



Volunteer Lawyers for Justice
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April 21, 2021

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC, 20510

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Appointment of Julien Neals to the United States District Court for the District of New Jersey

Dear Senators Schumer, McConnell, Durbin, and Grassley,

I am writing to offer my strong support for Julien Neals appointment to the United States District Court for the District of New Jersey. I am the executive director of Volunteer Lawyers for Justice (VLJ), a legal services office based in Newark, NJ that advances social, racial, and economic justice to people living in poverty across New Jersey. VLJ's service model works to make the most of limited resources by partnering with pro bono attorneys to provide free civil legal services alongside our talented staff. Mr. Neals served as a Trustee on VLJ's Board of Trustees from 2008 to 2013.

Mr. Neals quickly ascended into leadership roles at VLJ and served as the Board Chair from 2010 to 2013. Mr. Neals is a great champion of justice and, when serving as a leader at VLJ, made it a priority that all people, and especially people living in poverty, have equal access to the legal system Mr. Neals led VLJ through a period of great expansion, and was the Board Chair when Superstorm Sandy struck New Jersey. Mr. Neals provided steadfast leadership during this period of turmoil in New Jersey and worked with the board and staff to help lead the statewide legal response to the storm.

Mr. Neals was also heavily involved with the creation of VLJ's re-entry legal program, ReLeSe, that is even more vital today. ReLeSe helps people with criminal records address the civil legal barriers that serve as obstacles to their successful community reintegration. Recognizing that criminal records are a major barrier for people, especially Black, indigenous, and other people of color, seeking employment and housing, Mr. Neals made it a priority to ensure that a criminal record would not define a person's entire life.

Mr. Neals showed great skill in guiding VLJ's board through complex issues and his demeanor and judgement made him a particularly effective leader. The combination of his intellect, compassion, judgement, and demonstrated commitment to access to justice for all would make Mr. Neals an outstanding addition to the United States District Court for the District of New Jersey.

Please let me know if I can provide any additional information about Mr. Neals' leadership role at VLJ and his commitment to access to justice.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cathy Keenan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Cathy Keenan
Executive Director
ckeenan@vljnj.org