

October 27, 2023



**SUPPORT THE CONFIRMATION OF SARAH RUSSELL
TO THE U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF CONNECTICUT**

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 Sarah Russell to the U.S. District Court for the District of Connecticut. The Leadership Conference intends to include your position on the confirmation of Ms. Russell in our voting record for the 118th Congress.

Ms. Russell's impressive legal experience protecting the rights of all people makes her well-qualified to serve on this district court. Currently, Ms. Russell is the director of the legal clinic at Quinnipiac University, where she trains future attorneys. She leads the clinic's work representing low-income people and its juvenile sentencing project. Prior to this, Ms. Russell was the director of the public interest program at Yale Law School, overseeing their criminal defense, prison legal services, and Supreme Court clinics. She also served as an assistant federal defender with the Office of the Federal Defender. A graduate of Yale College and Yale Law School, she clerked for Judge Chester Straub on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit and Judge Michael Mukasey on the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. Throughout her career, Ms. Russell has shown a strong commitment to public service and equal justice.

Ms. Russell has spent much of her career rooting out disparities in the criminal-legal system. She spent two years as an assistant public defender, representing clients who could not afford an attorney and ensuring they had access to counsel to help them navigate the complex system. Her work as a public defender is particularly notable, as public defenders play a critical role in our justice system but remain vastly underrepresented on the federal bench.¹ Ms. Russell's commitment to working in and improving the criminal-legal system continued throughout her career. In 2016, she was appointed by Governor Malloy to be a member of the Connecticut Sentencing Commission, which evaluates criminal-legal issues and makes policy recommendations to the governor on possible reforms. Additionally, Ms. Russell was appointed by the chief justice of the District of Connecticut to serve as a member of the Standing Committee on the Criminal Justice Act, which creates policies and oversees the attorneys who are appointed to represent clients unable to afford an attorney. The District of Connecticut would be well served by the addition of Ms. Russell.

In addition, Ms. Russell has trained law students to effectively work in the criminal-legal system. As director of the Quinnipiac University School of Law's legal clinic, Ms. Russell oversees and mentors her students through complex litigation. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, she served as counsel

¹ Maggie Jo Buchanan, *The Startling Lack of Professional Diversity Among Federal Judges*, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS (June 17, 2020).

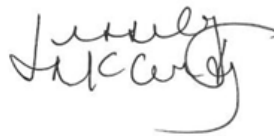
for a class action suit brought by medically vulnerable people who were incarcerated at Federal Correctional Institute (FCI) Danbury for failing to provide them with necessary health and safety protections, resulting in more than 200 people being transferred to the safer conditions of home confinement.² She successfully represented one of the clients from the FCI Danbury class action who had been released to home confinement in a subsequent matter after they had been re-incarcerated without any procedural protections.³ The court ruled that the Bureau of Prisons' process used by FCI Danbury to re-incarcerate people who had been released to home confinement per the CARES Act was unconstitutional, and that they are entitled to full due process rights.⁴ In another case, the clinic successfully secured a favorable settlement for a client who was denied skin cancer treatment while incarcerated — necessitating much more invasive surgery than otherwise would have been needed.⁵ As this impressive record demonstrates, Ms. Russell will bring a valuable perspective and experience to the bench.

Ms. Russell is an excellent choice for this position, and we strongly urge the Senate to confirm her to the District of Connecticut. If you would like to discuss this matter further, please contact Lena Zwarensteyn, 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

² *Martinez-Brooks v. Easter*, No. 3:20-CV-00569 (D. Conn. 2021).

³ *Tompkins v. Pullen*, No. 3:22-CV-00339 (D. Conn. Aug. 9, 2022).

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Bardo v. Wright*, No. 3:17-CV-1430 (D. Conn. Nov. 8, 2019).