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January 26, 2012

VIA EMAIL & FIRST-CLASS MAIL

The Honorable Thomas K. Norment, Jr.
Senate of Virginia
P.O. Box 396 district03@senate.virginia.gov
Richmond, Virginia 23218

The Honorable David T. Albo
General Assembly Building
P.O. Box 406 DelDAlbo@house.state.va.us
Richmond, Virginia 23218

**Re: Vacancy in the General District Court
of the Twentieth Judicial Circuit**

Dear Senator Norment and Delegate Albo:

On behalf of the Virginia Women Attorneys Association ("VWAA"), a regional committee ("the Committee"), was impaneled to evaluate candidates for the upcoming vacancy on the General District Court (20th Judicial Circuit) occasioned by the retirement of the Honorable Julia T. Cannon.

The VWAA process requires the submission of a completed VWAA Judicial Candidate Questionnaire, the candidate's resume and encouragement of the appearance of the candidate for an interview with the Committee.

The following endorsement 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 applicants whose qualifications are sufficiently above the minimum requirements 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 endorsements of "Qualified" and "Recommended" require a vote in support by at least a simple majority of the Committee. An endorsement 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 Board of Directors of the VWAA has approved, in accordance with its procedures, the following endorsements of the Committee(s) for this vacancy:

Jeanette Irby, Esquire is found *highly recommended*.

Lorrie A. Sinclair, Esquire is found *highly recommended*.

Zaida C. Thompson, Esquire is found *highly recommended*.

Deborah C. Welsh, Esquire is found *recommended*.

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:

E. Kate Fitzgerald, Attorney at Law: Ms. Fitzgerald is a partner at Capsalis Fitzgerald, PLC. Her practice focuses on criminal and civil matters in Virginia and she has been a member of the Virginia Bar since 2008.

Bonnie Hoffman, Attorney at Law: Ms. Hoffman is the Deputy Public Defender for the Loudoun County Public Defender's Office and has been with that Office since 1995. Her practice is exclusively in the field of criminal defense where she handles a variety of felony, misdemeanor, and traffic cases. She has been a member of the Virginia State Bar since 1994.

Elizabeth Pendzich, Attorney at Law: Ms. Pendzich is a principal at the Law Office of Elizabeth Pendzich, P.C. and immediate past President of the Loudoun Chapter of VWAA. She focuses her practice on domestic and family law, guardianships for incapacitated adults and small estate work. She has been a member of the Virginia State Bar since 1985

Betsy Sue Scott, Attorney at Law: Ms. Scott is a principal of the Law Office of Betsy Sue Scott and the President of the Loudoun Chapter of VWAA. She focuses her practice in the areas of export and trade compliance, wills, trusts, estates and guardianships/conservatorships. She has been a member of the Virginia Bar since 2007.

We hope that this information will prove helpful to you during your selection process for this very important judicial position. Please feel free to contact VWAA President Catherine M. Reese at (703)279-5140, should you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely yours,

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is 'Elizabeth Pendzich' and the signature on the right is 'Betsy Sue Scott'. Both are written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elizabeth Pendzich and Betsy Sue Scott by email
Judicial Co-Chairs, Loudoun Chapter
Virginia Women Attorneys Association

Enclosures

cc: Jeanette A. Irby, Esquire – personal delivery
Lorrie A. Sinclair, Esquire – personal delivery
Zaida C. Thompson, Esquire – personal delivery
Deborah C. Welsh, Esquire – personal delivery

JEANETTE A. IRBY

Experience and Legal Ability: Jeannette Irby received her Juris Doctor from Thomas M. Cooley Law School in Michigan in 1988. From 1988 to 1994, Ms. Irby was the managing partner of Family Law Center, P.C., a solo law practice focusing on domestic relations law. During this six year period Ms. Irby also accepted court appointed criminal cases, handling both misdemeanor and felony offenses. In 1995 she moved to Fauquier County and was admitted to the Virginia Bar that same year. Ms. Irby is also a member of U.S. Bankruptcy Courts for both the Eastern (2004) and Western (2007) Districts of Virginia.

From 1995 to 2000 Ms. Irby was an associate with the Warrenton firm, Walker, Jones where her practice included domestic relations, civil and criminal cases. Through this firm, she also represented Fauquier County Department of Social Services in abuse, neglect and removal cases. Her practice included bench and jury trials before the General District and Circuit Court. For four years thereafter Ms. Irby served as Law Clerk to Judges Robertson and Parker of the Fauquier County Circuit Court. In 2004, she became the Assistant County Attorney for Fauquier County, where she represented the County in both general district and circuit court on tax and zoning matters. In 2007, Ms. Irby became the Town Attorney for the Town of Leesburg. In her current position she provides legal representation for the Town Council, and serves as a legal advisor to the Town Manager as well as a myriad of Town Departments including human resources, police and public works. Ms. Irby also prosecutes and assists the defense of all civil matters concerning the Town of Leesburg.

