



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 Judge Sarah A.L. Merriam to the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

Throughout her career in private practice, public service, and on the bench, Judge Merriam has consistently demonstrated a commitment to equal justice. Now, with more than seven years of experience as a federal magistrate judge and district court judge for the District of Connecticut, Judge Merriam is eminently qualified to join the Circuit Court.

Judge Merriam has excelled at every step of her career. After graduating from Yale Law School, she clerked for Judge Alvin W. Thompson on the U.S. District Court for the District of Connecticut and Judge Thomas J. Meskill, a former Republican elected official and President Ford appointee, on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. Reflecting on her time as a clerk for Judge Meskill, Judge Merriam said she learned that “partisan politics have no place in judicial chambers.” Following her clerkships, Judge Merriam quickly distinguished herself in Connecticut’s legal community as an associate at Cowdery, Ecker & Murphy, LLC, where she worked on a variety of civil and criminal matters, primarily in federal court. While she had success in private practice, Judge Merriam often spoke of her desire to work in public service. In 2007, she fulfilled this dream by joining the Office of the Federal Defender for the District of Connecticut as an Assistant Federal Defender.

As a public defender for eight years, Judge Merriam performed the essential work of representing indigent individuals charged with federal crimes and ensuring their constitutional rights were protected. She appeared in federal court almost daily and handled all facets of litigation, from initial appearance through guilty plea or trial, appeal, and post-conviction proceedings. In addition to her substantial caseload, Judge Merriam regularly advised Criminal Justice Act attorneys and private attorneys on the Federal Sentencing Guidelines and criminal history issues. She also provided training for defense attorneys on various issues, including cell site location evidence, DNA evidence, and Second Circuit appeals.

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In 2014, Judge Merriam was selected to serve as a U.S. Magistrate Judge and was sworn in on April 3, 2015. She served for more than six years, until her elevation by President Biden to the district court. Judge Merriam was confirmed to the U.S. District Court for the District of Connecticut by a bipartisan vote on October 6, 2021, with support from Republican Senators Collins, Graham, Murkowski, and Tillis. She also garnered endorsements from [26 former federal prosecutors](#) and [former advisors and appointees of Republican officials](#). Upon her confirmation, she became the first former public defender to serve in the District of Connecticut since 1964. Judge Merriam has demonstrated an evenhanded and accessible approach, as evidenced by her meticulous examination and analysis of legal issues in the hundreds of cases she has presided over.

If confirmed to the Second Circuit, Judge Merriam would bring an important perspective based on her work representing many of the most vulnerable individuals in our society. Public defenders play a vital role in our criminal justice system by ensuring that the constitutional rights of people accused of crimes are protected, yet they are severely underrepresented on the bench. Judge Merriam would join Judge Eunice Lee as only the second former public defender on a court dominated by judges with very traditional legal backgrounds.

Given her exemplary qualifications and abiding commitment to equal justice for all Americans, the Senate should swiftly confirm Judge Sarah A.L. Merriam to the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

Sincerely,

Rakim H.D. Brooks

Rakim Brooks
President, Alliance for Justice