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November 11, 2020

VIA FIRST-CLASS MAIL & FACSIMILE:

The Honorable Ralph S. Northam
Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, Virginia 23218

VIA FIRST-CLASS MAIL & EMAIL:

Senator John S. Edwards
Chair, Courts of Justice Committee
Senate of Virginia
Pocahontas Building, Room E506
900 E. Main Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219
district21@senate.virginia.gov

VIA FIRST-CLASS MAIL & EMAIL:

Representative Charniele Herring
Chair, Courts of Justice Committee
Virginia House of Delegates
Pocahontas Building, Room E606
900 E. Main Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219
DelCHerring@house.virginia.gov

**Re: Vacancy in the 19th Judicial Circuit of Virginia, Fairfax
County Circuit Court**

Dear Governor Northam, Senator Edwards, and Representative
Herring:

On behalf of the Virginia Women Attorneys Association
("VWAA"), a regional committee (the "Committee") was impaneled
to evaluate candidates for an anticipated vacancy in the 19th Judicial
Circuit of Virginia, Fairfax County Circuit Court.

The VWAA requested that interested candidates complete the
VWAA Judicial Candidates Questionnaire (the "Application"), submit
a short biography, and participate in an interview with the Committee.
On October 27, 2020 the Committee conducted virtual interviews of
seven (7) candidates.

It is worth noting that the VWAA ratings are based upon a review of each candidate's merits against published standards and guidelines, including the following: fairness, integrity, experience, intellect, temperament, professionalism, and *pro bono* service. Ratings are not a function of a general vote by the VWAA membership, nor are they a comparison of candidates within the "pool" presented.

The following rating categories are used by the VWAA:

- (1) NOT QUALIFIED: Applied to any applicant who fails to meet the minimum requirements for fairness, experience, intellect, temperament, professionalism, integrity and/or other basic criteria set forth in the ABA Guidelines.
- (2) QUALIFIED: Applied to any applicant who meets the minimum requirements for fairness, experience, intellect, temperament, professionalism, integrity and/or other basic criteria set forth in the ABA Guidelines.
- (3) RECOMMENDED: Applied to any applicant whose qualifications are sufficiently above the minimum requirements for fairness, experience, intellect, temperament, professionalism, integrity and/or other basic criteria set forth in the ABA Guidelines to warrant the Committee's affirmative recommendation.
- (4) HIGHLY RECOMMENDED: Reserved for any candidate who is especially well-qualified for the position and merits special recommendation.

The VWAA's procedures provide that ratings of "Qualified" and "Recommended" require a vote in support by at least a simple majority of the Committee. A rating of "Highly Recommended" requires a vote in support by at least a two-thirds majority of those voting. In order for the Committee to find that a candidate fails to meet the minimum qualifications and is "Not Qualified," at least two-thirds of those voting must so find.

The Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of the VWAA approved, in accordance with its procedures, the following endorsements of the Committee for this judicial vacancy:

The Honorable Manuel A. Capsalis was found *highly recommended*.
Christie A. Leary was found *highly recommended*.
The Honorable Tina L. Snee was found *highly recommended*.
The Honorable Susan J. Stoney was found *highly recommended*.

Vernida R. Chaney was found *recommended*.
Tania M. Saylor was found *recommended*.

Dennis A. Somech was found *qualified*.

Executive summaries of the qualifications of each of the above candidates are attached to this letter.

For your further information, the Committee members participating in the interview process were as follows:

Maureen E. Carr: Ms. Carr is a shareholder at Bean, Kinney & Korman, where she focuses her practice on employment law and commercial litigation. Ms. Carr is the President of the Northern Virginia Chapter of the VWAA and is a member of the State VWAA Board. She has been a member of the Virginia State Bar since 2006.

Carole' Krogmann: Ms. Krogmann is a partner at the law firm of Masterman Krogmann, P.C. She focuses her practice in the area of domestic relations, including divorce, child custody and visitation, child support, spousal support, and equitable distribution. She has been a member of the Virginia State Bar since 1997.

Sara Leiner Schuler: Ms. Schuler is the managing partner at the Law Office of Sara Leiner Schuler, PLC, and her practice focuses on all aspects of family law, to include divorce, custody, support, adoption, enforcement issues and equitable distribution. Before entering private practice, Ms. Schuler served as a law clerk for the Honorable Randy I. Bellows at the Fairfax County Circuit Court. Ms. Schuler has been a member of the Virginia State Bar since 2003.


