

August 24, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
PO Box 203005
Helena MT 59620-3005

Dear Ms. Menzies:

I am writing to you to give support to Christopher Abbott's nomination for district court judge for the First Judicial District. I know Chris personally and worked with him professionally. Chris is a lifelong Helena resident, born and raised in Helena. He cares deeply about Helena and it's legal community.

When I first graduated law school and moved back to Helena, Chris helped me land on my feet. He mentored me and gave me professional advice. He did not know me well, but he still took the time to answer my professional questions. Chris cares about professional development and the legal profession.

Chris is an exceptional judicial candidate because he has extensive trial experience, criminal experience, administrative law experience, and civil practice. Having a judicial candidate that understands administrative law and the state's administrative processes is critical because the State of Montana's contracts and the State's administrative rules selected the First Judicial District as the primary court with jurisdiction. That means the First Judicial District, by far, hears more administrative law cases than any other judicial district. Chris worked as a hearing examiner/administrative law judge. This allowed him to have hands on experience adjudicating administrative law cases. Administrative law is not intuitive rather, it is arcane and difficult to learn. Chris already has that knowledge and can quickly and efficiently rule on those cases. Chris's broad knowledge of the law and the practice of law will make him an excellent district court judge.

Chris's reputation proceeds him as a fair minded and just attorney. He's worked hard to be fair and civil to opposing attorneys, victims, police officers, and judges. He has always worked hard to understand opposing counsel's issues and how they perceive them.

It is an honor to write in support of Christopher Abbott. Chris's extensive background demonstrates he will be a fair and effective district court judge.

Sincerely,

Rune Vander Wey

August 28, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Ms. Menzies,

This letter is in support of Christopher Abbott as District Court Judge. I began working for the Public Defenders in 2012, where I first met Chris. Chris was at that point considered an experienced criminal attorney who took on many felony cases including some of the most heinous cases. Not only did he represent each defendant to the best of his ability, he worked every case as if it was the most important case on his case load. Many of the younger attorneys would seek out Chris for mentoring, he was always the “go-to attorney” and everyone knew how knowledgeable he was. He handled every case/client with passion and was very efficient. In the time working with Chris at the Public Defenders, I watched Chris do numerous trials. Each trial posed new obstacles including, writing extensive briefs, staying late and working long hours, all of which Chris executed and handled exceptionally. During these trials it amazed me how in tune he was with the case and always looked at every detail pertaining to the case or defendant, there was never a lack of knowledge with Chris.

Fast forward to 2020 where I now get to work with Chris, again, this time on the prosecution side of things. Again, Chris has shown the utmost professionalism and fairness with every case he gets. Having the defense attorney background has given Chris the ability to see both sides and truly understand a case as well as the complex aspects of every case/matter. On top of working on the defense and prosecutorial side of things, Chris also has the civil experience. Being a Hearing Examiner for our agency has given Chris the experience to hear an array of different civil matters and exercise his knowledge of administrative law.

I strongly believe Chris would make a great District Court Judge. Not only is Chris a great lawyer but he is also a great person. He has always exhibited a high degree of energy toward his work as well as compassion and professionalism. I give my support of Christopher Abbott as District Court Judge.

Sincerely,

Brandy Morrison

8/30/20

James Reavis
Bar Number 12157
jamesrichardreavis@yahoo.com

Judicial Nomination Commission,

I write to you to show my enthusiastic support for Chris Abbott, who has applied to fill the open seat vacated by Judge James Reynolds of the First Judicial District.

Even though we did not work in the same office, I knew Chris early on by reputation as a skilled public defender who passionately represented his clients. Chris was a role model I could look up to as I pursued my new career as a public defender. Chris's presentations at our annual public defender conferences were always a joy to watch. Chris cares about his clients and wants to be sure the justice system treats them right.

In 2014, I was hired as an appellate defender and transferred my job from Butte to Helena. As this happened around my birthday, I invited attorneys from the public defender office for a little party to help me integrate into this new community. Even though Chris did not know me very well at the time, he still showed up. I appreciated this kind gesture and never forgot it. Chris makes time for others, even when there is no reward in it for him. He has the kind of character that we are looking for in a judge, because he will understand that every litigant in a case is important, no matter their circumstances.

Chris has a well-rounded body of experience you will not find in many judicial candidates. After a long career as a public defender, Chris now works for Agency Legal Services for the Department of Justice. This means that Chris has experienced the criminal justice system from both sides of the aisle. He has experience in both civil and criminal litigation, and he understands the law from both a trial-level and appellate-level perspective. Chris understands how delays in litigation frustrates the lives of those who are being held in limbo, which is why he will work hard and issue timely decisions that fairly apply the law. I urge the Commission to forward Chris's nomination to the Governor.

Sincerely,

James Reavis

Jenny Kaleczyc
Attorney at Law
7 W 6th Ave, Suite 4N
Helena, MT 59601

August 30, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

Among the many good applicants for the vacant judgeship in the First Judicial District, one stands above the rest: Chris Abbott.

Chris has a well-deserved reputation for his strong trial skills, knowledge of the law, and work ethic. At the Office of the Public Defender, where I worked with Chris for 10 years, he quickly ascended the ranks, earning a statewide reputation for excelling in trying complex cases. Even though he carried a heavy caseload of his own, he always made time to mentor other attorneys. Chris was the person to call for help for public defenders all over Montana. Need a brief? Chris may have already written one on the issue. Need to talk through a case? Chris will make time. Have a novel issue? Chris will help you research it and map out a strategy.

Good attorneys have different strengths. Some are known for their research and writing skills; some for their courtroom advocacy; others for their breadth of knowledge. Chris is the rare attorney who is at the top of his field in all these categories. Chris is a strong and persuasive advocate, in part, because he can see all sides of an issue. His ability to critically analyze legal issues from different perspectives will be a strength to him on the bench. His intellectual curiosity and integrity are unparalleled.


Since Chris left his work as a public defender, he has gained substantial experience in civil law. At the Department of Justice's Agency Legal Services he defends complex civil cases in state and federal courts. This

experience combined with his criminal law background make him the rare judicial candidate with extensive experience and knowledge of both civil and criminal law. He is uniquely prepared for a judgeship.

Since I was admitted to the Montana bar in 2002, I have clerked for the Montana Supreme Court and practiced law at a law firm, the public defender's office, and a state agency. Recently I returned to private practice as a sole practitioner. This has allowed me to work with hundreds of attorneys across a wide range of disciplines. None can match Chris for his intellect, work ethic, and critical thinking.

Montana would be fortunate to have Chris Abbott serve as district court judge, and I wholeheartedly urge you to select him.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jenny Kaleczyc', with a stylized, flowing script.

Jenny Kaleczyc

Jonathan King
PO Box 236
Helena, MT 59624

August 25, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

I am a civil plaintiff lawyer with the law firm Doubek, Pyfer & Storrar in Helena. Previously, I work alongside Chris Abbott in the Office of the State Public Defender. Prior to working with Chris, I worked in New York at the law firm of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher and in the Boston area at the Massachusetts public defender agency. In these offices, I was mentored by and worked alongside many capable and intelligent lawyers.

Chris is among the most intelligent and hard-working lawyers I have worked with. Chris has an encyclopedic knowledge of the law, including instant recall of cases by name or even citation. Chris also truly enjoys the law: he likes to read it, think about it, and talk about it. He immerses himself in the law and can often be found in his office at night and on weekends, working tirelessly on his cases. Because Chris is a hard worker who has practiced both civil and criminal law—including trying numerous cases to verdict—he will be an asset to both the criminal and civil bars.

Chris also has a perfect judicial temperament: he is even-keeled, patient, and attentive. When Chris and I served as co-counsel on cases, I was impressed by how measured Chris remained in situations when most others would react emotionally.

I recommend Chris wholeheartedly for the position of district court judge.

Sincerely,



Jonathan King

August 28, 2020

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission,

I am writing this letter on behalf of Christopher Abbott and his application for District Court Judge. Mr. Abbott has a strong and diverse background as a legal practitioner that is well suited for becoming a district judge.

Mr. Abbott has both civil and criminal legal experience, including extensive trial experience in the Office of the Public Defender's Major Crimes Unit. Mr. Abbot has additionally worked on complex civil cases and appeals, providing him with a well-rounded legal background. Mr. Abbott understands the importance of judicial discretion and how it impacts both individual decisions and future cases, and I believe he has the capacity to balance discretion with adherence to the principles of the law.

Mr. Abbott is committed to his clients, and during his time with the Office of the Public Defender he worked diligently to provide the best defense for those he represented, no matter how challenging. Mr. Abbott approached both his cases and clients with integrity and took the time to understand the often traumatic events that had shaped his clients experience, and provided exceptional representation as a result. I believe Mr. Abbott is similarly committed to the continued success of Treatment Court and would be an excellent steward going forward.

Mr. Abbott's reputation at the Officer of the Public Defender was that of a committed and ethical advocate for his clients. As the former Executive Director of The Friendship Center in Helena, I was impressed by Mr. Abbott's commitment to both clients and victims, and greatly appreciated his belief that the judicial system should promote successful individuals. In the cases that I observed where Mr. Abbott was involved, I was impressed with his even handed and analytical approach, and by his skillful handling of witnesses.

I strongly support Mr. Abbott as a candidate and believe he will make a capable and honorable judge for our community.

Sincerely,

Melinda Reed

Helena, MT

Peter B. Ohman
Attorney at Law
612 South 10th Avenue
Bozeman, MT 59715

September 1, 2020

Office of the Court Administrator
c/o Lois Menzies
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Re: District Court Appointment

Dear Members of the Judicial Nomination Commission:


I am writing to express my support for Christopher Abbott to be appointed to the District Court for the First Judicial District. It is clear Mr. Abbott meets the qualifications to take the bench in Broadwater and Lewis and Clark counties.

I have known Mr. Abbott since he began working at the Public Defender's Office in 2007. Chris quickly distinguished himself as a fine lawyer developing expertise in a broad array of practice areas. When I became the training coordinator for OPD I regularly leaned on him to provide training to our new and more experienced attorneys. Difficult subjects such as DNA and cross-examination of highly skilled expert witnesses seemed to come easily to Chris, generating a degree of envy from myself. When he chose to leave OPD for the Attorney General's office it was a loss for one agency but a gain for another.

Since his move to Agency Legal Services I have been able to continue working with Mr. Abbott. He has provided excellent representation to our office on two challenging matters, both with successful outcomes. Obviously, he has handled the transition from criminal to civil practice with aplomb.

Chris' intellect, calm demeanor, sense of humor, courtroom experience, and mastery of both criminal and civil law make him uniquely suited for this position. I hope you will forward his name to the Governor for further consideration.

Sincerely,



Peter B. Ohman
Attorney at Law



FOX LAW FIRM

Andrea Fox

307 1st Ave. E., #4

P.O. Box 9621

Kalispell, MT 59904

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afox@mtfoxlaw.com

September 1, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Re: *Christopher Abbott judicial nomination*

Dear Lois,

I am writing a letter of support for Christopher Abbott. I have known Chris for 23 years. We met in high school speech and debate, and both ended up becoming lawyers. He took the criminal law track and I practice mainly family law.

In all the time that I have known Chris, he has always been the smartest guy in the room, but the last one to tell you so. A great judge needs to have the intelligence to analyze complex areas of the law and synthesize facts with the law and into rulings. I have no doubt that Chris would make short work of the "academic" end of the law.

Chris's long service for the OPD demonstrates his extreme patience, a quality which only the best of judges possess. All lawyers have been in the hot-headed, impatient judge's courtroom, and all have been very excited to leave it. A lack of patience, in my experience, does not lead to the best judicial decisions. I believe that Chris would make very measured, level-headed rulings.

His trial experience puts him in good stead for managing a courtroom. He knows what makes a good judge, he knows what makes a bad judge. He knows civil procedure, the rules of evidence, and everything in between. While many of these rules can be learned as one goes, I believe it is very beneficial for a judge to have trial experience prior to becoming a judge so that they can focus on making decisions, not the mechanics of the law. Chris has the knowledge of the rules covered.

As a family law practitioner, and as a parent, I also appreciate that Chris has a family. I have seen so many judges butcher family law decisions because they are out

of touch with what it is like to have a family. Selfishly, as a family law lawyer practicing part-time in Helena, I want to see a judge who will make good family law decisions. And, honestly, a lot of the Court's time is spent on family law cases. I think Chris would make very good family law decisions.

I think Christopher Abbott would be a wonderful judge and I fully support his nomination for the position.

Best Regards,

/s/ Andrea Fox
Andrea Fox
Attorney at Law

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

September 4, 2020

To the Judicial Commission:

I write in support Christopher Abbott's application to fill the judicial vacancy in First Judicial District that was created by Judge Reynold's retirement. I am an active member of the First Judicial District bar and I have worked alongside Chris at the Attorney General's Office in the Agency Legal Services Bureau (ALSB) for the last four years. Additionally, I knew him by reputation long before he joined ALSB, as his former paralegal (while he was at Major Crimes at the Public Defender's office) worked for me for many years and had nothing but wonderful things to say about him.

