

June 12, 2024



**SUPPORT THE CONFIRMATION OF JUDGE CYNTHIA VALENZUELA DIXON
TO THE U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**

Dear Senator:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 240 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States, we write to express our strong support for the confirmation of Judge Cynthia Valenzuela Dixon to the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California. The Leadership Conference intends to include your position on the confirmation of Judge Valenzuela in our voting record for the 118th Congress.

Judge Valenzuela's work in pursuit of equal justice and her experience as a fair-minded jurist will make her an excellent addition to the federal bench. Currently, she is the supervising judge of the State Bar Court of California, an administrative court that hears all attorney discipline cases. Prior to this, she was the Criminal Justice Act (CJA) supervising attorney for the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California. Judge Valenzuela also served as the national vice president and director of litigation for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), an assistant U.S. attorney in the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Central District of California, a trial attorney with the civil rights division of the U.S. Department of Justice where she specialized in voting rights, and a special assistant to the vice chair, Justice Cruz Reynoso, of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Judge Valenzuela is a graduate of the University of Arizona and University of California at Los Angeles School of Law. As her impressive career demonstrates, Judge Valenzuela is extremely well qualified for this position.

Judge Valenzuela has dedicated much of her career to defending civil and human rights. As the litigation director for MALDEF, she oversaw the extensive litigation work done nationally by their trial attorneys, as well as maintaining her own caseload. For example, Judge Valenzuela represented the interests of Latino students after the Tucson Unified School District petitioned the District of Arizona to be released from a desegregation order, which had been put in place by the same court in 1978 after Black and Latino students sued, alleging discrimination in the school assignment plan used by the school district.¹ Ultimately, the Ninth Circuit held that because the school district had not been able to demonstrate that they made good faith attempts to desegregate their schools, the 1978 order remained in place, allowing continued oversight to ensure that the school district was improving educational opportunities for Black and Latino students.² In another case, Judge Valenzuela represented more than 3,000 Latino workers who were owed back wages and had been forced to work in unsafe environments without proper meal and rest breaks, ultimately securing an \$8.5 million settlement.³ In addition to her litigation caseload, Judge

¹ *Fisher v. United States*, 549 F. Supp. 2d 1132 (D. Ariz. 2006).

² *Fisher v. Tucson Unified Sch. Dist.*, 652F.3d1131 (9th Cir. 2011).

³ *Gutierrez v. Schmid Insulation Contractors, Inc.*, No. 2:08-cv-06010 (C.D. Cal. 2009).

Valenzuela also helped author many amicus briefs while at MALDEF. These briefs included challenging the constitutionality of voter ID laws,⁴ defending a law that would give students who met certain state residency requirements a tuition benefit for college regardless of their immigration status,⁵ and supporting marriage equality efforts in California.⁶

After her time with MALDEF, Judge Valenzuela served as the supervising attorney for the CJA panel for the Central District of California. In this role, she worked with the participating judges overseeing the court's CJA committee, helping to ensure that all who were involved in the criminal-legal system — but who were unable to afford their own representation — had access to qualified counsel. Judge Valenzuela has shown her dedication to civil rights, and this experience is crucially needed for our federal judiciary.

In addition to the professional experience that Judge Valenzuela would bring to this position, she would bring important lived experiences. If confirmed, Judge Valenzuela would be only the second Latina sitting Article III judge on this court.⁷ Until the 2023 confirmation of Judge Mónica Ramírez Almadani, no Latina judge had been confirmed to this bench in 25 years.⁸ The Central District of California is the most populous federal district, serving more than 19 million residents.⁹ Almost half of these residents — nearly 9 million people — identify as Hispanic or Latino,¹⁰ yet there have only been 13 Latino/a lifetime judges ever to sit on this court.¹¹ Of these 13 judges, only three have been Latina.¹² When our courts better reflect the vast diversity of our country, public trust in the judiciary is strengthened.¹³ These varied perspectives also help to improve judicial decision-making.¹⁴ Confirming Judge Valenzuela to this position would help our federal courts better reflect the vast diversity of our country.

Judge Valenzuela is an excellent choice for this position, and we strongly urge the Senate to confirm her to the Central District of California. 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.

⁴ Brief for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund as Amicus Curiae, *Crawford v. Marion Cnty. Election Bd.*, 553 U.S. 181 (2008).

⁵ Brief for Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund et al. as Amici Curiae, *Martinez v. Regents of Univ. of California*, 50 Cal. 4th 1277 (2010).

⁶ Brief for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, et al. as Amici Curiae, *Strauss v. Horton*, 46 Cal. 4th 364 (2009); Brief for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund et al. as Amici Curiae, *In re Marriage Cases*, 43 Cal. 4th 757 (2008).

⁷ See [Biographical Directory of Article III Federal Judges, 1789-present](#), FEDERAL JUDICIAL CENTER.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ [District Population](#), U.S. Attorney's Office for the Central District of California (accessed May 2024).

¹⁰ [Quick Facts, United States](#), U.S. CENSUS BUREAU (accessed May 2024).

¹¹ See [Biographical Directory of Article III Federal Judges, 1789-present](#), FEDERAL JUDICIAL CENTER.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ Maya Sen, [Diversity, Qualifications, and Ideology: How Female and Minority Judges Have Changed, or Not Changed, Over Time](#), WIS. L. REV. 367 (2017).

¹⁴ 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).

June 12, 2024
Page 3 of 3



Sincerely,

Maya Wiley
President & CEO

Jesselyn McCurdy
Executive Vice President of Government Affairs