Margaret M. Marks: Ms. Marks is a shareholder at Odin Feldman & Pittleman, P.C. She focuses her practice on civil, commercial, and estate litigation. Prior to joining Odin Feldman & Pittleman, P.C., Ms. Marks served as a judicial law clerk to the Honorable Jan L. Brodie of the Fairfax County Circuit Court for two years. She has been a member of the Virginia State Bar since 2008.

Jamel Rowe: Ms. Rowe is a senior associate at Livesay & Myers, P.C., where she exclusively practices family law. She handles matters such as separation, divorce, custody, visitation, support and adoption. Ms. Rowe has been a member of the Virginia State Bar since 2012.

Dana M. Wolfson: Ms. Wolfson is an associate at Hicks Crandall Juhl, PC. She focuses her practice on the area of domestic relations, including divorce, child custody and visitation, child support, spousal support, and equitable distribution. She has been a member of the Virginia State Bar since 2013.

Respectfully yours,


Margaret Hardy
President
Virginia Women Attorneys Association


Michelle Kaminsky
Judicial Chair, Northern Virginia Chapter
Virginia Women Attorneys Association

Enclosures: Executive Summary of Honorable Manuel A. Capsalis
Executive Summary of Vernida R. Chaney, Esquire
Executive Summary of Christie A. Leary, Esquire
Executive Summary of Tania M. Saylor, Esquire
Executive Summary of the Honorable Tina L. Snee
Executive Summary of Dennis A. Somech, Esquire
Executive Summary of the Honorable Susan J. Stoney

CC (by email only): The Honorable Manuel A. Capsalis
Vernida R. Chaney, Esquire
Christie A. Leary, Esquire
Tania M. Saylor, Esquire
The Honorable Tina L. Snee
Dennis A. Somech, Esquire
The Honorable Susan J. Stoney

CC (by email only): Senator Adam Ebbin
Senator Barbara Favola
Senator David Marsden
Senator George L. Barker
Senator J. Chapman Petersen
Senator Janet D. Howell
Senator Jennifer B. Boysko
Senator Richard L. Saslaw
Senator Scott Surovell
Delegate Alfonso Lopez
Delegate Kathy KL Tran
Delegate David Bulova
Delegate Eileen Filler-Corn
Delegate Karrie K. Delaney
Delegate Mark H. Levine
Delegate Charniele L. Herring
Delegate Kathleen J. Murphy
Delegate Kenneth R. Plum
Delegate Patrick A. Hope
Delegate Kaye Kory
Delegate Mark D. Sickles
Delegate Mark. L. Keam
Delegate Marcus B. Simon
Delegate Richard C. Sullivan, Jr.
Delegate Daniel I. Helner
Delegate Vivian E. Watts

CC (by email only): Maureen E. Carr, Esquire, VWAA, Northern Virginia Chapter, President
Carole' Krogmann, Esquire
Sara Leiner Schuler, Esquire
Margaret M. Marks, Esquire
Jamel Rowe, Esquire

MANUEL A. CAPSALIS

Experience and Legal Ability: Judge Capsalis earned his Juris Doctor degree from George Mason University School of Law in 1988 after receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree from Duke University in 1981. Judge Capsalis was admitted to practice law in the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1988.

Judge Capsalis has served as a full-time judge on the Fairfax County General District Court since July 2015. Prior to his full-time judicial appointment, Judge Capsalis served as a substitute judge from 2003 to 2015 in the District Courts of Fairfax County, Arlington County, Fauquier County, Loudoun County, and Prince William County, where he presided over thousands of criminal, traffic, and civil matters.

Judge Capsalis began his legal career with Odin, Feldman & Pittleman, P.C. In 1992, he moved to Cohen, Gettings & Dunham, P.C. as an associate and later became a partner, practicing civil litigation. Since 2005, he has been a named partner in his own firms and has concentrated primarily on criminal defense. From 1989 to 1992 and 1994 to 2015, Judge Capsalis also served as Deputy Town Attorney and prosecutor for the Town of Herndon.

Throughout his career, Judge Capsalis has generously devoted a significant amount of time to the Virginia State Bar and other legal organizations within the community. He is a past-president of the Arlington County Bar Association (1999-2000), the Virginia State Bar (2008-2009), and the Virginia Law Foundation (2012-2013). He has served the Virginia State Bar as a member of Bar Council (2005-2010) and the Standing Committee on Professionalism. Judge Capsalis has also served on the Board of Directors of Lawyers Helping Lawyers (2002-2004). Further, Judge Capsalis is a Past-Chair of the State Bar's Conference of Local Bar Associations and was the first Chair of the Virginia State Bar's Diversity Conference, as well as a founding member of its Board of Governors. He is an *emeritus* member of the George Mason Inn of Court and a past-member of the Chief Justice's Indigent Defense Training Initiative. He received the William L. Winston Award from the Arlington County Bar Foundation in 2009 for long-standing public service, promotion of democratic ideals and advancement of the rule of law and was made a Fellow of the American Bar Association in 2010.

