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May 15, 2021

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Re: House Courts of Justice Committee's Twenty-Third Circuit Court Appointments

Dear Delegates:

We are attorneys practicing in Virginia's Twenty-Third Circuit, where a woman attorney has not been appointed to the circuit court bench since the Honorable Diane Strickland retired in 2002. The twenty-year mark has not escaped the attorneys practicing in this circuit. It has also not escaped the attorneys that in the entire history of the Twenty-Third Circuit, she has been the only woman attorney appointed to the circuit court bench. This pattern also exists in the Twenty-Third

Circuit's General District Court, where Judge Jacqueline Talevi has been the only woman judge for twenty-six years.

The Roanoke Bar Association has 126 members who are women attorneys, making up twenty percent of its membership. The Salem/Roanoke County Bar Association's membership consists of forty women attorneys, who make up thirty-six percent of its membership. A majority of the women attorneys in the Twenty-Third Circuit have been practicing actively in the Virginia court system for over 10 years and some over 20 years. This circuit does not lack experienced, exceptionally gifted women attorneys in all areas of practice.

The apparent trend for appointing women to the bench in the Twenty-Third Circuit is to place them on the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court ("J&DR") bench, which now consists of four female judges and one male judge. On this court no female judge has been moved up to the circuit court bench when they have applied, and they have applied. Every time a male judge has applied for elevation to the circuit court bench, a male judge has been appointed. In essence, female judges are dead-ended on the J&DR bench, while the male judges use that court as a springboard to the circuit court bench and beyond. A conclusion can be drawn that women attorneys are considered appropriate to the J&DR bench because dealing with child and family matters is "women's work." While we recognize the significant work conducted in the J&DR courts, our women attorneys are also capable of being exemplary judges in the circuit and appellate courts.

Lack of access to judicial positions higher than the J&DR bench prohibits woman judges in this circuit from climbing the ladder to the Court of Appeals or the Supreme Court of Virginia appointments. Not one woman lower court judge or attorney from the Twenty-Third Circuit has been appointed to a Virginia appeals court.

It is past the time to appoint woman attorneys or lower court judges from the Twenty-Third Circuit to the circuit and general district courts and to the Court of Appeals and Supreme Court of Virginia. When the next openings occur, we will be looking to you to serve our circuit and its citizens by appointing the capable women candidates from the Twenty-Third Circuit.

Sincerely,

**MEMBERS OF THE TWENTY-THIRD CIRCUIT BAR**

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Signature

Nancy F. Reynolds  
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Katie DeCoster

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Lauren Ellerman

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Vicki Francois

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C. Kailani Memmer

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Monica Monday

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Monica Mroz

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Mary Beth Nash

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Christine Poarch

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Leigh Strelka

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Lori Thompson

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Rachel Thompson

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Jennie Waering

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Johneal White

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Kathleen Wright

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c: Governor Ralph S. Northam  
Attorney General Mark R. Herring

Delegate Christopher Head  
Delegate Joseph McNamara  
Delegate Samuel Rasoul