One of the most striking things about Chris is his ability to seamlessly transition from criminal law to civil law. Chris came to ALSB to perform complex civil litigation after a decade of exclusively criminal experience. ALSB operates in a very broad range of legal areas – torts, Section 1983 cases, employment actions, human rights claims, constitutional issues, environmental law, and all types of administrative law. It is not unlikely that in a single day Chris will have cases and client questions that are in completely different titles of the Montana Code. Even coming from a criminal background, however, Chris was immediately able to perform the highest quality work in all these diverse civil areas. Additionally (as ALSB bills its time to state agency clients), he was able to do so with great efficiency. He has a tremendous work ethic and excellent time management skills. Watching Chris work a high and broad case load over the last four years, I have no doubt that he will be able to effectively manage the massive caseload of a First Judicial District Judge. Whether it be criminal, civil, or administrative law, Chris has done it all—and done it all extremely well.

Chris is also one of the best litigators and trial attorneys I know. His command of the Rules of Evidence, Rules of Criminal Procedure, Rules of Civil Procedure, and Uniform District Court Rules is truly something toward which we should all strive. Having tried so many cases throughout his career, he is able to recall rules and their nuanced applications off the top of his head. He has much to teach those of us with less trial experience, and he is always willing to help and instruct in the most

supportive way. His extensive trial experience, and his deeply internalized knowledge of all the applicable rules would make him the kind of judge we all hope to have—on who knows and works by the rules and understands how trials work. His experience living through litigation as counsel (whether civil or criminal) also gives him an intimate awareness of what it is like to litigate cases. He understands discovery, dealing with opposing counsel, client management, settlement negotiations, motions practice, and trial preparation. This would make him a very practical judge, which is highly useful when it comes to things like resolving discovery disputes or setting meaningful case schedules. Litigants always appreciate having someone on the bench who has lived their experience.

In addition to being a great lawyer, Chris is also just a wonderful human. He is compassionate, friendly, polite, and with the highest moral compass. He is very attuned to ethical issues in the practice of law and meticulous about adhering to his ethical obligations. Whether he is dealing with staff, pro-se inmates, members of the public, or opposing counsel, he is uniformly pleasant to work with. He has a very calming presence and always tends to de-escalate a difficult situation or work to find a solution, rather than increasing the tensions already inherent to an adversarial system. As a judge, he would be just as even-keeled, respectful, compassionate, and professional regardless of who was appearing in front of him or how high the emotions were running. He is the consummate professional and I believe his demeanor would be contagious in the courtroom in the best way.

Finally, I would like to note that my support for Chris comes even though we are not always on the same page ideologically or politically. Our opinions differ on many issues, and we have often had lively debates on current events. However, I have always felt that Chris was not only respectful of my opinion and open to new ideas, but completely unbiased in his practice of law. He treats everyone the same regardless of their background or affiliation and I have never seen him advocate or adjudicate a single matter based on anything other than the law before him. Despite our differences, I would love to appear before him on a case because I know that he would make decisions based solely on the law and the facts, without any bias. True impartiality is hard for any human being to achieve, but Chris is one of the few people who is capable of it.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this public comment in support of Chris.

Sincerely,

/s/ Sarah Clerget

First Judicial Bar Member

Anna Maria A. Kecskes
836 8th Ave.
Helena, MT 59601
September 8, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

I am writing this letter in support of Christopher Abbott, who is currently applying to fill the vacancy left by Judge Jim Reynolds' upcoming retirement in the First Judicial District. I am more than happy to recommend Chris, as I feel that he is a uniquely qualified candidate.

I met Chris when we both worked at the Office of the Public Defender (OPD) in Region 4, and our time overlapped for a little over a year until he accepted his current position as an assistant attorney general. Being a public defender was my first practicing job out of law school, and by the time that I joined the office, Chris had already amassed a reputation as one of the most experienced and knowledgeable attorneys at the office, and really within the state of Montana. Chris was routinely assigned to the most serious criminal cases that came through our office, but despite his case load, he still took the time to be a resource for the younger attorneys. Because of his years of experience, combined with his almost uncanny ability to recall cases and statutes, Chris was a wealth of knowledge for the office. Attorneys would routinely go to him in order to "talk out" a case or a problem, and would usually leave with Chris' promise to send a sample brief or citation for further help. In particular, I remember one instance where I was defending a misdemeanor case for trespass, and Chris was able to point me in the direction of several cases which articulated the high standard for cities' and counties' ability to trespass private citizens from sites of public access. I tell this story only to point out that I had really gone into Chris' office to talk about the case, hoping to gain a sympathetic ear. Probably ten minutes into my spiel, Chris had citations for me and I was on my way to draft a motion to dismiss.

In addition to his extensive criminal (and civil) experience, I believe that Chris is a uniquely valuable candidate because of his honest, and fair-minded approach to our justice system. Public defenders represent defendants who have been charged with crimes along the full spectrum, from driving with a suspended license to sexual crimes and homicide. Chris worked tirelessly during his time as a public defender to provide passionate and thorough representation to those defendants, especially those that were charged with serious felonies and potentially capital crimes. While his dedication was obviously focused on providing the best representation that he

could to his defendants, Chris has never lost his overall sense of fairness or understanding of the effect of his work on judges, opposing counsel, victims, and law enforcement. In other words, even while passionately working for his clients, Chris never lost sight of the other people within his cases, or the points of view they represented. This gained him a lot of respect within OPD, and within the First Judicial District in general.

Again, I am more than proud to support Chris in his application for this position as he is truly an asset to this community for the work he has done and continues to do.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Anna M. Kecskes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Anna" and last name "Kecskes" being clearly legible, and the middle initial "M." written in a smaller, more stylized script.

Anna Maria A. Kecskes

To whom it may concern:

I am writing you with regards to the judicial nomination on behalf of Christopher Abbott. I want to front load my statements by stating I am an expert witness and I testify in many counties across Montana. I also want to make clear I have been hired by Mr. Abbott yet I have also been cross examined by him. My observations of Mr. Abbott in his professional and personal life are supportive of his ability to be effective in the role of District Court Judge. Mr. Abbott is diligent in his practice of law, yet is balanced, fair, and always willing to be educated. I deeply respect his desire to learn and take new information into consideration. Personally I have known him in the community and he is always cheerful, respectful, and easy to engage. He clearly has the ability to balance his personal and professional responsibilities and I highly recommend him for the position of District Court Judge.

B. Smelko, Psy.D., ABPP

Bowman Smelko, Psy.D., ABPP
Licensed Psychologist
Board Certified in Forensic Psychology

Capital City Consultants

25 S. Ewing St. Suite 416

Helena, MT 59601

P: 406-282-1744

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Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Louis Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Cameron Boster
Attorney
215 E. 6th Ave.
Helena, MT 59601

I am writing to support Christopher D. Abbott's nomination to the 1st Judicial District Court in Helena, Montana.

I worked with Mr. Abbott at the Office of the State Public Defender in Helena, Montana, and became familiar with his work as a hearing examiner at Agency Legal Services while I worked for the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

In his role as an attorney for the Office of the State Public Defender, Mr. Abbott demonstrated he is a skilled litigator, deeply-learned lawyer, and thoughtful mentor. In his role as a hearing examiner, Mr. Abbott demonstrated he is also a thoughtful, even-handed adjudicator, and thorough writer.

In my experience, there are few members of the bar equally well-regarded as Mr. Abbott. The level of respect with which so many local attorneys speak of Mr. Abbott is not only a sign of a good lawyer, but also a sign of a good potential judge.

It is critical that both the public and the members of the bar trust the office of the judiciary. To preserve that trust, it is critical that we select attorneys who are capable, willing, and well-regarded to serve in those roles. For this reason, I strongly support the nomination of Mr. Abbott to the 1st Judicial District Court.

Sincerely,

/s/ Cameron Boster

Letters to judicial nominating commission for Mary Cochenour and Christopher Abbott

Dear members of the Judicial Nominating Committee:

My name is Dorothy McCarter. I served as District Judge for the First Judicial District in Montana from 1989 until my retirement in 2013. I am familiar with the appointment process, since I went through it in 1989 when the Honorable Judge Henry Loble retired before the end of his term.

Mary Cochenour and Christopher Abbott have each asked me to write a letter to you to recommend them for the vacancy to occur upon the early resignation of the Honorable James Reynolds. Since I hold both Mary and Chris in high regard, I decided to recommend them both and leave the decisions to you. I understand that your committee will provide a list of candidates to the governor, and I urge you to include them both.

Mary and Chris began their legal careers in Helena, and appeared in my court almost daily for many years. They both served as public defenders and later moved on to other areas, including prosecution and civil law. They are both highly skilled attorneys in every area of the law that I observed in my court. I always enjoyed presiding on cases in which they were involved. Mary and Chris are both respectful of the court and the court proceedings. They were well prepared for every case. Their conduct has been impeccable, and their presence pleasant and efficient.

In my experience on the bench I appreciate the importance of the judge to be personable and respectful of attorneys and their clients at all times. Mary and Chris are very likable and get along with the judges and lawyers. Judicial temperament is paramount for a good judge. Mary and Chris have always maintained an even temper in all kinds of cases, including those contentious situations that could rile up anyone. They both have a good sense of humor that helps maintain a calm and pleasant courtroom environment.

Mary and Chris are both highly intelligent, are hard working and are excellent legal writers. Neither seems to be the type of person easily influenced by extrajudicial pressures.

For these reasons, I most enthusiastically recommend both Mary and Chris for the judicial position. Please contact me if I provide any further information.

Sincerely,
Dorothy McCarter

Cook, Kevin

From: Menzies, Lois
Sent: Tuesday, September 8, 2020 9:25 PM
To: Cook, Kevin
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott

From: Michael Swingley <mswingley@lccountymt.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, September 8, 2020 3:36 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Christopher Abbott

To: Judicial Candidates Commission
c/o Lois Menzies

Re: Christopher Abbott

I wish to recommend Christopher Abbott for the open judicial seat, vacated by Judge James Reynolds, First Judicial District Court. Mr. Abbott and I have known each other for 10 years. I am very familiar with Mr. Abbott as he practiced in my court for all of that time as an attorney for the Public Defender's Office. Mr. Abbott has always shown a high level of professionalism in the defense of his clients and a compassion for them and seeing that justice is delivered fairly in their cases. Mr. Abbott is extremely well spoken, and demonstrates a high level of intelligence and performance in his position of an attorney. His cases are well organized and presented in an efficient manner. I have held Mr. Abbott in a position of high regard. Mr. Abbott has the experience to handle to stress and high pressure position of serving as a District Court Judge and would be an excellent candidate to fill the position vacated by Judge Reynolds.

Respectfully,
Mike Swingley

Cook, Kevin

From: Menzies, Lois
Sent: Tuesday, September 8, 2020 9:25 PM
To: Cook, Kevin
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott

From: koan mercer <koan_mercer@yahoo.com>
Sent: Monday, September 7, 2020 10:45 AM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment regarding Chris Abbott's application for the 1st Judicial District Court

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

I am writing in support of Chris Abbott's application for appointment to the First Judicial District. I know Chris from his years as a public defender. He is without question one of the finest attorneys I have ever encountered. He is also among those most suited to be a judge.

It is not just that Chris is crazy smart—he is. Chris will be an amazing judge because he is thorough, because he is objective, and because, like Hamilton, “the man is non-stop.” The First Judicial District could not wish for a better candidate.

Sincerely,

Koan Mercer

Cook, Kevin

From: Menzies, Lois
Sent: Tuesday, September 8, 2020 9:24 PM
To: Cook, Kevin
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott

From: Sarah Putzker <sjputzker@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, September 7, 2020 9:05 AM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Christopher Abbott

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a member of the community and would like to offer my support for Christopher Abbott as a judicial candidate. Although I do not know Chris directly, I have heard a lot about him and believe he would make an excellent judge.

Sincerely,

Sarah Murray

September 1, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of the Court Administrator
PO Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Ms. Menzies:

I am writing today to show my support for Chris Abbott's appointment to the First Judicial District Court Judgeship. I worked with Chris at OPD and have worked adjacent Chris in state and local government positions. He is the perfect fit for a judge as he pairs a broad understanding and curiosity about the law with a deep compassion for all members of society. I wanted to share two stories that show Chris as a technical thinker as well as a caring person.

Chris is a problem solver. I can remember one felony criminal client I represented who plead guilty to an array of charges. There was an agreed upon plea deal calling for a certain number of years in prison. When it came time for sentencing the prosecutor, the judge, and I realized that the charges that my client plead to would not equate to the agreed upon sentence length. The prosecutor and I both left court in a state of befuddlement with an order to come back the next week and sort things out. After doing a lot more math than an attorney should be allowed to do, we both turned to Chris. Even though this was not his case he jumped right in and made sense of the chaos. He crafted an agreement that suited both the needs of my client and the needs of the county. Chris spent time explaining what he did and walking us through recrafting the plea agreement. I think that it is truly telling of Chris as an individual that he would set his immense workload aside to really sit down and help a coworker out of an incredibly tough spot.

