



JEWISH COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

25 Broadway, Suite 1700
New York, NY 10004
(212) 684-6950
contactus@thejcpa.org
www.jewishpublicaffairs.org

April 6, 2021

Honorable Dick Durbin, Chairman
Honorable Chuck Grassley, Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Grassley:

We write regarding Kristen Clarke, President Biden's nominee to lead the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice. The Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) is the network hub of 125 local Jewish community relations councils and 16 national Jewish agencies, including the four denominations of American Judaism. Together, we advocate for a just and pluralistic America, peace and security in Israel, and human rights around the world. Throughout our 77-year history, JCPA has rarely taken public positions regarding political appointees, and this letter is not intended as an endorsement of Ms. Clarke's nomination, but to repudiate misleading allegations of antisemitism made against her.

JCPA's Board of Directors arranged for a meeting on March 25 between Ms. Clarke and representatives of JCPA's national agencies, as well as a number of local Jewish community relations councils. At this meeting, we discussed with Ms. Clarke her civil rights record, as well as her work fighting antisemitism and domestic extremism in the United States.

For many years, JCPA has worked alongside Ms. Clarke in coalitions to advance a range of critical civil rights issues, including combatting antisemitism, white nationalism, and hate. Some highlights of Ms. Clarke's career include:

- President and CEO of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
- Head of the New York State Attorney General's Civil Rights Bureau where, among other things, she established a Religious Rights Initiative to ensure that employees, including Jews, had the right to observe the Sabbath
- Attorney at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund
- Leading efforts to combat hate crimes and white supremacy, including suing neo-Nazi and antisemitic websites
- Attorney in the Criminal Section of the federal Justice Department's Civil Rights Division where she prosecuted hate crimes

During our meeting with Ms. Clarke, she explained her civil rights vision and commitment to fighting religious discrimination, in particular protecting the rights of Sabbath observers. She also agreed that violence against readily identifiable Jews is a problem and discussed the Justice Department's use of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act and other statutes to prosecute violent hate crimes. She similarly spoke about the use of the Religious

Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act to protect the rights of Jewish and other religious organizations.


It should be noted that Ms. Clarke has previously publicly acknowledged and apologized for an error in judgment she made as a young college student, which some are using to label her as antisemitic. JCPA is committed to conducting due diligence on a person's record and background and does not believe that accusations of antisemitism should ever be used as a political wedge issue.

After reviewing the entirety of Ms. Clarke's professional career fighting for civil rights and against hate, JCPA considers attempts to focus on purported antisemitism during her confirmation process to be inappropriate, pretextual, and baseless. As a national organization representing a wide diversity of the organized Jewish community, we urge the Senate to consider her confirmation based on her career and actual record of leadership and not based upon these unfounded charges of antisemitism.

Sincerely,



Michael Fromm
JCPA Chair



David Bohm
JCPA Policy Advisory Committee Chair

Cc: Members of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary