

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **NOVEMBER 2020 FAIRFAX GENERAL DISTRICT COURT JUDICIAL SCREENING**

#### **VANESSA R. JORDAN**

Vanessa Jordan is a long-time resident of Springfield, Virginia. She spent much of her childhood in St. Louis, MO, but moved to Alabama in high school. In 2000, she graduated from the University of Alabama. In 2003, she moved to Virginia and began attending Howard University School of Law, where she received her J.D. in 2006. Ms. Jordan was admitted to practice before the Virginia Supreme Court in 2006.

#### **EXPERIENCE AND LEGAL ABILITY**

Ms. Jordan began her career in the Fredericksburg Office of the Public Defender. She worked at that office for approximately eight years and was eventually a Senior Assistant Public Defender. From October 2014 - present, she has been in private practice, first at the firms of Janet E. Boyd and Associates (October 2014 - July 2015), Woehrle Dahlberg Jones Yao PLLC (July 2015 - April 2016), and The Law Office of James A. Rivera PLLC (April 2016 - October 2016) before opening her own firm, The Law Office of Vanessa R. Jordan, PLLC, in October 2016, handling primarily criminal and traffic cases. In addition to criminal matters, Ms. Jordan also handles domestic cases, including divorce, custody, and visitation. She also serves as a Guardian Ad Litem in abuse and neglect, custody, CHINS, and adoption cases. Finally, for many years she was appointed by the Court to represent parents responding to abuse and neglect allegations.

#### **FAIRNESS AND TEMPERAMENT**

Ms. Jordan displayed an appropriately formal demeanor. The Committee was impressed with her presence, believing her to have a fair, calm, and pleasant temperament as is required to be a General District Court judge. Ms. Jordan had a specific vision for the ideal judicial demeanor that focused on showing dignity and respect. She was also able to clearly discuss how she would deal with a situation where she imagined herself becoming upset on the bench or making a decision based off of information not directly in the case before her. These descriptions of judicial demeanor were consistent with what the Committee learned about Ms. Jordan's demeanor as an attorney from both her interview and from members of the Bar, which leads the Committee to determine that she will have a strong judicial temperament if elected to the bench.

#### **PROFESSIONALISM AND INTEGRITY**

The candidate demonstrated professionalism and a strong work ethic. The committee notes Ms. Jordan's service to the Northern Virginia Black Attorneys Association as its President, Immediate Past President, Social Committee Chair, and member of the Judicial Selection Panel. She is also a member of the Criminal Law Sections of the Virginia State and Fairfax County Bars. In August 2020, Ms. Jordan was appointed to the Fairfax County Civil Service Commission. She has also volunteered her time with a variety of other community organizations, especially activities that expose students to the legal profession.

During her interview, Ms. Jordan expressed the need for the General District Court to affirmatively work to make all persons appearing before the Court feel welcome and respected. She noted that

other courts, including the Fairfax Circuit Court, the Fairfax Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, and the Supreme Court of Virginia, had made public statements regarding systemic racism and community engagement. She expressed the need for the General District Court to do the same as it is the Court that serves the highest volume of litigants who come from all parts of the County and walks of life. The Committee was impressed with her thoughts on the need for a strong perception of fairness of the Court by all members of the public.

### **OVERALL EVALUATION**

The committee affirmatively recommends Ms. Jordan for the position of General District Court judge. She meets the requirements of experience, fairness, temperament, and professionalism to be appointed to the General District Court bench in Fairfax County, Virginia. Ms. Jordan has a strong desire to continue her history of public service by serving her community as a judge of the General District Court. She has clearly put a great deal of thought into how she would approach the position of a Judge and was able to support those thoughts with specific examples. Her application would be improved by additional exposure to civil law or with service as a substitute judge.

**COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: RECOMMENDED**