In another instance, I was with Chris when he met with a young man who was incarcerated in a jail outside of the county. This man, who was barely an adult, had no support figures in his life, and significant learning difficulties. He was facing charges that could mean a lifetime of incarceration. At the start of our meeting this man was teary, terrified, and completely confused about what was happening. Chris took the time to listen to him, explain the charges and court process, and set up plan of communication moving forward that left this man clearly more comfortable and at ease when we left. I was really in awe and touched by seeing someone show such care and attentiveness to such a downtrodden individual. When I think of effective client counselling that is always a meeting I remember. I doubt that man was acquitted, but I am sure that he received patient counsel and fully understood everything that was happening when he was in court.

Thank you for taking this public comment under consideration.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Barbee

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005 Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

9/9/2020

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission,

I submit this letter in support of Chris Abbott for the position of District Court Judgeship. I am familiar with Chris as I worked with him as a public defender in Helena for several years. Chris was my mentor, and I spent a significant amount of time asking him questions, as well as working cases with him and seeing him practice in court. I think he would make a great judge for three reasons.

First, Chris is very qualified for the job and he truly wants it. He has extensive criminal law experience as he was a public defender for 10 years. I know from conversations with him, watching him in court, and asking him questions, that he is very knowledgeable about Montana law, the rules of evidence, and other court rules. He was patient with me as a new attorney, taking the time to answer my many questions about cases, clients, statutes, and court rules. Chris was a constant resource for me. He would very frequently spout rules and statutes off the top of his head in an impressive demonstration of the breadth of his knowledge. That knowledge base, as well as his experience practicing in criminal court, positions him well to become a judge. He has also worked on the civil side as an assistant attorney general at the DOJ. This means he would not be new to either type of law and could hit the ground running, a fairly novel position for a new judge. In addition to being qualified, his desire for the job over a long time period exhibits his dedication. Ever since I met him, he has been clear about his aspiration to become a judge. This is something that he has been considering for years, not something that he has decided to pursue on whim. It is important to select a candidate who is committed to the position, and that candidate is Chris.

Second, he will be fair and impartial. In appointing judges, it is important to select a candidate who will serve the bench and adhere to the law. I have watched Chris remain calm and collected in the face of very difficult personalities, both from clients and from opposing counsel. While he is passionate, he is also matter-of-fact. I think his temperament would make him an excellent judge, one that is able to set aside personal feelings and rule fairly without prejudice or bias. He has demonstrated an ability to look at both sides of any argument, often playing devil's

advocate in my case discussions. This shows that while he practiced on the defense side in the criminal context, he is well-suited to see the other side as well. The addition of his civil work further makes him a well-rounded candidate. I have no doubt that Chris would make his rulings not based on biases or emotions, but solely based on the law, and that is what any attorney, defendant, plaintiff, or victim should want from a judge.

Third, he will work harder than any other candidate. One thing that always struck me about Chris, aside from his impressive and almost encyclopedia-like knowledge of the law, was his commitment to his work. He sacrificed much of his personal time to be as thorough and as prepared as possible on every single case. He was relentless in his representation of his clients. Even though he was very efficient and maintained a large caseload, he put in the extra work to give the best possible representation to his clients. Despite his workload and many trials, he always took the time to talk to me and other new attorneys about our cases and issues, giving us his time even on very low-level cases. He approached his mentoring without ever looking down on new attorneys or our clients or cases. He also agreed to second-chair one of my first big felony trials, adding to his own work just to help me out. I know he would bring that same attention to detail and tireless work ethic to the bench, making him the best possible candidate for the job.

While I was a coworker and mentee of Chris for several years, I am lucky enough to also count him as a friend. Chris is a very impressive attorney and I credit him with the strong foundation of practice I received in my time in Helena. Everything about who he is as both an attorney and as a person means he is the best person for the job. If selected, I have no doubts that Chris would make a fantastic addition to the bench. I urge you to select Chris Abbott for the position of First District Court Judge.

Thank you for your consideration,

Brady Minow Smith
Trial Attorney
Salt Lake Legal Defender Association
275 East 200 South
Salt Lake City, UT 84111

Stanley T. Kaleczyc
661 West Main Street
Helena, MT 59601
406 431 5305
stan@bkbh.com
September 10, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
PO Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
By email: mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Re: Christopher D. Abbott

Dear Members of the Commission:

I am writing in support of the application of Chris Abbott to serve as a Judge of the First Judicial District.

The First Judicial District is unique in the scope of the cases and issues which its judges are asked to decide. The Court, of course, has an active criminal and general civil docket. In addition, the judges of this Court are called upon to decide issues of constitutional and statewide significance, including cases of first impression, undoubtedly with greater frequency than any other judicial district. The people of Montana will be well-served with the appointment of an individual who has the breadth of knowledge and depth of experience which will enable the new judge to "hit the ground running." By his experience, intellect, and educational achievements, Chris Abbott meets all the relevant criteria.

As his application demonstrates, Chris has experience as a criminal lawyer who has defended many individuals, has prosecuted criminal cases, and has significant experience representing the state and state agencies in high-profile and complex civil cases. As a law clerk to Judge Browning on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, Chris also had the opportunity to observe, assist, and learn from a distinguished Montana jurist.

Equally as important as his demonstrated legal ability, Chris possesses the temperament which we look for in all our judges. It is at this personal level that I have come to know Chris. He is fair-minded, compassionate, and perceptive. He works as hard and diligently as any attorney I have known in my 38 years of private practice in Montana with my firm, Browning, Kaleczyc, Berry & Hoven, P.C. He has an unwavering respect for the law and the judicial system. At the same time, he understands that the law is not always perfect, and as judge he will be called upon to dispense justice. Chris truly has a sense of fair play and substantial justice which he will bring to this office.

Judicial Nomination Commission
Re: Christopher D. Abbott
September 10, 2020

Chris is not only an outstanding candidate to succeed Judge Reynolds, and, if appointed, will be an outstanding jurist. I commend him to you.

Sincerely,



Stanley T. Kaleczyc

Steven C. Haddon
21 Lone Mountain Road
Clancy, Montana 59634

September 9, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Via hand delivery

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

Chris Abbott has requested I write to you in support of his application for the upcoming vacancy in the Montana First Judicial District Court. It is my pleasure to be able to provide input.

I first met Mr. Abbott when I worked with him in the Office of the State Public Defender in Helena. Having come from a practice where the criminal side was federal criminal defense, I was not fully familiar with the procedural aspects of Montana criminal practice and more particularly with how the Judges in the Montana First Judicial District Court ran their respective criminal dockets. I found Mr. Abbott to be a go to source when I needed information. It was clear to me Mr. Abbott carried a command of not only the "big picture" aspects of Montana criminal law and procedure, but also of its minutia.

Mr. Abbott was also an effective advocate for his clients and diligently worked for the best possible resolution to their cases. Importantly, his temperament was such that he could effectively manage difficult individuals without being confrontational; a trait I believe to be important in a District Court Judge. Mr. Abbott's courtroom demeanor was always professional, whether it was in how he related to the Court, to witnesses, or other professionals. He always sought the high-ground and did not resort to petty or underhanded tactics.

I believe Mr. Abbott possesses the intellect, demeanor, and patience necessary in a District Court Judge. It is without question he is well versed in the intricacies of procedural rules and Montana law. These traits, as well as others, will allow Mr. Abbott to be an effective jurist. I ask the Commission give him the utmost consideration.

Sincerely,



Steven C. Haddon

September 9, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

I am submitting this letter in support of Christopher Abbott's application for District Court Judge.

I met Chris in 2007 when he began working for the OPD. I was employed with the Montana Department of Corrections as a Probation/Parole Officer. I had the pleasure of working with Chris until my retirement in April of 2017.

Even with the often impossible workload for public defenders, Chris worked diligently and enthusiastically for his clients. He was always fair when discussions were taking place on disposition of shared clients. I was faced with cross examination from Chris many times, many of them several high profile cases. He knew his cases very well.

His support of the treatment court model is very important as the criminal justice system seeks to deal with the severity of addiction in our state, and our community.

I believe Chris has what it takes to be a judge in our community. Thank you for the opportunity to provide my support.

Gina Rasmussen

Cook, Kevin

From: Menzies, Lois
Sent: Thursday, September 10, 2020 9:07 PM
To: Cook, Kevin
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott

From: Melissa Shannon <melissa.shannon@me.com>
Sent: Wednesday, September 9, 2020 1:32 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Support Letter for Chris Abbott

September 9, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in support of Chris Abbott to replace retiring Judge Reynolds in the First Judicial District for Broadwater and Lewis and Clark Counties.

Chris will bring extensive experience to this position, having both criminal and civil legal experience. Currently, Chris serves as an assistant attorney general in the Department of Justice (DOJ) Agency Legal Services Bureau. In this position, Chris has defended complex civil cases, worked on the State's multimillion-dollar litigation against Big Tobacco, and defended the State on several constitutional challenges related to the State's COVID-19 response. Additionally, at DOJ he has handled criminal case appeals for the State and prosecuted felony cases in district court. Before joining the DOJ, Chris also got criminal experience serving as a public defender.

In addition, Chris also has extensive trial experience, trying over 25 cases to verdict. Chris knows the rules of evidence and trial procedure and understands what goes into litigating a case to trial.

Chris is also a lifelong resident of Lewis and Clark County, growing up in Helena, attending Capital High School, and living here for most of his life.

Thank you for your consideration of Chris Abbott.

Sincerely,

Melissa Shannon

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Sunday, September 13, 2020 10:01:48 PM

From: James Taylor <James.Taylor@cskt.org>
Sent: Friday, September 11, 2020 1:19 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] First Judicial District Applicants- Chris Abbott

Dear Ms. Menzies,

I am writing in support of the application of Chris Abbott the District Judge vacancy in the First Judicial District. When I was the Legal Director the MT ACLU I had the opportunity to frequently interact with Chris on a regular basis about the public defender system. At that time Chris was working as a trial attorney for the Helena public defender office. Chris has always impressed me as someone that was bright, fair, and articulate. He was a passionate advocate as a public defender and I am sure he has brought that same passion and integrity to his position with Agency Legal Services at DOJ. I first met Judge Reynolds when we were both law students (about a thousand years ago). Chris would be a great replacement for Judge Reynolds and would bring that same level of insight and fairness into the myriad issues that a district judge must deal with on a daily basis. The experience that Chris brings from both the prosecution and defense sides of the table would be a valuable asset to the First Judicial District. Thank you for considering my recommendation. Stay safe.

Jim Taylor

Managing Attorney
Tribal Prosecutors Office
P.O. Box 278
Pablo, MT 59855
406-675-2700, ext. 1176

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes

James.Taylor@cskt.org



Lewis & Clark County Sheriff's Office

406 Fuller Ave. • Helena, MT 59601

Office 406-447-8235

Fax 406-449-8452

Sheriff-Coroner Leo C. Dutton

Undersheriff Jason T. Grimmis

September 10, 2020

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission,

Please accept my nomination letter for Chris Abbott for District Court Judge, to replace the Honorable Judge Reynolds. I have also written a letter of support for Mary Cochenour. I hold both Chris and Mary in the highest regard.

I have been with the Lewis and Clark County Sheriff's Office for 35 years. Eleven of those years, I worked as a reserve deputy and the rest have been full-time. On September 2, 2008, I became the Sheriff of Lewis and Clark County and continue to serve in that capacity today. During my career, I have had the opportunity to interact with many different district court judges. I've testified in many different cases, from murder trials to driving under the influence cases and physical abuse cases. I offer all this background to say that I know what professionalism and competence look like as demonstrated by many judges.

I first became acquainted with Chris more than a decade ago when he worked as a Public Defender in Helena. After watching Chris in court, I understood why he had a reputation as a brilliant legal mind. He was always astonishingly well prepared and quick thinking while remaining humble and patient. He treats everyone with respect and compassion. It is clear he has a deep love and commitment for our system of justice and that his loyalty is to the law.

Other things I know about Chris is that he is an incredibly clear and concise writer. I have seen him take a complex issue and explain it in accurate and simple terms. I also have strong evidence that he can handle the stress of being a judge. As a Public Defender for Major Crimes, Chris worked long hours in an agency that is famously demanding and underfunded. It is widely known that Chris took on the most difficult cases and worked long hours. I also applaud his interest and willingness to serve as an Assistant Attorney General, which greatly expands his knowledge base and experience.

From my perspective, judges should exemplify core values. These values have been the hallmark that allows decisions to be made without bias or prejudicial preferential treatment. People who sit in a position of judgement should have professionalism, loyalty to the law, accountability to their decisions, compassion for all those involved, the courage to do the right thing when it is not popular, and the integrity to hold oneself true to their work.