Fairness and Temperament: Through his submissions, interview, and professional references, Judge Capsalis demonstrated to the Committee that he possesses the requisite fairness and temperament for the Circuit Court bench.

Professionalism and Integrity: The Committee finds that Judge Capsalis possesses the requisite professionalism and integrity to serve on the Circuit Court.

Overall Evaluation: The Committee finds that Judge Capsalis is especially well-qualified for the position of Circuit Court judge and his application merits special recommendation. Judge Capsalis warrants the Committee's rating of **Highly Recommended**.

VERNIDA R. CHANEY

Experience and Legal Ability: Vernida R. Chaney earned her Juris Doctor degree from Howard University School of Law in 2005 after receiving her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Virginia in 1999 and a Master of Business Administration degree from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2002. Ms. Chaney was admitted to practice law in the Commonwealth of Virginia in 2006.

Ms. Chaney founded her own firm, Chaney Law Firm, where she currently represents criminal defendants in state and federal courts in Northern and Central Virginia. Her trial work focuses primarily on complex criminal defense and juvenile justice. Additionally, she handles protective orders, school disciplinary actions, and Department of Family Services and Child Protective Service matters. Ms. Chaney also uses her business background to assist small businesses and help clients resolve civil disputes without litigation.

Ms. Chaney has devoted her career to serving indigent clients. Prior to founding her own firm, Ms. Chaney served as a Senior Assistant Public Defender in Fairfax County (2010-2012, 2013-2015), and as an Assistant Capital Defender in the Northern Virginia Capital Defender Office (2012-2013).

In addition to her substantial indigent and pro bono work, Ms. Chaney has remained involved in the state and local bar associations. Among other roles, Ms. Chaney is currently serving as the President of the Northern Virginia Black Attorney's Association (NOVABAA), she was the NOVABAA Vice President from 2016 to 2018, and she has served as the Chair of the Police Reform & Civilian Review Board Group of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (NACDL).

Fairness and Temperament: Through her submissions, interview, and professional references, Ms. Chaney demonstrated to the Committee that she possesses the requisite fairness and has an excellent temperament for the Circuit Court bench.

Professionalism and Integrity: The Committee finds that Ms. Chaney possesses the requisite professionalism and integrity to serve on the Circuit Court.

Overall Evaluation: The Committee finds that Ms. Chaney is especially impressive and that her qualifications are sufficiently above the minimum requirements to warrant an affirmative recommendation. While Ms. Chaney's complex criminal work is noteworthy and honorable, the Committee believes that Ms. Chaney may benefit from further experience in additional areas of law by continuing her courses in Continued Legal Education, shadowing colleagues in non-criminal cases, and/or serving as a substitute judge. Ms. Chaney warrants the Committee's rating of **Recommended**.

CHRISTIE A. LEARY

Experience and Legal Ability: Christie A. Leary earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from the College of William and Mary in 1997 and her Juris Doctor degree from George Mason University in 2000. She was admitted to practice law in the Commonwealth of Virginia in 2001.

Ms. Leary began her legal career as an associate at the law firm of Smolen Plevy in Tysons Corner, where she focused on corporate and business law, tax, and estate planning. In 2001, she joined the law firm of Greenspun Shapiro, P.C. in Fairfax (formerly Greenspun, Shapiro, Davis & Leary, P.C.), where she became the Managing Partner. While there, her practice focused on criminal law, traffic law, personal injury, and medical malpractice. She gained extensive trial experience in both criminal and civil bench and jury trials at the state and federal level, ranging from minor criminal and traffic offenses to serious criminal offenses, including murder and capital murder, as well as in complex personal injury and medical malpractice cases.

In 2011, Ms. Leary founded the Law Offices of Christie A. Leary in Fairfax, where she continues to practice today. Her practice remains focused on criminal law, traffic law, personal injury, and medical malpractice. Her practice also includes the litigation of matters such as protective orders, abuse and neglect cases, child delinquency proceedings, paternity matters, special immigrant juvenile status petitions, and general civil litigation.