Ms. Irby is a member of the Loudoun and Fauquier Bar Associations as well as the Local Government Attorneys Association, where she has served on several committees. For the past three years she has served as the Chair of Loudoun's Leadership in the Law Summer Camp.

Ms. Irby's current practice is primarily civil, however prior to her joining the County Attorney's Office in 2004, Ms. Irby handled a broad variety of civil and criminal matters. In addition, she served as a law clerk for the Fauquier County Circuit Court for four years, where she was tasked to handle both civil and criminal matters. Ms. Irby reports she has tried fewer than five cases to conclusion in a court of record over the last five years, all of which were bench trials. She also reported that seventy percent of her current practice is civil in nature, with the remaining thirty percent divided between zoning violations and administrative matters.

Fairness and Temperament: Through her submission and interview, the committee determined that Ms. Irby had the requisite fairness and temperament expected of a General District Court judge.

Professionalism and Integrity: The Committee is satisfied that Ms. Irby would exercise the impartiality and professionalism required by a sitting judge.

Overall Evaluation: The Committee was impressed with the breadth of Ms. Irby's legal experience, her professionalism, and management skills. It found that her fairness, experience, intellect, temperament, professionalism, and integrity is sufficiently above the minimum

requirements for the position of a general district court judge and merits the designation of **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.**

LORRIE A. SINCLAIR

Experience and Legal Ability: Ms. Sinclair received a Juris Doctor from Marshall-Wythe School of Law at the College of William & Mary in 1993 and was admitted to practice law in the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1996. Ms. Sinclair is also admitted to practice in the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Eastern District of Virginia.

Ms. Sinclair is currently in private practice as a principal with the firm of Sinclair Taylor PLLC, Leesburg, Virginia. She began her career as a Research Assistant at the Commonwealth's Attorneys' Services Council, and subsequently as Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney in Virginia Beach. Ms. Sinclair moved to Northern Virginia in 1999 where she worked as an Associate Attorney at a think tank and at a small law firm. In 2001, Ms. Sinclair returned to public service as Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney in Loudoun County where her experience included both felony and misdemeanor bench trials and jury trials. Ms. Sinclair served as a Legal Instructor at the Northern Virginia Criminal Justice Academy from December 2004 until July 2008. Since 2008, Ms. Sinclair has been a principal with the firm of Sinclair Taylor, PLLC where she handles a wide range of legal matters including an active practice in the General District Court. In addition to her court practice, Ms. Sinclair handles landlord tenant disputes, personal injury cases, collection matters and contract disputes.

Ms. Sinclair has extensive legal experience and appears regularly in the Loudoun County General District Court.

Ms. Sinclair was appointed by former Chief Justice Leroy R. Hassell to the Court Reporters Committee (2007), to the Virginia State Bar Mandatory Continuing Legal Education Board (2011 -2014), and by Chief Justice Cynthia D. Kinser to the Virginia State Bar Council, as an At Large Member (2012-2015). Ms. Sinclair has also been appointed as a Special Justice for the 20th Judicial Circuit (2008-2014) and as a Substitute Judge for the 20th Judicial Circuit (2011-2014).

Fairness and Temperament: Through her submissions and interview, Ms. Sinclair demonstrated to the Committee that she possesses the requisite fairness and temperament for the general district court bench.

Professionalism and Integrity: The Committee finds that Ms. Sinclair possesses the requisite professionalism and integrity for the general district court bench.

Ms. Sinclair is an active member Virginia State Bar where she currently serves as an At Large Member of the Virginia State Bar Council (2012-2015), and active member of the Loudoun County Bar Association, where she currently serves as President. Ms. Sinclair's appointment to the General District Court bench would bring welcome diversity to the bench in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Overall Evaluation: The Committee finds that Ms. Sinclair is sufficiently above the minimum requirements for the position of a general district court judge and merits the designation of **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.**

ZAIDA C. THOMPSON

Experience and Legal Ability: Zaida C. Thompson received her Juris Doctor degree from the Illinois Institute of Technology- Chicago Kent College of Law in 1993 after graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1985 from Loyola University in Chicago, Illinois. She is a member of the Virginia Bar (1994) and is admitted to the bar of the United States Supreme Court.

Ms. Thompson is currently an Assistant County Attorney in the Office of the County Attorney in Loudoun County. She has served in this position since 2001. Prior to this, she was an Assistant County Attorney in Fairfax County from 1998 to 2001. Her preceding position was as Staff Attorney for Legal Services of Northern Virginia in Arlington, Virginia, from 1995 to 1998 and for *Servicios Hispanos* in Herndon, Virginia from 1994 to 1995. In 1994, she held temporary legal positions in Washington, D.C. and, while a law student, she worked as a law clerk at Urban & Stone, P.C., Chicago, Illinois, from 1991 to 1993. Other positions before joining the bar included her 1985-1989 work as a criminalist/forensic scientist in the Chicago Police Department in Chicago, Illinois.