I believe Chris Abbott has these values and I highly recommend him for this District Court Judge position.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Leo C. Dutton". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Leo C. Dutton, Sheriff/Coroner



DELIVERED VIA EMAIL ONLY

September 15, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Re: Christopher Abbott

Judicial Nomination Commission,

I am writing this letter to support Christopher Abbott's application to be appointed District Court Judge in the First Judicial District Court. I have been a practicing attorney in the State of Montana for seventeen years and have been teaching as an Adjunct Professor at Carroll College for fourteen years. I first met Chris twenty-one years ago while I was a student at Carroll College competing on the forensics team. At the time, Chris was a Senior in high school competing in policy debate for Capital High School. The State Debate Tournament was held at Carroll that year and I remember judging Chris and being impressed with his analytical thinking skills. The next time I met Chris, I had been working for Lewis and Clark County as a Deputy County Attorney for five years. Chris was hired at the Office of the State Public Defender in the Major Crimes Unit. By 2009, I was prosecuting all the crimes against children, representing DPHHS in Youth in Need of Care cases, and prosecuting other major felonies as assigned. For the next six years, I prosecuted a number of cases against Defendants who were fortunate enough to have Chris as their attorney.

Chris possesses many qualities that would make him an exceptional District Court Judge. First, he has a love for the law and the academics it provides. I witnessed numerous occasions where Chris would delve into the intricacies of the law in representing his clients attempting to create new law. Although I sometimes found it to be exhausting, since I was having to respond to all of his motions and briefs, I knew he filed the motions because he cared about his clients and was advocating for them in the best way possible.

Second, he is a gifted writer. I anticipate his Findings and Orders will be well written, well-reasoned, and will follow existing precedent.

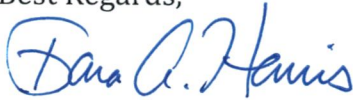
Third, Chris will be fair to all parties. I believe Chris is humble and although he is very bright, he is not conceited or domineering. He will be respectful to the attorneys and parties that appear before him.

Fourth, Chris is ethical and professional. Chris was on the opposite side of the last case I prosecuted before leaving the County in January of 2015 and entering into private practice. It was an emotional-challenging case. Despite the emotions involved, Chris remained professional and ethical throughout.

Finally, Chris has practiced both criminal and civil law. His diverse experience will not only give him an advantage as a District Court Judge, but will also increase his efficiency in making decisions.

I believe Chris will be an asset to the First Judicial District Court, which is why I strongly recommend you forward his name to the Governor for consideration.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tara A. Harris". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "T".

Tara A. Harris

WENDY HOLTON
Attorney at Law
211 5th Avenue, Helena, MT 59601

Telephone: (406) 443-4829

E-mail: wholton@mt.net

January 31, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Commission Members:

We are lucky to have more than one good candidate for judge in the First Judicial District. I am, however, writing in support of Christopher Abbott's application. I have known Chris for a number of years having met him when I was in solo practice in Helena and he worked for the Public Defender's Office. When I learned that he had been a law clerk for Judge Browning I was impressed – both by the position itself and the fact that I knew Chris had given up many more lucrative options in order to serve indigent people. He performed that service at the highest level – soon after he began working at OPD he was assigned responsibility for defending the most complex cases throughout the state as well as for helping to train newer lawyers.

Given his history of achievement, it goes without saying that Chris is highly intelligent. Just as important, however, he is reasonable – which is, at least theoretically, at the core of most legal principles. He is compassionate without being a bleeding heart and he can see all sides of an issue. Significantly, Chris's experience is not limited to criminal law. When he went to work for Agency Legal Services he honed his skills in the civil arena.

Chris is dedicated to the fair administration of the law. I am confident that he would treat everyone who appeared in his court with respect and would conscientiously apply controlling law to the facts presented. He is used to a heavy workload and would deliver timely and well-reasoned decisions.

Chris's personal qualities, his understanding of and expertise in both the criminal and civil arenas, and his knowledge of administrative procedure gleaned from acting as a hearing examiner/administrative law judge, makes him uniquely qualified to be a district court judge. I am happy to recommend Chris Abbott for the District Court Judge position.

Sincerely,


Wendy Holton

September 15, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Judicial Commission Nomination,

I am recommending Chris Abbott for district court judge in the First Judicial District. I currently practice in the First Judicial District, and Chris would be a welcome addition to the bench.

I had the honor of working with Chris at the Office of State Public Defenders. He is truly one of the best human beings I have met, and I have no doubt he would make an exceptional judge. As a public defender he whole-heartedly advocated for his clients and mentored his fellow attorneys. He was always ready and willing to patiently answer questions, no matter how small.

Sitting as a judge is a huge undertaking, requiring a lot of personal integrity, introspection and growth. Chris is kind, honest, open-minded, thoughtful, quick, intelligent and just. These are precisely the qualities we as a community need in a judge. We need someone like Chris, who can serve as a neutral party, see all sides of any given issue, act with patience and reason, and make quick measured decisions even in the most challenging of situations.

Chris has extensive experience in both criminal and civil law. This experience would serve Chris well as a judge, and would serve the first judicial district as a whole. But even more importantly, Chris is a well-rounded individual who constantly strives to do his best and master whatever challenge presents itself to him.

I urge the Judicial Nomination Commission to select Chris Abbott for district court judge.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Teal Mittelstadt', with a stylized, cursive script.

Teal Mittelstadt
Box 1512
Helena, MT 59624

Danna R. Jackson, Esq.
719 Holter St.
Helena, MT 59061
406.431.8485 * danna_jackson@yahoo.com

September 15, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Re: Christopher David Abbott's application for judicial appointment

Dear Selection Committee:

I write in strong support of Mr. Abbott's application to be appointed a judge on the First Judicial District. As Chief Legal Counsel for the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation I have engaged the Montana Department of Justice's Agency Legal Services Bureau to handle legal matters. In at least three instances Mr. Abbott was assigned to preside over Department cases and litigate on the Department's behalf. In every instance, Mr. Abbott proved to be an excellent arbiter and lawyer.

In one instance, Mr. Abbott served as a Hearing Examiner in a five-day hotly contested employment termination appeal. As was his right, the grievant did not waive time-lines proscribed by the rules. Despite the vast amount of legal and factual issues under consideration, Mr. Abbott ran an efficient and effective docket. His pre-trial rulings assisted the parties in narrowing the issues for hearing, providing the needed clarity to hone in on the relevant facts and legal issues. The hearing was run professionally and fairly. At the end of the proceeding, Mr. Abbott generated a comprehensive order that was well written and reasoned. Mr. Abbott managed an enormous and emotional matter with grace and intelligence. He was unflappable. To that end, Mr. Abbott demonstrated that he has the appropriate temperament to contend with very sticky and complicated issues. I am convinced he would carry these same attributes to the bench.

It is a rare judicial candidate that has both criminal and civil experience. I have spent the majority of my career as a litigator. In my experience, it is imperative that the presiding judge have more than a theoretical understanding of the Rules of Evidence. The First Judicial District will be well served to have a judge who has worked "in the trenches" as a public defender. Mr. Abbott has vast amount of courtroom experience. As such, he has a command of the process,

Letter to Selection Committee
September 15, 2020
page 2

procedures, and rules that govern such proceedings. I did not interface with Mr. Abbott when he was a public defender, but his reputation during his tenure suggests he set the gold standard. He is reputed to be extremely hard working, bright, capable, and an outstanding writer.

On occasion I have interacted with Mr. Abbott socially. He is well known and well-regarded in Helena. It is important to note that he has the social and political acumen to not just be a judge, but also a candidate who will succeed in an election.

I am very pleased and humbled to make this recommendation. Should you have any questions regarding this, do not hesitate to call.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Danna R. Jackson', written in a cursive style.

Danna R. Jackson

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Tuesday, September 15, 2020 6:52:22 PM

From: Craig Shannon, 406-542-7500, 240 East Spruce Street, Missoula, Montana 59802

<craigkevinshannon@gmail.com>

Sent: Monday, September 14, 2020 10:44 AM

To: MT Supreme Court,

Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: Christopher Abbott for the position of district court judge for the First Judicial District (Broadwater and Lewis and Clark Counties)

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

TO: Judicial Candidates Commission, c/o Lois Menzies

Re: Christopher David Abbott

I wish to recommend Christopher David Abbott for the open District Court Judge position, First Judicial District Court.

I am a practicing lawyer and have known Christopher in that capacity since 2016, when the two of us worked on a death penalty case in the First Judicial District Court.

What I observed in working directly with Christopher was his unfailing honesty in addressing the Court and opposing counsel, his calm demeanor through-out the entire judicial process which, at times, can be gut-wrenching, his intelligence in drafting, crafting and presenting legal arguments, his interpersonal skills in communicating with co-counsel, client and support staff, his sense of self which allows him to take himself serious but not too serious, and the respect he has earned among his peers. All these personal characteristics will suit him well as a district court judge.

I request that the committee take him under serious consideration when considering who to nominate for this position.

Respectfully,

Craig Shannon

Craig Kevin Shannon
240 East Spruce Street
Missoula, Montana 59802
USA

voice 406-542-7500

(fax 503-715-9911)



Craig Kevin Shannon
240 East Spruce Street
Missoula, Montana 59802
USA

voice 406-542-7500

(fax 503-715-9911)

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Tuesday, September 15, 2020 6:53:49 PM

From: Alex Rate <alex.rate@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, September 15, 2020 11:24 AM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Letter in Support of Chris Abbot's candidacy for First Judicial District Court vacancy

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

I am writing this letter of support in my individual capacity, and not on behalf of any group or organization. In that capacity strongly support Chris Abbot for the Lewis and Clark County District Court position that is currently open.

Most of my professional experience has been in an adversarial position to Chris. As an assistant attorney general, Chris has defended multiple lawsuits that we filed against the state. Despite being on opposite sides of an issue, I have always found Chris to be a collegial, professional and unfailingly courteous opposing counsel. I think that these qualities will serve Chris well on the bench, where litigants deserve decency and fairness from their finder of fact.

Chris' collegiality does not come at the expense of effective advocacy. I know Chris to be an extremely prepared and very thorough attorney, with polished writing skills and a strong work ethic. Again, those skills are absolutely essential for a district court judge.

Finally, I believe Chris has a deep and abiding commitment to justice, and to the fair and impartial rule of law. I trust that he would give all litigants a fair shake, and in particular those individuals who may be on the margins or who do not have access to traditional systems of power. These qualities are all the more important in Lewis and Clark County, where actions against the state government are typically venued.

In short, Chris would make an outstanding district court judge.
Please contact me if you have any questions.
Regards,

Alex Rate
Bar #11226
[Alex.rate@gmail.com](mailto:alex.rate@gmail.com)
406-224-1447

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Tuesday, September 15, 2020 6:53:19 PM

From: Streano, Jennifer
Sent: Monday, September 14, 2020 2:51 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: Public support letter for Christopher Abbott

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

I am writing this letter in sincere support for Christopher Abbott for 1st Judicial District Court Judge. I had the privilege of working with Chris at the public defender's office for many years. I watched him as he began his career representing clients in Helena Municipal Court and finishing in the Major Crimes Unit. We tried many cases together and I was constantly impressed with his professionalism and just pure legal knowledge. Chris is untroubledly the smartest and fairest attorney in the state of Montana. I would always comment his briefs were so lengthy, but it was because he could not help but argue both sides of every issue.

He not only improved the lives of every client he worked for, but he improved the entire OPD agency by just being a part of it. He set the standard that many new attorneys still hear about and strive to achieve today. Montana is incredibly lucky to have an attorney like Chris in the legal profession, and Helena even more so, to have him as their next District Court Judge.

Jennifer E. Streano
Regional Deputy Public Defender
Region 2- Missoula
610 Woody St.
Missoula Mt. 59802
(406)523-5140

September 12, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

I am writing to express my wholehearted support for Chris Abbott's application to serve as a First Judicial District Court Judge. His thoughtfulness, professionalism, intellect, and commitment to public service make him an excellent fit for this position.

I have known Mr. Abbott personally and professionally for approximately four years, since moving to Helena in 2016. I work as an attorney in the Appellate Defender Division of the Office of the State Public Defender. In his role as an Assistant Attorney General, Mr. Abbott has been my opposing counsel in two cases before the Montana Supreme Court: *In the Matter of R.B.*, DA 18-0688, 2020 MT 169N; and *State v. Martin*, DA 17-0520, 2019 MT 44. Mr. Abbott won both of these appeals. Throughout these cases, Mr. Abbott was courteous and a pleasure to work with. He was also a formidable opposing counsel; he deftly identified weak spots in my legal arguments, displayed exceptional legal acumen with his counter-arguments, and wrote his briefs with a disarmingly reasonable tone. In my two-and-a-half years appealing cases to the Supreme Court, I have never faced an opposing counsel as smart, articulate, and courteous as Mr. Abbott.

As a practicing attorney, I am intimately familiar with the essential traits of a good judge. A good judge must have a reputation for evenhandedness, fairness, and open-mindedness. He or she must be a brilliant legal thinker but also humble, thoughtful, and curious. And a good judge understands his or her role as fundamentally in service of the public good and the efficacy and independence of the judicial branch.

Mr. Abbott demonstrates all these traits. He possesses the legal wisdom to efficiently and thoughtfully decide complex cases. He has developed a reputation in the legal community for fairness and independence. And I know him to be a *deeply* committed public servant who reveres the judiciary as an institution and who understands that public faith in the rule of law is the glue that holds our civilization together.