In 2014, Ms. Leary was appointed to serve as a substitute judge in the District Courts of the 19th Judicial Circuit. She has presided over approximately 1,500 or more cases in that capacity. In addition, Ms. Leary has served as a faculty member for numerous CLE seminars over the past five years. She was also formerly an adjunct faculty member for the Legal Writing Program at George Mason University - Antonin Scalia School of Law.

Within the legal community, Ms. Leary has been particularly active in the Fairfax Law Foundation and the Fairfax Bar Association, previously serving as President and presently serving as a member of the Board of Directors of both. Ms. Leary is also on the Board of Directors of the VWAA, Northern Virginia Chapter. Ms. Leary was recently elected to serve on Bar Council as a representative for the 19th Judicial Circuit.

Fairness and Temperament: Through her submissions, interview, and professional references, Ms. Leary demonstrated to the Committee that she possesses the requisite fairness and temperament for the bench.

Professionalism and Integrity: The Committee finds that Ms. Leary possesses the requisite professionalism and integrity for the bench.

Overall Evaluation: The Committee finds that Ms. Leary is especially well-qualified for the position of a Circuit Court judge and merits the Committee's special recommendation. Accordingly, the Committee rates her as **Highly Recommended**.

TANIA M. SAYLOR

Experience and Legal Ability: Tania M. Saylor earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Virginia in 1999 and her Juris Doctor degree from The George Washington University School of law in 2003. She was admitted to practice law in the Commonwealth of Virginia in 2003.

Ms. Saylor started her career as staff counsel at the Law Offices of Michael L. Davis & Associates in Alexandria, Virginia, where she worked from 2003 to 2007, defending personal injury and property damage claims asserted against parties insured by State Farm. In 2007, Ms. Saylor joined Wilson Elser Moskowitz Edelman & Dicker, LLP in McLean as an associate attorney, where she handled medical malpractice cases. In 2008, Ms. Saylor began working at Sands Anderson, PC in McLean and defended professional malpractice claims and handled estate litigation matters. In 2010, Ms. Saylor founded Peterson Saylor, PLC, where she is currently the managing partner and represents clients in fiduciary matters, contested guardianships and business disputes.

On July 1, 2015, Ms. Saylor was appointed by the 19th Judicial Circuit to be a substitute judge, where she sits two to three times per month on average. As a substitute judge, Ms. Saylor presides over civil (child support, custody, contract disputes, personal injury, landlord-tenant, emergency removal, child dependency cases, and protective order cases) and criminal matters.

Ms. Saylor has volunteered with programs such as Wills on Wheels and Uncontested Divorces. She recently volunteered to assist with the Attorney of the Day program run by Legal Services of Northern Virginia. Ms. Saylor also volunteers with the Mock Trial program, which is presented at local elementary schools.

Ms. Saylor is currently on the Circuit Court Committee of the Fairfax Bar Association and is a Motions Conciliator with the Fairfax Bar Association. Ms. Saylor is also a member of the Virginia State Bar Disciplinary Committee, the VWAA, and the Northern Virginia Black Attorneys Association.

Fairness and Temperament: Through her submissions, interview and professional references, Ms. Saylor demonstrated to the Committee that she possesses the requisite fairness and temperament for the Circuit Court bench.

Professionalism and Integrity: The Committee finds that Ms. Saylor possesses the requisite professionalism and integrity to serve on the Circuit Court.

Overall Evaluation: The Committee finds that Tania M. Saylor's qualifications are sufficiently above the minimum requirements for the position of a Circuit Court judge and merits the Committee's recommendation. Accordingly, the Committee rates her as **Recommended**.

TINA L. SNEE

Experience and Legal Ability: Judge Snee earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from the State University of New York at Geneseo in 1984 and her Juris Doctor degree from the University of Buffalo in 1987. She was admitted to practice law in the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1987.

Judge Snee was appointed to the Fairfax General District Court on July 1, 2015, where she currently presides over criminal, civil and traffic matters. From 2013 to 2015, Judge Snee served as a substitute judge in both the General District and Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, overseeing criminal, civil, traffic, juvenile and domestic matters.

Prior to her appointment to the bench in 2015, Judge Snee was the founding partner and owner of the firm Tina L. Snee & Associates, PLLC, a boutique litigation firm that specialized in civil litigation. Judge Snee represented businesses, individuals and insurance companies in trial, mediation, and arbitration regarding employment, personal injury, construction and declaratory judgment actions. Judge Snee began her career with Slenker, Brandt, Jennings & Johnston in 1988, became a partner in 1995 and remained with the firm until starting her own law firm in 2004.