Ms. Thompson practices primarily in civil matters such as government enforcement matters, collection, and land use issues. She also serves as Special Prosecutor in criminal matters relating to violations of ordinances and appears in General District Court and state courts of record. In addition to litigation for Loudoun County, she provides legal advice to department heads and county staff, drafts and reviews county ordinances and supervises and mentors junior Assistant County Attorneys.

Fairness and Temperament: Ms. Thompson has demonstrated to the Committee, through her submission and interview, that she has the requisite temperament expected of a General District Court judge. Ms. Thompson impressed the Committee with her concern for fairness and the Committee is satisfied that she would exhibit the fairness required by a sitting judge.

Professionalism and Integrity: The Committee finds that Ms. Thompson possesses the requisite professionalism and integrity for the general district court bench.

Ms. Thompson served as Chair of the Virginia State Bar Lawyer Referral Committee, President of the Virginia Commission on Women and Minorities in the Legal System and on the Bar Counsel Search Committee. She has contributed to the publication of the Virginia State Bar Annual Reports of Special Committees: *The Virginia Lawyer Referral Service*. Within the Loudoun County Bar Association, she has been a Board member and Parliamentarian and served as chair of the Judicial Qualifications Committee. She formerly was a member of the Virginia Women Attorneys Association and is a founding member and past President of the Hispanic Bar Association of Virginia. She has written for *El Sol* newspaper "Consejos Legales por Servicios Hispanos." Ms. Thompson's appointment to the General District Court bench would bring welcome diversity to the bench in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Within the community, Ms. Thompson is a member of the Virginia Youth Soccer Association and the Leesburg Football Club. She has volunteered in her church's Child Development Enrichment Program and elementary-level programs.

Overall Evaluation: The Committee is satisfied with the extent of Ms. Thompson's legal experience, her legal ability, her fairness and temperament, and professionalism and integrity. The Committee especially notes her career-long dedication to public service. The Committee finds that she exceeds the minimum requirements for the position of a general district court judge and merits the designation of **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**.

DEBORAH C. WELSH

Experience And Legal Ability: Ms. Welsh was awarded a Bachelor of Arts from Westhampton College, University of Richmond in 1976, and received her Juris Doctor degree from the T.C. Williams School of Law, University of Richmond, in 1980. She was admitted to the Virginia Bar and the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Eastern District of Virginia in 1980.

Ms. Welsh is a solo practitioner in Leesburg, and has enjoyed a solo practice for about half of her career. In addition, she was an attorney-at-large in the firm of Charles Ottinger from 1983-1985, and partnered with Kennedy, McAdams & Welsh (1985-1988); McAdams & Welsh (1988-1991); Stock, Harris & Welsh (1991-1992); and Welsh & Lanham (1994-2005).

Ms. Welsh practices law primarily in the areas of family and domestic relations, civil litigation, estate planning, real estate, and the formation and representation of small companies. She also serves as a guardian *ad litem* for juveniles and adults. She reports that her litigation experience in the past five years is exclusively civil and non-jury. Ms. Welsh was the Deputy Town Attorney for Leesburg (1987-2001) and Purcellville (1987-2002). She reports that in the past she represented clients in criminal matters, maintained a collections practice, and worked with personal injury clients. The Committee felt that while she has an adequate depth and breadth of legal knowledge, her lack of recent criminal experience was of concern. The Committee notes that Ms. Welsh recognizes the need to educate herself in this area and Ms. Welsh describes herself as a "fast learner."

Fairness And Temperament: The Committee determined that Ms. Welsh had the requisite temperament and professional demeanor expected of a General District Court judge

Professionalism And Integrity: The Committee is satisfied that Ms. Welsh would exercise the professionalism and has the integrity required by a sitting judge.

Ms. Welsh served as President and Secretary for the Loudoun County Bar Association, and currently serves as Secretary on the 7th District Disciplinary Committee for the Virginia State Bar. She is also a member of the Resolution of Fees Disputes Committee for the Virginia State Bar. The Committee is impressed with Ms. Welsh's diligence and community service, noting her leadership in the Daffodil Ball on behalf of Capital Hospice and her active participation in numerous other events and causes. Her involvement in local and state legal organizations is commendable, as is her provision of pro bono services.

Overall Evaluation: The Committee finds that Ms. Welsh meets the minimum requirements for the position of a General District Court judge and merits the designation of **RECOMMENDED**.