In short, Mr. Abbott exhibits the temperament, intellect, and selflessness required to be an excellent judge. I hope you will strongly consider his application.

Sincerely,



Michael Marchesini
Attorney at Law



**Opportunity
Bank**
OF MONTANA

September 16, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

RE: Letter of Recommendation for Christopher Abbott

Dear Mr. Menzies,

I am writing this letter of recommendation to the Judicial Nomination Commission for Christopher Abbott. I have known Chris since high school, first as a fellow classmate and into adulthood with our mutual work serving on the Board of Directors for Helena Area Habitat for Humanity.

Chris would serve a judgeship well. He is an excellent lawyer, and an advocate for the improvement of his community. He possesses skills relating to writing, analysis, research, communication, and advocacy. He also possesses strong skills related not just to academics, but to the responsibilities of being a public servant. He has displayed excellent judicial temperament in all situations I've seen him involved in. He has a great sense of humor, self-discipline, and impartiality. His devotion to his wife and daughter are evident. He has a sharp intellect and has shown me in several instances his ability to point out other sides of an argument to collaborate and come out with a fair resolution.

Christopher Abbott has the drive, dedication, experience, and knowledge to be an excellent judge in my opinion.

Sincerely,

Crystal Eckerson

ceckerson@oppbank.com

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Kirsten K. Madsen

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September 16, 2020

The Montana Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov
lmenzies@mt.gov

Re: Chris Abbott Letter of Support

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

It is my pleasure to offer this letter of support for the nomination of Christopher Abbott to fill the First Judicial District judgeship vacancy.

I am currently an Assistant Attorney General for the Montana Department of Justice, Agency Legal Services Bureau. For the first half of my career, I was honored to serve as Senior Law Clerk to the Honorable James P. Reynolds, First Judicial District when he first took the bench, and before that as the first law clerk to now-retired Judge John C. McKeon, Seventeenth Judicial District.

I had an up-close view of what it takes to do Judge Reynolds' job and I am confident Mr. Abbott would serve with aplomb. In every District Court case are individuals with lives bound up in the outcome—whether professionally, personally, financially, or otherwise—and awaiting resolution. The job is an unforgiving mix of people and questions needing to be heard fully and fairly, and a finite number of hours each day to accomplish that. Working with and observing Chris over the last decade, I say with total confidence that Mr. Abbott has the intellect, the skill, and the personality needed to successfully and timely tackle the monumental and diverse workload; and perhaps more importantly, engender the respect and trust of our community in doing so.

It was as a law clerk that I first met Mr. Abbott and had the opportunity to observe his impeccable work as an attorney. While working on the Hi-Line, I travelled with Judge McKeon throughout the three county district and saw many familiar lawyers faithfully serving their small communities. Chris was then working for the Office of Public Defender doing major cases across the state. Mr. Abbott's representation in a Valley County case was where I first noticed something different. Chris' briefing was well-researched and tightly written and stood out for its thoughtful application of the law. I eventually realized Chris's briefs were often the starting point for other lawyers—and for good reason, his style is straight forward and readable, and his arguments fairly apply the law. I was interested to see him in Court and he did not disappoint. It was a pleasure to discover Chris was as good in person as he was on paper.

Chris had an internalized understanding of procedure and rules, he minded the record, and he was deliberate in knowing when to fiercely advocate for his client, he did not bluster just for show and *never* without substance. During my tenure with Judge Reynolds, Chris appeared regularly in Court with the same stand-out representation I had seen years earlier. Throughout Chris's time as a public defender, I saw him handle an impossible workload and yet, still bring his full attention to each case. Chris understands that advocacy involves command of the courtroom as well as displaying respect and fairness even on a devastating cross-examination. The thing that struck me about Chris during that first case has never changed—he has a unique blend of technical and legal mastery and innate interest in extending kindness to everyone involved.

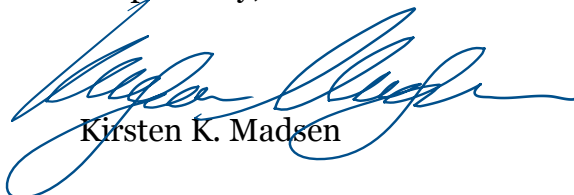
For the last several years, I have been lucky to practice law with Mr. Abbott at Agency Legal Services Bureau and come to know Chris and his family as friends. Our Bureau handles a wide swath of civil and administrative matters for various state agencies. There is only one word to describe Chris's transition from a long career in criminal law to this entirely new realm of practice: Seamless. He truly enjoys thinking about the law, whatever the particular subject, both from an overarching perspective and in the details of specific cases. I have met only a few lawyers who can so skillfully draw on both.

As his colleague, I observe in Chris a dedication to the *profession* of law, as a set of practiced skills and constantly-acquired knowledge, applied with integrity and made useable for real people. As his friend, I know Chris to be brilliant, yes, but also approachable, funny, and comfortable with himself; he is patient with his daughter and genuine with his wife. It is hard to understate the value of subtle characteristics like these when you hold a position of power or authority—they instill a sense of trust, and I would trust Chris as a judge. I trust his inherent and ever growing knowledge of the law, and I trust his steady, congenial disposition.

Sitting on the other side of the bench, Mr. Abbott will approach litigants before him the same way he has practiced law—fairly, expertly, with dignity and respect for the people and issues in front of him; timely and correctly making decisions supported by law. To engender the trust of our community necessary to carry out its work, the bench needs wicked smart, friendly folks; Chris is exactly that.

I urge you to recommend Chris Abbott as the First Judicial District's next judge.

Respectfully,



Kirsten K. Madsen

Lisa Leckie, Esq.

September 14, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
Office of Court Administrator
P. O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Judicial Nomination Commission:

This letter is submitted in support of Chris Abbott's appointment as District Court Judge for the First Judicial District. I was a Deputy County Attorney with the Lewis and Clark County Attorney's Office for over 30 years. I have practiced in front of numerous judges during my tenure, and have observed what traits make a fair and impartial judge. I believe that Chris possesses the skill and disposition necessary to make an excellent judge for the First Judicial District. For the 10 years that Chris was employed with the Public Defender's Office, I had almost daily contact with him through his representation of indigent defendants.

Chris possesses a keen intellect, which was reflected in his briefs that showcased his analytical and persuasive writing skills. Many of the legal issues briefed by Chris have been taken to the Montana Supreme Court and resulted in changes, or clarifications in case law. His ability to spot issues and think through complicated legal issues would be invaluable on the bench.

Chris also displayed a very centered approach to litigation. Rather than fighting over every matter and using extreme argument, he would concentrate on the strengths of his position and use logical arguments which were very successful in representing his client's wishes. I believe that Chris worked hard to develop a strong working relationship with his co-workers, judges, and prosecutors. He is able to navigate a balance between keeping a good relationship with opposing counsel, and judges, while still representing his clients effectively.

Perhaps most importantly, the character trait that I most admire about Chris is his integrity. Some defense attorneys have a reputation for using any means to an end, but I never doubted Chris' word and he continually conducted himself ethically and honestly in his dealings with me and the Court. We may have fought in the courtroom but it was toward a common end, that being the service of justice, which is the purpose of the criminal justice system.

Sincerely,



Lisa Leckie

Holly Kaleczyc
661 West Main Street
Helena, MT 59601

September 9, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Members of the Commission:

I am writing to offer my highest recommendation of Chris Abbott for appointment to the First Judicial District Judgeship vacancy.

Chris and I have been friends and partners in community volunteer projects for more than a decade. He has always been quick to volunteer and has brought thoughtful analysis of any challenge and willingness to do the heavy lifting. In every interaction I have found Chris to be tenacious and efficient; compassionate and humble; and always guided by a deep moral and ethical code. And, wow, the man can write!

A long time ago I was a government major at Georgetown University. One of the things I learned that stayed with me was Socrates' description of the essential qualities of a good judge, which are: To hear Courteously; To Answer Wisely; To Consider Soberly; and To Decide Impartially.

Over ten years I have learned that Chris Abbott embraces these qualities. They have made him a good man, a good husband, a good father, an active member of his community and a good friend. These same qualities will make him a great judge.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Holly Kaleczyc



We build strength, stability, self-reliance and shelter.

9/11/2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Ms. Menzies and Judicial Nomination Commission,

I feel privileged to write this letter in support of Christopher Abbott's application to the First Judicial District Judgeship vacancy for Broadwater and Lewis and Clark Counties. Chris has served on the board for Helena Area Habitat for Humanity since 2017, when he was still an Assistant Public Defender. He had expressed interest in serving with Habitat for Humanity from his long service as a public defender, where most of his clients struggled with safe, decent, and affordable housing. He has been an efficient and dedicated board member, bringing his extensive and varied experience to our work of serving individuals and families with housing. Chris has served on our Resource Development committee, raising donations to Habitat for Humanity, along with our profile and connections in the community. It has always been clear to me that Chris cares deeply about Helena and its residents.

I believe Chris Abbott to be a rare and uniquely qualified candidate for the judgeship from his long experience as a public defender in Helena, and his extensive experience in both criminal and civil law. He is a lifelong Helena resident. He is fair-minded and is committed to a compassionate, holistic approach to exercises of discretion. He recognizes the need to achieve justice for victims, while ensuring the judicial system, to the extent possible, promotes rather than impedes healthy, stable, and successful individuals and families. He supports the continued success of alternatives like treatment court, which provides a restorative alternative to the criminal justice system. He is an excellent writer, deeply analytical, while caring and committed to his community. He selflessly brings the best of himself, and the full weight of his background, ability and knowledge, to any task for which he is needed.

I have no doubt of Chris Abbott's ability to be the most efficient, even-handed, compassionate and timely decision-maker as judge. For the reasons I have provided, Chris Abbott has my highest recommendation and my unreserved support.

With Respect,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "JK" with a large loop and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jacob Kuntz, Executive Director

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Thursday, September 17, 2020 8:58:54 PM

From: Jessica Wilkerson <jessica.wilkerson@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, September 17, 2020 11:25 AM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Letter of Support for Christopher Abbott's Judicial Candidacy

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission,

I am writing in support of Mr. Christopher Abbot's Judicial Candidacy for the First Judicial District Court. To put it simply, Chris is perfectly qualified to serve as a District Court Judge here in Helena.

I first met Chris in 2013 when he was practicing with the Major Crimes Unit of the Office of the Public Defender. His reputation as a thoughtful, thorough, intelligent, and hardworking attorney had preceded him and was readily supported upon witnessing him in that trial and thereafter. During my two years with OPD, I conferred with Chris on many difficult issues and always received insightful input. Despite his large caseload and numerous other responsibilities, he was a gracious mentor. His exemplary practice has remained consistent.

Chris possesses a brilliant legal mind, a thorough understanding of the frameworks that affect the justice system, a compassionate spirit, and a community-oriented outlook. I have no doubt that Chris would fully engage in any issue placed before him in order to determine the most prudent, legally consistent and equitable outcome available. As a judge, he would not engage in biased action and would adhere to the high standards of practice that come so naturally to him. The communities included in the First Judicial District and the statewide judicial system would benefit greatly by having Christopher Abbott on the bench. We would all be fortunate to have him serving in this position.

I am honored to provide my whole-hearted and enthusiastic support to Chris's nomination to the First Judicial District Court Bench.

Sincerely yours,

Jessica Wilkerson
Attorney

To whom it may concern:

I have known Chris Abbott since January of 2015, when I began working as a legal secretary at the Office of the Public Defender in Helena. I worked with him for the next year and a half. During my time we were often understaffed, meaning someone had to pick up the slack. I can remember many late evenings, weekends, and holidays where Chris and I would see each other in the office - not to mention the weekday evenings when I would be walking through downtown and see his office lights were still on after 8pm!

Beyond the hours, Chris showed his dedication to justice by taking on the toughest cases we had. It did not matter how difficult, unpopular, or unwinnable a case seemed, Chris would do his best to advocate for his clients and defend their rights. Through his work at the Public Defender's Office, Chris has gained a personal understanding of the often traumatic history criminal defendants carry with them.

That being said, Chris has always had an even-handed and fair view of the world – I have the utmost confidence he would deliver just rulings and sentences to all parties before his bench. Chris spent a decade advocating for criminal defendants in some of the most high profile cases in this state and was death penalty certified, but his dedication to the law would never allow him to be a biased judge. Chris understands the difference between the roles of an advocate and a judge and I would expect nothing from him but the most even-handed, fair, and lawful dispensing of justice possible.

After I left the Office of the Public Defender to begin law school, hoping to follow in Chris' footsteps as a defender of the indigent, Chris moved-on himself and became an Assistant Attorney General. Under Attorney General Tim Fox, Chris has represented the state in some criminal legal proceedings and appeals, but, has also successfully represented the people of Montana in a plethora of high level civil proceedings as well. When I was in law school I had the opportunity to help ensure the people of Montana had access to information about campaign contributions made by those receiving contracts from the State of Montana by requiring those contractors to disclose their political spending. Chris was successful in defending that requirement through a civil proceeding in federal court. In the end, Chris successfully represented Montana in state and federal court on those issues as well as many others.

