

# Community Legal Aid

A non-profit law firm serving the legal needs of low-income individuals and families in central northeast Ohio



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## SCOTUS nomination shows how far we've come

*by Kimberly Adams, advocate and law graduate, and Andrew Neuhauser, managing attorney*

The world is watching this week as confirmation hearings for Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson's roll out for her nomination to the Supreme Court of the United States. This is surely to go down as a defining moment in our nation's history.

And yet, it shouldn't have taken this long.

There have been 115 justices on the Supreme Court. Five of them have been women. Another way to look at it is that there has been one woman justice for every twenty-two male justices.

The lack of racial diversity on the Court has been equally appalling. Justice Thurgood Marshall, who was confirmed to the Court in 1967, was succeeded by Justice Clarence Thomas in 1991. They remain the only two Black justices in the Court's history.

Justice Sonia Sotomayer was the first woman of color, the first Latino, and first Hispanic justice in the Court's history. Judge Jackson would join her as the second woman of color on the Court.

This lack of racial and ethnic diversity undermines the public's faith in the court. [A 2019 report](#) from the Brennan Center focused on how the lack of diversity in state supreme courts negatively affects the public's perception of the legal system.

The report noted a poignant quote from Yvette McGee Brown, a former justice of the Ohio Supreme Court: "The public's perception of justice suffers...when the only people of color in a court-house are in hand-cuffs."

Judge Jackson's nomination (and pending confirmation) breaks another glass ceiling that for many has seemed unattainable. It also grows the Court's continued diversity of thought and life experience, bringing a much needed new perspective to this space where critical decisions are made that affect all our lives in profound ways.

Judge Jackson is part of a bench of exceptionally well-qualified Black female attorneys that is deep and has been for some time.

Her accomplishments and experience are remarkable, even when compared to the current justices on the Court. She attended and excelled at Harvard University, clerked at all three levels of the federal court system, worked in private practice and as a federal public defender, served as vice chair of the U.S. Sentencing Commission, as well as both a federal trial court judge and as a federal appellate judge.

She also may help bridge the Justices' role in analyzing law with an understanding of how their decisions affect everyday people. Her background in public defense brings to the Court a knowledge of the challenges people in poverty face on a daily basis, not only with access to the justice system, but to all the systems that exacerbate and prolong the plight of poverty -- a welcome and needed voice for the 42.5 million Americans currently living at or below federal poverty levels.

We are inspired by this moment of history unfolding, and we remain hopeful that it marks a turning point in the field of justice, bringing to the forefront the fact that Black women belong in these spaces. Witnessing achievements like this makes the fight worth it.

It reinforces, for all of us, that despite the challenges we may face, the ability to achieve extraordinary things is alive and well.

*This article is part of Legal Aid's "Big Ideas" series.*

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