Judge Snee currently works cross-agency on issues involving mental health in the judicial system and is the Presiding Judge of the Fairfax Behavioral Health Docket. Prior to taking the bench, Judge Snee participated in the Model Judiciary Program, the Fairfax Bar Conciliation Program and the Court Tour program. While in private practice, Judge Snee had an AV rating with Martindale-Hubbell and was repeatedly chosen as one of Washington D.C.'s Area's Best Lawyers, Virginia's Best Lawyers, Virginia Super Lawyers and Virginia Legal Elite.

Fairness and Temperament: Through her submissions, interview and professional references, Judge Snee demonstrated to the Committee that she possesses the requisite fairness and temperament for the Circuit Court bench.

Professionalism and Integrity: The Committee finds that Judge Snee possesses the requisite professionalism and integrity to serve on the Circuit Court.

Overall Evaluation: The Committee finds that Judge Snee is especially well-qualified for the position of Circuit Court judge and her application merits special recommendation. Judge Snee warrants the Committee's rating of **Highly Recommended**.

DENNIS A. SOMECH

Experience and Legal Ability: Mr. Somech earned his Bachelor of Arts degree from Emory University in 1996 and his Juris Doctor from the George Washington University School of Law in 1999. He was admitted to practice law in the Commonwealth of Virginia in 2000.

Mr. Somech is currently serving as a prosecutor with the Office of the Commonwealth Attorney in Fairfax County, a position he has held since January 2020. In this capacity, he prosecutes a wide range of criminal matters in Fairfax County courts. Prior to joining the Commonwealth Attorney's office, Mr. Somech was the principal of the Law Office of Dennis Somech for over ten years, where he primarily practiced family and criminal law.

Mr. Somech is actively involved in the legal community. He was President of the Hispanic Bar Association and is a long-serving member of its Judicial Screening Committee. He was previously awarded the "Making the Difference" award by the Alexandria Alliance Against Domestic Violence.

Fairness and Temperament: Through his submissions and interview, Mr. Somech has demonstrated to the Committee that he possesses the requisite fairness and temperament to serve on the Circuit Court bench.

Professionalism and Integrity: The Committee finds that Mr. Somech possesses the requisite professionalism and integrity to serve on the Circuit Court bench.

Overall Evaluation: The Committee finds that Mr. Somech meets the minimum requirements for the position of a Circuit Court. Accordingly, the Committee rates him as **Qualified**.

SUSAN J. STANFORD STONEY

Experience and Legal Ability: Judge Stoney earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Virginia in 1983 and her Juris Doctor degree from William & Mary Law School in 1988. She was admitted to practice law in the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1988.

Judge Stoney was appointed to the Fairfax General District Court in November 2016, where she currently presides over criminal, civil and traffic matters. Additionally, she serves as one of two judges on the General District Court who handles the Fairfax Mental Health Docket and provides back-up on the Court's Veteran's Treatment Docket. From July 1, 2015 until her appointment to the General District Court bench in 2016, Judge Stoney served as a substitute judge in both the General District and Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, overseeing criminal, civil, traffic, juvenile and domestic matters.

Prior to her appointment to the bench, Judge Stoney served as Deputy Director of Legal Services of Northern Virginia, handling civil legal cases for low-income residences of Northern Virginia who could not otherwise afford counsel. Her legal aid practice encompassed various areas of the law, including but not limited to domestic relations, consumer law, public housing matters, and bankruptcy. From 1988 to 1990, she clerked for the Honorable James W. Benton, Jr. (Ret.) on the Virginia Court of Appeals, thereby gaining an excellent view of the judicial system from the appellate perspective. After her clerkship ended, she began her legal aid practice, which continued until her judicial appointment in 2016.

Prior to taking the bench, Judge Stoney served as Chair of the Fairfax Area Community Emergency and Transitional Services (FACETS), a local non-profit dedicated to providing emergency shelter and transitional services to low-income residents of Fairfax County. She received the Fairfax Bar Association James Keith Public Service Award (2015), was named a Virginia Lawyer's Weekly Leader in the Law (2012), and was named as an Influential Woman in the Law by Virginia Lawyer's Weekly (2020).

Fairness and Temperament: Through her submissions, interview and professional references, Judge Stoney demonstrated to the Committee that she possesses the requisite fairness and temperament for the Circuit Court bench.

Professionalism and Integrity: The Committee finds that Judge Stoney possesses the requisite professionalism and integrity to serve on the Circuit Court.

Overall Evaluation: The Committee finds that Judge Stoney is especially well-qualified for the position of Circuit Court judge and her application merits special recommendation. Judge Stoney warrants the Committee's rating of **Highly Recommended**.