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February 2, 2024

VIA EMAIL
Ms. Tracy Nutall
Executive Director
dc.jnc@dc.gov

Re: Support for the Nomination of Caroline Van Zile to the D.C. Court of Appeals

Dear Ms. Nutall:

The Washington Council of Lawyers (WCL) proudly endorses Ms. Caroline Van Zile for appointment to the District of Columbia Court of Appeals. WCL, as the public-interest bar association in D.C., comprises a diverse membership, including lawyers, legal professionals, law students, and advocates, all committed to advancing important public-interest issues. Our endorsements are based on a candidate's demonstrated dedication to pro bono and public-interest law, as well as their efforts to promote equal access to justice.

Ms. Van Zile has consistently emphasized pro bono and public-interest work throughout her career. She began as a public school teacher at a Title I middle school in Brooklyn, New York. Here she witnessed many barriers that stood in the way of her students' success. These institutional obstacles inspired Ms. Van Zile to become a lawyer committed to dismantling these barriers and fostering equity in lower-income communities.

In law school, she collaborated with her school's pro bono clinic to advocate for equitable school funding in Connecticut for marginalized communities. She also engaged in a community policing clinic and taught part-time in public schools, educating low-income students about their constitutional rights through the Marshall-Brennan Constitutional Literacy Project.

Following law school, Ms. Van Zile joined Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP in the District of Columbia, where she dedicated significant efforts to pro bono work. She recorded over 1,225 pro bono hours between April 2016 and July 2018. Notably, she played a pivotal role in litigation on behalf of the Multicultural Media, Telecom and Internet Council (MMTC), advocating for emergency alerts in languages beyond English to protect non-native speakers during disasters. She also contributed to an amicus brief for the Transgender Law Center in a significant Supreme Court case involving public accommodations.

Subsequently, Ms. Van Zile joined the Office of the D.C. Attorney General, focusing on public-interest work, particularly in expanding voting rights and eliminating racial equity barriers in elections. She authored numerous briefs advocating for accessible election practices, including voting by mail and re-enfranchising former felons. Her work extended to cases related to access to benefits, quality affordable housing, and immigration.

Ms. Van Zile currently serves as the Solicitor General for the District of Columbia. In this capacity she handles all appeals on behalf of the District government, defending District laws from overzealous businesses, landlords, and employers. She also provides training to various legal professionals. Staying true to her public-interest roots, Ms. Van Zile collaborates with appellate counsel at Legal Aid to address recurring issues affecting low-income litigants. This has led to positive changes in the District's practices. She also volunteers to train new Administrative Law Judges at the District's Office of Administrative Hearings, emphasizing the importance of the D.C. Language Access Act and the need for interpreters and reconsideration for pro se litigants when they miss a hearing through no fault of their own.

Outside of her professional commitments, Ms. Van Zile mentors law students and recent law school graduates interested in public-interest work, supporting organizations like The Appellate Project, the American Constitution Society, and Yale Law Women+. Her community and civic activities primarily focus on education for District youth, including volunteering at schools, mentoring students, and participating in programs like the Marshall-Brennan Constitutional Literacy Project's high school moot court competition.

Ms. Van Zile's numerous efforts reflect her dedication to equal access to justice initiatives and public-interest law. She is a well-respected member of the D.C. legal community and would make an excellent addition to the bench. WCL wholeheartedly endorses her application for appointment to the District of Columbia Court of Appeals.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deborah C. Hill". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "D".

Deborah Cuevas Hill
President
Washington Council of Lawyers