EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
JANUARY 2025 FAIRFAX CIRCUIT COURT JUDICIAL SCREENING

THE HONORABLE DIPTI PIDIKITI-SMITH

Judge Dipti Pidikiti-Smith currently lives in Fairfax. She was born in India and spent her childhood in India and Nigeria before moving to the United States when she was nine years old. She attended Temple University where she graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Biology. She then joined AmeriCorps where she taught in an elementary school in West Philadelphia. Judge Pidikiti-Smith then went to the David A. Clarke School of Law at the University of the District of Columbia to specifically focus on public interest law. She was required to complete 700 hours of clinical experience to graduate and was very involved in public service in law school. After law school she clerked for Judge Russel Canan and Judge Stephanie Duncan-Peters of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. After her clerkships, she joined Legal Services of Northern Virginia (LSNV). She remained with LSNV until she was appointed to the Fairfax County General District Court in August 2022. She speaks conversational Telugu.

EXPERIENCE AND LEGAL ABILITY

Judge Pidikiti-Smith joined LSNV as a staff attorney in 2008 and served as its Deputy Director for Advocacy until joining the General District Court bench in 2022. As Deputy Director for Advocacy, she oversaw law training and advocacy for the diverse set of practice groups at LSNV. She also helped to manage 76 employees, including 46 attorneys and a large budget. As an attorney at LSNV she has handled over 1400 civil cases at all levels of state courts, in addition to federal and appellate cases. While at LSNV, she handled a variety of cases, including child custody and visitation, child support, protective orders, divorces, housing law and consumer law. In addition to the in-house trainings she led and managed as Deputy Director for Advocacy, Judge Pidikiti-Smith has also presented at many legal education trainings about consumer law, language access, using technology in court, systemic racism and poverty, housing, and child safety. Judge Pidikiti-Smith also participated in significant legal appellate opinions while at LSNV, and has a passion for research and writing.

She has continued the practice of presenting many legal education trainings while on the Bench, including a presentation for judges on how to use plain language to more effectively communicate in the courtroom. Judge Pidikiti-Smith continues to demonstrate a fastidious desire to learn about and understand rules of evidence and legal issues before they appear before her on the Bench, even compiling research files that appear to have become a resource for other judges. Judge Pidikiti-Smith is currently writing the first chapter of the GDC Bench Book on the Fair Housing Act.

At LSNV, Judge Pidikiti-Smith was limited to civil matters. Since then her performance on the GDC Bench has demonstrated a deep knowledge of criminal law and procedure. As a result of her demonstrated performance on the Bench, the Committee has no concerns about her experience in any substantive area of the law.

Judge Pidikiti-Smith was appointed as a substitute judge in May 2021, and appointed to the General District Court in August 2022. She has shown an interest in learning, listening, and growing as a judge. She recognizes her limited experience with jury trials and endeavors to actively finding opportunities to watch jury trials and learn areas of law necessary for a Circuit Court Judge.

The Committee found that while Judge Pidikiti-Smith has shown positive growth in the time that she has served on the General District Court Bench in all areas, she will continue to benefit from more time serving on the General District Court.

FAIRNESS AND TEMPERAMENT

The Committee had no questions about her ability to demonstrate empathy for all appearing before her in court. She demonstrated an energy and passion for serving as a judge. Judge Pidikiti-Smith's references provided consistent, very positive information about her as a candidate. They all mentioned her tireless attempts to improve the entire legal community and access to justice. She is hard working, detail oriented, patient and kind.

Judge Pidikiti-Smith demonstrates empathy and a desire to make sure self-represented persons have a level playing field, obtain legal information without legal advice, and to use plain language to ensure their understanding of the proceedings. However, some members of the Committee have concerns that Judge Pidikiti-Smith's dedication to the underserved can occasionally appear as a lack of impartiality. Her desire to improve access to justice may create the appearance of an imbalance between parties, particularly in cases where only one side is represented.

PROFESSIONALISM AND INTEGRITY

Judge Pidikiti-Smith served as the co-chair for the Fairfax County Fair Housing Task Force and as vice-chair for the Fairfax County Alliance for Human Services. She continues to lecture frequently at continuing legal education seminars. Judge Pidikiti-Smith is also very involved in the Fairfax Bar Association. She was co-chair of the Circuit Court Committee and was involved in the District Court Committees as well, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic as the law was rapidly changing for civil litigants. She was also President of the Alexandria Bar Association and has been involved in many other community and Bar related activities over her career.

The Committee finds that Judge Pidikiti-Smith has continued her significant commitment to the community while on the bench and continues to find ways to improve access to justice. Since serving on the GDC Bench, she serves as Co-Chair of the Self-Help Resource Center Committee, a member of the Local Access to Justice Committee, spearheaded the initiative to bring kiosks and new signage to the Courthouse to promote access to justice, served an integral role in the revision of various forms used by the GDC Bench, and frequently presents at many community and Bar events.

OVERALL EVALUATION

Judge Pidikiti-Smith sufficiently exceeds the minimum requirements for integrity, legal knowledge, professional experience, judicial temperament, diligence, health, financial responsibility, and public service. The Committee believes that Judge Pidikiti-Smith has positively contributed to the General District Court and has garnered a good reputation as a Judge. The Committee believes Judge Pidikiti-Smith has great potential but would also benefit from additional time on the General District court bench if she is not selected this time. The Committee also suggests that with additional time on the GDC Bench, Judge Pidikiti-Smith will find a better balance of the appearance of equity and fairness.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: RECOMMENDED