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July 22, 2024

The Honorable Richard Durbin  
Chairman  
Senate Judiciary Committee

Dear Chairman Durbin:

On behalf of the Alliance for Justice (AFJ), a national association representing over 130 public interest and civil rights organizations, I write to express our strong support for Judge Jonathan Hawley's nomination to the United States District Court for the Central District of Illinois. Judge Hawley is a tremendous jurist with an impressive 15 years of public defense experience. He is dedicated to serving the Central District and has already done so for the vast majority of his impressive career.

Born in Peoria, Illinois, Hawley has deep ties to the Central District. He earned his B.A., cum laude, from the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1992 and his J.D., cum laude, from DePaul University College of Law in 1997. After graduating from law school, he clerked for Judge Michael P. McCuskey on the Illinois Third District Court of Appeals. McCuskey was then elevated to the United States District Court for the Central District of Illinois, and Hawley continued his clerkship at the district court level. In 1998, Hawley went on to clerk for Judge James D. Heiple of the Illinois Supreme Court. In 1999, Hawley joined the Federal Public Defender's Office for the Central District of Illinois, rapidly progressing through the office's ranks and eventually earning the prestigious title of Chief Federal Public Defender. Hawley spent an impressive 15 years representing his fellow Illinoisans as a federal public defender.

In recognition of his incredible career as a public defender and his brilliance as an attorney, Hawley was chosen to serve as a United States Magistrate Judge for the Central District. Since joining the bench in 2014, Hawley has distinguished himself as a thoughtful, knowledgeable, and fair judge who profoundly respects the individuals in his courtroom. In 2023, he was elevated to the role of Executive United States Magistrate Judge – the effective leader of the magistrate judges on the Central District.

We are thrilled to see a judge of Hawley's caliber nominated to the federal bench. Not only would he bring an in-depth, lived knowledge of the Central District community, he would also bring important professional diversity to the Court. Public defenders play a vital role in our legal system; they uphold the guarantees of the Sixth Amendment and ensure that, regardless of wealth or status, Americans can access high-quality legal representation. Based on our review, none of the current sitting judges on the Central District have public defense experience, meaning that Hawley's experience is sorely needed on the bench.

In conclusion, we hope the Senate will move quickly to confirm Judge Hawley. He is a talented lawyer and jurist who cares deeply about his community. We are confident that, if confirmed, he would be an incredible asset to the bench.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Keith Thirion".

Keith Thirion  
Interim Co-President, Alliance for Justice