What I am trying to say is Chris has a multi-faceted legal mind. Many attorneys focus on either criminal or civil law, but Chris is, as they say in baseball, a multi-tool player. In football there are few players who can "play both ways." Chris is that rare talent - he has been successful in playing offense and defense. He has been victorious in criminal trials, he has been victorious in civil cases, and he has been won at the appellate level.

Another point about Chris I think people should be aware of is his brilliant writing. His briefs are still used today as a starting point for public defenders here in Helena. When a new attorney has an interesting question about a point of law, our first response is, "Have you looked at Chris Abbott's old briefs?" The other day I had a question myself

and was browsing his old arguments and found the document that inspired me to become an attorney - a motion to dismiss that Chris wrote, effectively arguing that simply dating someone does not make you a criminal...turns-out he was right!

I want to close this letter letting the people making this selection know that I think of Chris Abbott as the perfect example of what one would expect from a member of the bar and more than qualified to be a member of our judicial branch. He is brilliant, but humble. He is honest to a fault. Chris has integrity by every sense of the definition: he has a set of values as a practicing attorney based upon the law, he has consistently voiced his belief in the law being applied fairly, and has walked the walk in advocating for the people of Montana and their right to having the law applied fairly, no matter what the outcome.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Qasim W. Abdul-Baki

Rachel Wanderscheid
902 4th Ave East
Polson, MT 59860

September 10, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

I am writing to recommend Chris Abbott for the position of First Judicial District Court Judge. As a new attorney, I was very fortunate to work with Chris in at the Helena Office of the State Public Defender. Chris was a wonderful mentor to all the new attorneys in that office and throughout the agency. He always made time to patiently answer questions and share his legal knowledge. He is the type of person we need to step into the role of judge.

Chris is one of the most intelligent attorneys I have ever met. He can recite case citations from memory and has researched and written legal briefs on some of the most pressing criminal and civil issues facing our system today. Although Chris is an amazing legal scholar, what really sets him apart is work ethic and high moral standards. I have seen Chris work long days, nights, and weekends for his clients and he will bring this work ethic to the bench. In the courtroom, no matter the circumstances, Chris always treats every person with respect and dignity. He always considers everyone's perspectives and needs. A rare trait in an attorney and one that is necessary to consider when selecting our judges.

While I practiced in Helena, I was the defense attorney assigned to the Treatment Court run by Judge Reynolds. In considering who to select to fill this position, it is very important to address the future of the Treatment Court. I know Chris will support the program and bring new insight and innovation to help it grow and thrive.

Chris is one of the most intelligent, capable, and ethical attorneys practicing in Montana right now. I encourage you to select him for this position because he is the caliber of attorney we need to serve as a district court judge.

Sincerely,

/s/ Rachel Wanderscheid

September 18, 2020

From:

Emily O. Tosoni, MS, CHES, ATC
1920 5th Avenue
Helena, MT 59601

To:

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
PO Box 203005
Helena, MT, 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to you today to highly recommend Christopher Abbott for the position of District Court Judge for the 1st Judicial District.

I have personally known Christopher for over three years through my connection with his partner, Jenifer Gursky, and was able to get to know him better while participating in a nanny-share in their home for our children. I was initially connected to Jenifer through mutual work that we were both engaged in for non-profits in Helena.

I believe that Christopher is best suited for the position for many reasons but wanted to highlight the reasons that are most important to me both personally and professionally. Christopher's work as a public defender is very important to me and offers a frame of reference for a District Court Judge that is necessary in administering justice with thoughtful consideration and an understanding of the struggles of the most marginalized in our society.

From a personal perspective, I also appreciate the work that Christopher has done to support and promote treatment court. I know that this type of treatment is misunderstood by a lot of society, but as someone who has a brother with a mental illness and previous drug addictions who has also had minor struggles with the justice system as well as a sister-in-law who has a serious mental illness, disability, and current, long-standing addictions and continues to be in-and-out of jail and prison. The holistic and compassionate alternative of treatment court provides hope and understanding in ways that our judicial system must learn to adapt to and with.

Christopher is fair-minded and his experience working in criminal and civil cases gives him a broad range of experience in all aspect of the law. He graduated in the top 5% of

his class at the University of Washington Law School and has strong analytical skills along with administrative law and judicial experience.

To summarize, I believe that Christopher is best suited for the position of District Court Judge because of his extensive and important professional experience, and because he also understands the importance of family values, compassion, and liberty. These are values that are not only important to the work done through our judicial system, but also within the day-to-day lives of hard-working Montanans. Christopher is the right person for this position.

Be consider this as my highest recommendation for Christopher to be the District Court Judge for the 1st Judicial District as the best candidate for the position, not only due to professional accolades and accomplishments, but more importantly due to the humanity he would bring to his work as he has done in all his other work in the judicial system.

Sincerely,

Emily O. Tosoni, MS, CHES, ATC



APPELLATE DEFENDER DIVISION

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Helena, MT 59620

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September 21, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission

c/o Lois Menzies

Office of Court Administrator

P.O. Box 203005

Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

After nearly twenty-five years practicing criminal defense in Montana, I have had the opportunity to practice with or against seven out of the nine candidates applying for the First Judicial District Court judgeship. I recommend Christopher David Abbott for the vacancy. On par with these other attorneys, Mr. Abbott is a top-notch litigator. He was known as one of the best attorneys in the state working for the Office of Public Defender. He also possesses the rare combination of courtroom expertise with superior legal research and writing skills.

What separates Mr. Abbott from the other candidates is his ability to look past courtroom squabbles to achieve the greater good. For example, when prosecutors and defense attorneys in Lewis and Clark County were embroiled in a running dispute about what information to reveal in sensitive cases, Mr. Abbott hammered out a long-term solution saving court time and effort while respecting the rights of victims and defendants. Too often litigators, including myself, get caught up in winning over doing what is right for the justice system. Mr. Abbott will make a great judge because he can see both sides of a dispute and bring the sides together with understanding, knowledge and skill.

Sincerely,

Chad Wright

Appellate Defender

September 21, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Members of the Commission:

I am writing to enthusiastically support the nomination of Christopher Abbott to the position of First Judicial District Judgeship. I have known Chris for more than twenty years, since we were “crosstown rivals” in high school debate. Chris is sharp, articulate, and extremely hard-working. These qualities and more make him an ideal candidate for this judgeship.

Chris’s academic achievements, which include Capital High School Valedictorian and University of Washington School of Law Order of the Coif, speak to his intelligence and work ethic. But it is his dedication to public service during his legal career that should particularly impress this committee. Rather than pursuing more lucrative job opportunities, Chris served as a public defender for a decade. He has extensive trial experience and knowledge of both civil and criminal law.

I am not an attorney, but I am married to one. My one degree of separation from the practice of law has taught me a lot about the qualities of a good judge. I can attest that Chris has these qualities. He is calm, fair, and even-handed. He works with thoughtfulness and efficiency, both of which are necessary to handling the large caseload of the court. Most importantly, he cares deeply about equitable treatment of all parties and fair application of the law.

Chris is a lifelong Helenan and has proven his dedication to this community. He will serve it well as district judge. I strongly urge his nomination.

Sincerely,

Annie Hanshew
Helena, Montana
406-475-2131

Ashley D. Morigeau
Helena, MT
ashley.d.young22@gmail.com

September 20, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
C/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

I recommend Chris Abbott for First Judicial District Court Judge. I know Chris from working as an attorney at the Office of State Public Defender (OPD). I started at OPD in 2010. In 2012, I was co-counsel on my first homicide case, which involved a juvenile. I had to act fast when the client was brought to jail, and I recall calling Chris to share my preliminary ideas about the case with him. I had admired Chris' work at OPD and knew he would be the right person to ask for help. Even though I was in a different office, he was more than willing to take my call and help me out. Chris frequently responded to intra-agency questions and was always willing to share his knowledge with the entire agency. I have always been impressed with Chris' commitment to his clients and the practice of law. When he left OPD, I knew OPD's loss would be another part of the legal profession's gain.

I have the utmost confidence in Chris' ability to seamlessly transition into a District Court Judgeship. His intellectual curiosity, diligence, and devotion to furthering the integrity of the Montana legal profession are an invaluable asset to this State. Chris will no doubt serve the citizens of Montana well in this role. I highly recommend him for First Judicial District Court Judge.

Sincerely,

/s/ Ashley D. Morigeau



Big Sky Country

MONTANA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Representative Moffie Funk

House District 82

DURING THE SESSION
State Capitol Building
PO Box 200400
Helena MT 59620-0400
Phone: (406) 444-4800

COMMITTEES
Education, Vice Chair
Business and Labor
Agriculture

HOME ADDRESS
825 8th Ave
Helena MT 59601
Phone: (406) 461-6785
moffie.funk@mtleg.gov

Judicial Nomination Commission

21 September 2020

c/o Lois Menzies

Office of Court Administrator

P.O. Box 203005

Helena, MT 59620-3005

Re: Letter of Support for Christopher Abbott

Dear Members of the Judicial Nomination Commission:

It is an honor to write in support of Christopher Abbott's application for appointment to the First Judicial District to replace Judge Reynolds. I met Chris more than six years ago and have come to know him well. My admiration for his character, commitment to our community and intelligence has grown with each passing year.

Chris is absolutely dedicated to our community and to being a voice for justice for all. After clerking for Ninth Circuit Court Judge Browning, Chris had his choice of lucrative offers from prestigious law offices. Instead, he chose to return to Montana and work in the Office of the State Public Defender. And Chris did not take this role for the sake of a resume; he stayed on to be one of the lead defenders for our most disadvantaged because he believes so strongly in our judicial system and its ability to ensure justice for everyone. I think it is of paramount importance that our judges have this depth of experience in defense, not just prosecution, to enable them to make the most informed decisions from the bench.

Another reason that Chris has my full support is his commitment to the Treatment Court. It is my understanding that Judge Reynolds was instrumental in making this court a success and I know without doubt that Chris will carry on his legacy.

Finally, although Chris' character, temperament and commitment will make him an outstanding judge, I would be remiss to not also acknowledge that he is one of the smartest people I have ever met. Chris has extensive book knowledge to be sure, but it is his analytical skills and abilities to apply logic, common sense and the law to situations that take him to the next level.

It is without hesitation that I recommend, and encourage the Commission to nominate, Christopher Abbott for the First Judicial Court.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Moffie Funk".
Moffie Funk



432 North Last Chance Gulch, Helena, MT 59601

September 21, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005.
Helena, MT 59620-3005
Via email: mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

RE: Letter of Recommendation

Dear Ms. Menzies:

I am writing this letter in full support of Christopher David Abbott in the application for District Court Judge.

I have had the pleasure of serving on the Board of Directors with the Helena Area Habitat for Humanity with Chris for the last three (3) years. In our tenure, I have found his expertise and thoughtfulness invaluable as we guide the organization.

Chris possesses immense wisdom and it is a joy to share in our volunteerism with his dedication to our community. I hold Chris in very high regard and believe he will serve as an impeccable judge for the State of Montana.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Greg Wirth".

Greg Wirth, P.E.



BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Andy Hunthausen

Jim McCormick

Susan Good Geise

City County Building 316 North Park Helena, Montana 59623 406.447.8304 Fax: 406.447.8370

September 21, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Ms. Menzies:

Please accept this correspondence as public comment in support of Christopher Abbott's application for the appointment to the 1st Judicial District Court. Mr. Abbott has demonstrated via his application and resume that he possesses the experience and character needed to succeed as a judge.

Christopher has shown his commitment and dedication to the law over the last 14 years as clearly demonstrated by his application. His experience working in the courts of the 1st Judicial District as a Public Defender as well his time working as an Assistant Attorney General, make him distinctively qualified to serve as a judge.

Judge Reynolds held himself to a high standard of excellence and always looked for ways the court could strive for justice while encouraging the system to find creative and effective ways to gain efficiencies. Mr. Abbott has these same qualities needed to continue to competently manage a docket while discovering ways to add tools to the court through the implementation of specialty courts and other best practice sentencing alternatives.

Christopher Abbott's resume and application are sound and deserve serious consideration by the committee. From a look at the list of applicants for this seat on the court I can see that they are all very qualified and have experience to match. Sometimes it is the quality and the character of a person that sets them apart. In Christopher there is no doubt that, if selected, the 1st Judicial District would not only gain a judge with the expertise needed for success but could rest assured that a person was selected that has great care for his community and possesses the highest of character.

Sincerely,

Andy Hunthausen

Lewis and Clark County Commissioner

Suzanne R. Seburn
33 Sidewinder Loop
Clancy, MT 59634

September 20, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
PO Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Ms. Menzies:

I am writing to express my support for Christopher Abbott's nomination for district court judge for the First Judicial District. I know Mr. Abbott from the time that we both worked together at the Helena office of the Office of Public Defender. I had the opportunity to co-counsel with Chris and was able to observe his advocacy and courtroom skill first hand. Chris was the "go to" attorney in the office for any legal questions and his breadth of knowledge was impressive. Moreover, Chris was always willing to mentor other attorneys in the office. I observed him to have a tireless work ethic and fervent desire to represent his clients to the very best of his ability.

