



PRESIDENT  
RAKIM BROOKS

CHAIR  
PAULETTE MEYER

May 24, 2022

The Honorable Richard Durbin  
Chairman  
Senate Judiciary Committee

Dear Chairman Durbin:

On behalf of the Alliance for Justice (AFJ), a national association representing more than 130 public interest and civil rights organizations, I write to strongly support the confirmation of Lara E. Montecalvo to the United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit.

Ms. Montecalvo, the Public Defender of Rhode Island, has spent her career upholding and protecting the constitutional rights of our most vulnerable. After graduating from Swarthmore College and Boston College Law School, Ms. Montecalvo began her career in public service at the U.S. Department of Justice, Tax Division and was hired as a trial attorney in the Rhode Island Office of the Public Defender in 2004. She has remained there ever since.

Ms. Montecalvo has worked as a public defender for nearly two decades, including ten years as an appellate attorney. After several years of practice at the trial level, Ms. Montecalvo was promoted to the Appellate Division in 2010. In 2016, Ms. Montecalvo was named Chief of that division. In that role, she briefed and argued appeals in over 65 Rhode Island Supreme Court cases and supervised over 80 additional appeals. Ms. Montecalvo also handled post-conviction matters in federal court in both the U.S. District of Rhode Island and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit.

Appointed by then-Governor Gina Raimondo to serve as the top defender in 2020, she now maintains a robust caseload while supervising a staff of nearly 100 and managing the office's legal, policy, and programmatic strategy. Ms. Montecalvo has been particularly focused on addressing the role that addiction and health, including mental health, play in our criminal justice system. For example, the Rhode Island Public Defender's Office has an innovative medical-legal partnership with the Lifespan Transitions Clinic that provides intensive health services to people re-entering the community from prison.

While President Biden has prioritized the nomination of public defenders, they are still vastly underrepresented on the federal bench; Ms. Montecalvo's confirmation would bring our courts one step closer to reflecting the full breadth of the legal profession.

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Outside of the courtroom, Ms. Montecalvo is deeply involved in her legal community. She has been a Board Member for the Rhode Island Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers and the Criminal Justice Policy Board for the State of Rhode Island. She is currently a member of the Rhode Island General Assembly's Special Legislative Commission to Study Justice Reinvestment Proposals and Provide Recommendations for Reducing the Incarceration of Women.

In addition to the professional diversity she would bring, Ms. Montecalvo would also help the First Circuit better reflect the communities it serves: women make up more than 50% of the First Circuit, but only 20% of First Circuit judges. Ms. Montecalvo's confirmation would move the First Circuit, and the federal courts in general, closer to gender parity.

Given her exemplary qualifications, described in greater detail in our [linked](#) report, the Senate should swiftly confirm Ms. Montecalvo to the United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit.

Sincerely,

*Rakim H.D. Brooks*

Rakim Brooks  
President, Alliance for Justice