 3, 2023



**SUPPORT THE CONFIRMATION OF JUDGE SHANLYN PARK  
TO THE U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF HAWAII**

Dear Senator:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 240 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 Judge Shanlyn Park to the U.S. District Court for the District of Hawaii. The Leadership Conference intends to include your position on the confirmation of Judge Park in our voting record for the 118th Congress.

Judge Park's impressive experience protecting the rights of all people makes her extremely well qualified to serve on the federal bench. Since 2021, Judge Park has been a fair-minded circuit court judge for the first circuit of the state of Hawaii judiciary. Prior to this, she served as of counsel at Gallagher Kane Amai & Reyes and as partner and of counsel at McCorriston Miller Mukai MacKinnon LLP. She also worked as an associate attorney at Hisaka Stone & Goto. For 20 years, she served in the federal public defender's office for the District of Hawaii, first as an assistant federal public defender and then as a senior litigator. A graduate of Chaminade University and William S. Richardson School of Law, University of Hawaii, she clerked for Judge Francis Yamas, a U.S. magistrate judge for the District of Hawaii. Judge Park's background as a public defender and her commitment to pursuing equal justice is a welcome addition to this court.

Judge Park has shown a strong commitment to equal justice throughout her career and would be a tremendous asset to our federal courts. Throughout her 20 years as a federal public defender, she represented clients who could not afford an attorney to ensure they had access to justice. Her 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.<sup>1</sup> If confirmed, Judge Park would be the only lifetime judge with public defender experience currently serving on the District of Hawaii, and she would be only the second public defender to ever serve as an Article III judge on this court.<sup>2</sup>

Even after Judge Park returned to private practice, she continued her commitment to helping people navigate the criminal-legal system. She was an attorney for the Criminal Justice Act (CJA) panel for the District of Hawaii, where she continued to represent those unable to afford access to counsel. During her time as a CJA attorney, she was the representative for the Kalilipono Program, a pre-sentencing pilot

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<sup>1</sup> Maggie Jo Buchanan, [The Startling Lack of Professional Diversity Among Federal Judges](#), CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS (June 17, 2020)

<sup>2</sup> [Biographical Directory of Article III Federal Judges, 1789-present](#), FEDERAL JUDICIAL CENTER (Accessed September 2023) Search includes all judges on the U.S. District Court for the District of Hawaii who listed "community defender," "public defender," or "federal defender" as non-volunteer work experience.



program for people who have been convicted.<sup>3</sup> The program offers mentoring and cognitive behavioral treatments, and it helps design a re-entry plan to follow after people have served their sentence — and successful completion of the program may result in a reduction in sentencing.<sup>4</sup> Judge Park was also a volunteer attorney for the Access to Justice program, where she helped litigants without counsel navigate the complicated legal system.<sup>5</sup> Judge Park’s dedication to making sure people have access to qualified counsel and to rooting out disparities within the criminal-legal system would bring vital and much needed experience to this role.

In addition to the professional experience that Judge Park would bring to the District of Hawaii, she would bring important lived experiences as well. If confirmed to this position, Judge Park would become the only Native Hawaiian woman to ever serve as an Article III federal judge.<sup>6</sup> To strengthen public trust in the judiciary, our courts should reflect the communities they serve.<sup>7</sup> Diversity of experience, both personal and professional, helps improve judicial decision-making.<sup>8</sup> The confirmation of Judge Park would be an important step towards ensuring that our federal courts reflect and represent the diversity of our nation.

Judge Park is an excellent choice for this position, and we strongly urge the Senate to confirm her to the U.S. District Court for the District of Hawaii. 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>3</sup> Lorenn Walker, Leslie Kobayashi, & Jeannie Lum, [Kapilipono: A U.S. District of Hawai‘i Specialty Court Pilot Project](#) (March 28, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> [Access to Justice Initiatives](#), Hawaii State Judiciary (accessed September 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Press Release: [Hirono, Schatz Announce Nomination Of Judge Shanlyn A.S. Park To U.S. District Court For Hawaii](#), Office of Senator Mazie Hirono (September 6, 2023).

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

<sup>8</sup> 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).