Since Chris left the public defender's office, he has continued to be a resource to the public defender's office by using his personal time to be a presenter at new attorney trainings. In my opinion, he has a genuine desire to advance legal knowledge and the practice of law.

I hope that you will forward Mr. Abbott's name to the governor for his consideration.

Sincerely,



Suzanne R. Seburn

Kim Mangold
290 Barney #B
Helena, Montana 59602

To Judicial Nomination Commission:

This letter is in support of Christopher Abbott for the 1st Judicial District Court Judge.

Chris has years of administrative law and judicial experience. As an Assistant Attorney General where he has handled many cases for various state agencies. These cases were handled efficiency and in a timely manner. As a public defender, Christ fought for individuals who were struggling in society.

With both criminal and civil litigation experience, Chris Abbott is an ideal candidate for District Court Judge. Given his experience and understanding of all aspects of the law, Chris will be able to fit into this position and quickly take over the responsibilities and demands of this position.

Chris is a longtime Helena resident who understands the regional issues in this state. He has a strong commitment to family and community. This is evident in participation in family activities and events along with his experience with a number of volunteer programs.

I hope that you will give Christopher Abbott your most serious consideration for this position.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Mangold

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Monday, September 21, 2020 10:04:14 PM

From: Pam Rabold <psrabold@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, September 21, 2020 1:46 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] ATTN: Judicial Nomination Commission re: applicant Chris Abbott

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission,
I am writing in support of Chris Abbott's application for appointment to the bench in the First Judicial District due to Judge Reynolds' retirement. I support Chris without reservation, because of his strong qualifications for the job. I worked with him briefly when he joined the Agency Legal Services Bureau and I was an attorney with the State Risk Management and Tort Defense Division. Though I did not work with Chris for long, his reputation preceded him and now follows him. His intellect and legal genius are unquestioned by anyone who has ever come into contact with him professionally. What sets Chris apart is his common sense, humility and compassion. He could work for a prestigious law firm, but chose to serve as a public defender. His family is his priority, as it should be. Chris knows what it means to find work-life balance.

A lot of people have the intellectual capacity to be a judge. But not everyone has the demeanor to be a good judge. Chris does. He will make decisions that are well-reasoned and timely and will treat parties with respect. We would be lucky to have him on the bench.

Respectfully,
Pamela Rabold
(formerly Snyder-Varns)

Shiloh Hernandez, Esq.
566 Highland Street
Helena, MT 59601
shiloh.hernandez@gmail.com

September 22, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Dear Members of the Judicial Nomination Commission,

I am writing to express my strong support for Christopher Abbott for the vacancy at the First Judicial District Court. I believe that the breadth of Chris's legal knowledge, the depth of his legal experience, and the strength of his character make him uniquely suited to replace Judge Reynolds on the First Judicial District Court bench.

It is critical that a district judge have detailed knowledge of both civil and criminal law, as well as both federal and state jurisprudence. In addition, because the First Judicial District Court is located in Helena, a successful district judge should be well versed in the details of administrative law. Chris has this knowledge in spades. This is demonstrated by his top performance in law school, his clerking at the Ninth Circuit, his lengthy experience as a lead attorney in numerous criminal trials, and his current civil and administrative docket at the Attorney General's office. This knowledge-base and facility in multiple areas of law will allow Chris to make fast progress in addressing the current backlog of cases in the First Judicial District.

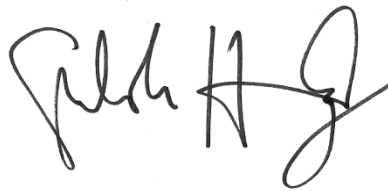
The life of the law, it is said, is experience. Chris has a depth of experience as a trial lawyer, both in criminal and civil cases. Bringing cases to trial in a just and timely manner is the fundamental duty of a district judge. Chris's experience as a trial lawyer and his command of the rules of civil and criminal procedure will be an asset to the First Judicial District bench and bar, alike. Additionally, it is worth stressing that the First Judicial District bench regularly hears appeals from state agency decisions and, accordingly, the judges must be familiar with the

unique field of administrative law. Chris's experience in administrative law cases at the Attorney General's office meets this prerequisite.

Judicial temperament may be the most important attribute of a judge. I have known Chris in a personal and professional capacity for a decade and can state unequivocally that he has the temperament to be an exceptional judge. I have always known Chris as a senior lawyer with stellar skills and credentials—yet in personal interactions, Chris is modest, soft-spoken, and generous with his time. He is a good listener and has an easy sense of humor. He is neither rash nor quick to anger, but thoughtful and considerate. On top of this, Chris has an abiding commitment to public service, hard work, and excellence. Judges are required to make life-changing decisions on the most important issues in people's lives. A good judge will make detailed, fact-intensive rulings in a timely matter. An exceptional judge will recognize the humanity at play in each case, and assure that win or lose, all litigants are treated with dignity. I am confident that Chris has the temperament to be an exceptional judge.

In sum, Christopher Abbott has the knowledge, experience, and character to be an exceptional judge. I strongly support Chris for the vacancy at the First Judicial District Court.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shiloh H. Hernandez', written over a horizontal line.

Shiloh Hernandez

KRISTINA NEAL
4385 Wylie Drive
Helena, MT 59602
(406) 461-9664
Kristinaneal46@gmail.com

September 21, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Sent by email to: mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

RE: Christopher Abbott – First Judicial District Court Judgeship Vacancy

Dear Nominating Committee:

I am writing to show my support for Christopher Abbott for the appointment of judge for the First Judicial District.

I have known Chris since 2008, when we worked together at the Office of the State Public Defender. Chris has a keen mind and uncanny ability to prioritize details and issues. Chris combines his superior intellect with an unapparelled work ethic. It was not uncommon to find Chris working long into the night or on the weekends. He worked tirelessly not for the pursuit of wealth or his own career but rather to defend the rights and tell the stories of his indigent clients. Chris is not guided by his ego but rather a strong moral compass and genuine desire to make the world, and this community, a better place.

Chris's passion for the pursuit of justice and the betterment of his community, and his modest, yet persistent, manner are ideal qualities for a district court judge. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

/s/ Kristina Neal



St. Paul's United Methodist Church

512 Logan Street

Helena, MT 59601

(406)-442-5643

September 21, 2020

Dear Commissioners –

I write in support of Christopher D. Abbott's application to the First Judicial District's Judgeship.

As ordained clergy, I have high standards for qualities like fairness, integrity and justice. I believe it is especially important for public servants to exhibit strong moral character as well as intellectual aptitude and comprehensive experience for a position of community trust. Chris exemplifies all of these characteristics and more. To use an old-fashioned term, he is genuinely honorable, both personally and professionally.

Prior to ministry, I served as a Certified Mediator in the State of Colorado. Out of this background, I appreciate Chris' willingness and desire to think beyond traditional criminal justice interventions, such as with treatment court. Cultivating means of seeking justice for both offenders and victims through a less-adversarial process can be of great benefit to the parties involved, emotionally and financially. Compassionate and also legally sound decision making is one of Chris' hallmarks. I find this to be an excellent quality in a judge!

I have only served in Helena for a bit over a year, so my acquaintance with Chris and with this community is comparatively short. This said, I believe that every community benefits when the best and brightest among us devote themselves to being a contribution to the world around them. Chris' keen mind, demonstrated legal abilities, and passion for doing good work on behalf of all citizens, regardless of class or status would be a tremendous asset to the First District and the State of Montana.

Chris' candidacy has my full support and I highly recommend him to you.

Sincerely Yours,


Rev. Margaret E. Gillikin
Lead Pastor

Harrison J (Harry) Freebourn
P.O. Box 221
Butte, MT 59703
hjfreebourn@bresnan.net
406-479-3889

September 18, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Commissioners:

My name is Harry Freebourn and I am the former, now retired, Executive Director of Montana's Office of the State Public Defender (OPD). I urge you to send Christopher Abbott's name to the Governor as one of your nominees for the open position of District Court Judge for the First Judicial District.

I first met Chris in 2007 while working at OPD. Chris was an attorney with OPD. During his time with OPD, Chris held several high-level attorney positions and even worked in our major crimes unit, which handles the most complex and high-profile cases in the state; including death penalty cases. His assignments demanded that he be one of the most skilled and well-trained attorneys in the state and he was. For your information, OPD is a Montana state agency that provides legal services to individuals charged with a crime in criminal cases and certain civil cases. A fascinating fact is that OPD operates in all 56 district courts (one in every county), in over 150 courts of limited jurisdiction (like justice, municipal and city courts), and in many specialty courts (like those that deal with mental health, veterans, and other serious issues). Chris worked in many courts and on many kinds of cases.

During my time with OPD, I was very impressed by Chris' education, experiences, his composure, temperament, and demeanor. Chris is not only a premiere attorney, but he routinely managed paralegals, investigators, administrative staff, legal consultants, mental health advisors, and others that served the over 1,000 cases assigned to him. This fact clearly shows that he can efficiently manage limited state resources. I recall that at times, Chris was asked by OPD to assist the agency on certain budgetary, legislative, planning, organization, and operational issues. Chris was a team player and always stepped up to the plate to help.

I believe that first and foremost, Chris, through education, training and vast experiences, has impeccable skills as a lawyer. He is able to communicate to all engaged in the legal process


(judges, other attorneys, consultants, juries and most importantly clients with various levels of education and mental capabilities) in a clear and understandable manner. He understands legal procedure and how to get the job done in a complex legal system in an effective and efficient manner. These attributes will make him a great judge.

I also know that Chris has a controlled demeanor and temperament which I think is important in conducting any legal proceeding. Also, a plus is his ability to make well thought out, fact based, timely decisions, while considering the weight of the decisions and those affected by the decision.

Finally, I want to mention Chris' devotion to do any job with integrity and honesty.

I ask that you nominate Chris for this Judgeship.

Respectively yours,


Harry Freebourn

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of the Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, Montana 50620 -3005

Re: Recommendation for Christopher Abbott

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission;

I am writing to express my support for Christopher Abbott to be appointed as Judge for the District Court of the First Judicial District. I believe that both Mr. Abbott's personal and professional experience make him a uniquely qualified person to serve all of the communities in both Lewis and Clark and Broadwater Counties.

By way of introduction I was employed as a probation officer for both state and federal courts throughout the state of Montana from 1977 until my retirement in 2005. Since then I have been conducting both private investigations and security clearance investigations for various governmental agencies.

During the summer of 2015 I met Mr. Abbott when I became involved in a case in which he was representing a young person who had been charged with the murder of a young child. Throughout the course of this matter I was continuously impressed by Mr. Abbott's professionalism, understanding of the law, and work ethic. Since the completion of that case I have come to know more about Mr. Abbott in both the personal and professional areas of his life, all of which has added to my admiration for and confidence in his abilities.

Mr. Abbott was born and raised in Helena and after his graduation from Capital High School, he completed undergraduate school at the University of Puget Sound, and then attended and graduated from the University of Washington Law School. Following the completion of a clerkship at the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit with the Honorable James R. Browning and the Honorable Harry Pregerson, Mr. Abbott chose to return to Montana to serve the citizens of Lewis and Clark and Broadwater Counties as a member of the then newly formed Office of the Public Defender.

During his decade of service as a public defender Mr. Abbott served the citizens of the communities within the First Judicial District and established strong relationships with all the agencies that regularly interface with the court. Additionally, during this period, he served as mentor and trainer for staff that were new to his office on various issues related to the law.

Since leaving the Office of the Public Defender to accept his present position with the Attorney General's Legal Services Division, Mr. Abbott has gained a wealth of experience in civil litigation while preparing and defending various civil matters involving the State of Montana.

It is my belief that Christopher Abbott is the most qualified candidate to be appointed to fill the present vacancy on the bench of the First Judicial District. I make this recommendation based on the fact that Mr. Abbott was born and raised in the First Judicial District and that he has consciously chosen to return to this area to serve the citizens of the community. Mr. Abbott has a wealth of courtroom experience in both the criminal and civil areas of the law. Additionally, I would add, that Mr. Abbott is an innovator who while simultaneously upholding the rule of law will continue to explore the enhancement of specialty courts for the handling of criminal cases and the use of mediation to enhance the court's management of its civil docket.

Yours truly,

Tom Corbett
10 Sand Piper Loop
Helena, Mt. 59602
tcorbett@bresnan.net



CURT DRAKE
~Selected to the American Board of Trial Advocates~
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SARAH MAZANEC
sarah@drakemt.com
ANDRES HALADAY
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PATRICIA KLANKE
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111 North Last Chance Gulch
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Helena, MT 59601
PHONE: (406) 495-8080
FAX: (406) 495-1616

September 17, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

SENT VIA EMAIL TO mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Judicial Nomination Commission:

I am writing in support of the appointment of Chris Abbott for the open judicial vacancy in the First Judicial District. I have known Chris in a number of capacities and he will be an excellent judge given his diverse legal and life experiences.

Chris is a kind, thoughtful, and compassionate person, which are all characteristics which will help him on the bench. He cares about the community. As a lifelong Helena resident, Chris is intimately familiar with the local community and is devoted to making it a better place. I first met Chris in his work on the Board of Directors of Helena Habitat for Humanity. He is an active board member, and though he is busy with a family and career, he freely dedicates his time to help the organization.

Chris has a diverse legal background, and has extensive experience in both criminal and civil law. Aside from his work with Habitat for Humanity, I have also had the opportunity to work with Chris professionally. In my experience, he is an intelligent and creative thinker and a skilled and efficient writer. He never hesitates to talk thorough legal issues when I call him up in the middle of his busy day. He is able to analyze complex areas of the law and to simplify them to make it understandable to the average person. Also, in an age where it has become increasingly rare to take cases to trial, Chris has extensive trial experience.

In both his civil and criminal practice, Chris has always been a dedicated public servant and is committed to equal justice under the law. He is especially suited to the judgeship given his extensive knowledge of criminal law, civil law, and administrative law. I have no doubt that Chris is capable of managing and understanding the diversity of cases that will confront him as a judge.

Undoubtedly, Chris will be an effective, fair and capable judge. I strongly recommend that Chris Abbott be nominated to be the next First Judicial District judge.

Thank you.



DAVID R. PAOLI
PAUL M. LEISHER

257 WEST FRONT STREET, SUITE A
P.O. Box 8131
MISSOULA, MONTANA 59802
PHONE: 406-542-3330
FAX: 406-542-3332
September 23, 2020

DAVIDPAOLI@PAOLI-LAW.COM
PAULLEISHER@PAOLI-LAW.COM

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Via Email: MTsupremecourt@Mt.gov

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

I write in strong support of Chris Abbott for First Judicial District Court Judge. I did not know Chris prior to our professional relationship working on a case together. However, through that time I have found Chris to be exceptional in his legal abilities and masterful with legal writing. We have and continue to undertake representation in a complex multi-party and multi-attorney case on behalf of the State of Montana. I have been very appreciative of all of Chris' efforts and am truly thankful that he is on our side.

One of our first tasks together in our case was a hearing in District Court in the First Judicial District. We were co-counsel and colleagues and as we walked into the courtroom, the District Court Judge was already on the bench and the first words out of his mouth were: "Well hello Mr. Abbott. Very good to see you back in my courtroom." I knew then that Chris was going to be a valuable member of our team. It was clear the presiding Judge had a great deal of respect for Chris. Given this, his work as another jurist in the First Judicial District will only be that much more valuable because of the respect Chris has from the Judge there.

As I previously indicated, Chris' legal instincts and skills are top notch. We have been able to discuss and argue points of our case and strategic directions that we would want to take, or not take. For this position on the First Judicial Court, I believe his skills will be a huge asset to the parties and attorneys who appear before him. Further, his wealth of experience in criminal matters, especially having worked as a Public Defender, will be a major asset not only to his chambers but to those in the First Judicial District as well as throughout the District Courts. Having had that ground level experience of a Public Defender and then transferring those experiences to the bench will be very helpful in the criminal portion of his judgeship. I have already spoken of his civil practice skills and those will be invaluable as well.

I wholeheartedly endorse Chris Abbott to be appointed Judge of the First Judicial District.

Very Truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'David R. Paoli'. The signature is stylized with large, flowing loops.

David R. Paoli

W.T. BOONE (1910-1984)
KARL R. KARLBERG (1923-1988)
JAMES J. BENN (1944-1992)
THOMAS H. BOONE, of Counsel
WILLIAM L. CROWLEY
RANDY J. COX
ROBERT J. SULLIVAN
DEAN A. STENSLAND
CYNTHIA K. THIEL
ROSS D. TILLMAN
JAMES A. BOWDITCH

MATTHEW B. HAYHURST
SCOTT M. STEARNS
NATASHA PRINZING JONES
THOMAS J. LEONARD
JULIE R. SIRRS
TRACEY NEIGHBOR JOHNSON
CHRISTOPHER L. DECKER
RANDY J. TANNER
ZACHARY A. FRANZ
TYLER M. STOCKTON
EVAN B. COREN
ALISON R. POTTS

September 24, 2020

Via U.S. mail and email
Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Re: Public Comment on behalf of Christopher Abbott

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission Members:

First, thank you for the Commission's willingness to accept public comment on the candidates for the First Judicial District Judgeship vacancy. I am writing to encourage the Judicial Nomination Commission to nominate Christopher Abbott to the vacancy.

I have recently had the opportunity to work with Chris in my practice when we represented co-defendants in a federal civil rights case. During my experience with him, he demonstrated his wealth of knowledge and meticulous handle on facts of a matter which required a command of a very document-intensive case file. In that case, he was successful in having his client dismissed after fully developing the case and moving for summary judgment. His accomplishments and experience speak for themselves, but I will say his experience in both the civil and criminal arenas will serve him well as a District Court Judge.

I believe Chris would be an excellent addition to the First Judicial District. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Tracey Neighbor Johnson

To: The Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies

From: Dave Burleigh, esq.

Re: Chris Abbott for District Court Judge

Date: Sept. 23, 2020

To the Judicial Nomination Commission:

My name is Dave Burleigh. I am a member of the Montana Bar Association, and have been employed by the State practicing law in various capacities in Helena since 2007. I write this letter in support of appointing Christopher David Abbott to the First Judicial District Court bench.

Mr. Abbott and I worked closely for several years as public defenders, and continue to maintain interest in one-another's careers. Chris is the brightest attorney I have seen practice. He is also the hardest-working attorney I know. He has the ability, references, and experience to succeed in any career path in the law, but he opts to serve our community. From representing hundreds of accused criminals, mentally ill, chemically dependent, and failing parents on the fringe of society to advocating on behalf of the State of Montana, Chris has selflessly upheld the law with professionalism, integrity, and dedication.

I can say without reservation that Chris is the best candidate for the bench. He is intellectually capable of legal discourse on any topic, experienced in the courtroom, well-versed on procedure, statutes, and case law, hardworking, and compassionate. What sets Chris apart from other candidates is that he will not take a prosecutorial mind set to the bench. Chris' zealous advocacy on behalf of his clients, especially the ones ostracized by society at large, demonstrates his dedication to the principles of law, justice, and upholding every citizen's rights, not just the ones he gets to go home feeling good about giving a voice or protecting from bad guys. The world is changing, and it is apparent that the community as a whole wants more empathy, compassion, and accountability from powerful people in both the public and private sectors. Chris understands when and how to assert these characteristics. Chris also understands when and how to be tough and strict. Without exception, Chris has displayed sound, professional decision-making in his career, and will continue to do so from the bench.

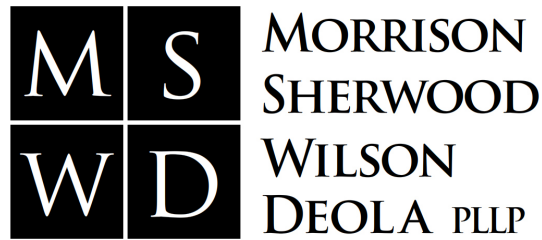
Chris is uniquely gifted with an incredible intellect and undying passion for service. The community and bar benefit from his commitment to serving the public. The best way to maximize the benefit of Chris's talents and work ethic is to appoint him to the bench where he can be an arbiter of justice, instead of simply an advocate for one side of a case. The community and bar will be better off having Chris Abbott on the bench.

Sincerely,

Dave Burleigh

John M. Morrison
Frederick F. Sherwood
David K. W. Wilson, Jr.
Linda M. Deola
Brian J. Miller

rfolsen@mswdlaw.com



Attorneys at Law
401 North Last Chance Gulch
P.O. Box 557, Helena, Montana 59624-0557
www.mswdlaw.com

Robert Farris-Olsen
Andrée Larose
Scott Peterson
Anne Sherwood

(406) 442-3261
(406) 443-7294 FAX

September 25, 2020

Via U.S. e-mail only

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Re: First Judicial District Judicial Vacancy
Letter for Support for Christopher Abbott

Dear Ms. Menzies:

I'm writing in support of Christopher "Chris" Abbott's nomination for appointment to replace Judge Reynold's as a judge in the First Judicial District Court. I've known Chris since we went to high school, here in Helena. While we were debate competitors – he went to Capital High and I went to Helena High – Chris was always thoughtful and caring as a person and as an opponent. His arguments were always sound.

These skills I saw in high school have carried over into his professional career. I've only practiced a small amount of Criminal Law as a contract public defender, but Chris' name was regularly discussed as one of the best both in skill and reputation. I'm sure as a judge he will continue to making informed, and compassionate decisions, while maintaining the high standards required by a judge.

Chris' experience as a public defender is also a critical skill missing from much of the bench – not just in the first judicial district, but around the state. In the first judicial district, two of the four judges have prosecutorial experience, and two were civil attorneys. Judge Reynolds' retirement gives the commission a unique opportunity to recommend someone

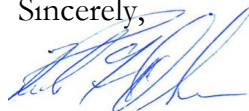
with criminal defense experience. At this point in time, in particular, it is important to have a judge who understands criminal law from a defendant and defense counsel's perspective.

Having practiced a limited amount of criminal defense, and served in the Legislature, I've seen firsthand how our system is skewed to promote convictions. In the legislature, for example, in the 2017 session, HB 133 was signed into law which was large step towards criminal justice reform, but during the 2019 session, that reform began deteriorating. So much so that a bill was proposed to allow roadside blood draws. Fortunately, that bill died, but it represents the stark reality that our legislature is a citizen legislature and some bills that violate a criminally accused constitutional rights will be signed into law. Chris' experience arguing against these exact kind of laws, and in support of our constitution, will benefit the bench and the citizens of Montana.

Beyond his experience as a criminal defense attorney, Chris' current work as an attorney for Agency Legal Services will help fill the void left by Judge Reynolds. Most of the cases Chris will hear are criminal and family law cases, but he will also hear other civil cases. And his understanding of the rules of civil procedure, and how the process works are critical to ensuring both parties to a civil matter are given a fair opportunity.

Put simply, I'm confident Chris' experience in both the criminal and civil law arenas will make him an effective Judge from day one. Please forward his name to the governor for appointment to the First Judicial District Court.

Sincerely,



Robert Farris-Olsen

Brett D. Schandelson
1836 Madera Drive
Missoula, MT 59802
brett.schandelson@icloud.com

September 22, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
Via email: mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

To the Judicial Nomination Commission:

I am writing to express my support and recommendation for Christopher Abbott for the position of District Court Judge in the First Judicial District Court. I have had the pleasure of knowing and working with Chris both during his tenure as a Public Defender and in his current position in the Attorney General's Office. Chris' character, professionalism, and legal experience make him the ideal candidate for this position.

As a public defender Chris brought much more to his representation than his finely honed legal skills wrapped in a zealous defense – he brought compassion, decency, and respect to the justice system and to his clients. Often, a client's only advocate during the stressful and uncertain time they're involved in the justice system is their public defender, and Chris' clients could not have asked for a better advocate, or better person, to help them navigate the system.

Chris' time as a Public Defender prepared him for the bench better than any other area of law could, and imbued him with the same values we expect our judges to uphold in their decisions, and in their communities: fairness, equality, and dignity for all.

Further, I have the somewhat unique opportunity to recommend Chris as a former "client." As Operations Manager for the Office of State Public Defender, I was responsible for handling the Agency's response to a lawsuit filed against OPD in 2018, and Chris was the primary attorney I worked with at Agency Legal Services. Throughout the multi-year litigation Chris exuded professionalism, competence, and skill, not only obtaining summary judgment in favor of OPD in the district court, but successfully arguing to the Montana Supreme Court to affirm that decision. And although the case was entirely different than the cases Chris handled as a public defender, as civil litigation typically brings additional layers of complexity in the discovery and pre-trial motions processes, Chris performed as effectively as any seasoned civil litigator I have practiced with or against. Chris' time at the Attorney General's Office can only serve to make him an even stronger candidate for this position.

There are many good attorneys out there, and many of them may make fine judges one day. But to be a great judge – one that embodies and reflects the values of the community, whose rulings are clear and consistent, and who understands the complicated realities of so many individuals in the justice system – takes not just a great attorney, which Chris certainly is, but also a great person. It is for these reasons that I recommend Christopher Abbott to this commission.

Sincerely,

/s/ Brett D. Schandelson

Brett D. Schandelson

September 22, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 204005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Ms. Menzies:

I am honored to support Christopher Abbott for the open Judicial District Court opening. I know Chris Abbott both personally and professionally.

As the Director of the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS), I've worked with Chris in his capacity as Assistant Attorney General. The department has many diverse and complex issues and often seeks outside counsel through Department of Justice. We are very pleased when Chris agrees to take our cases. He quickly grasps the complexity of each, often with both state and federal laws and rules resulting in the preparation of motions in either state or federal court. Although our issues are complex, it is almost always necessary to research, brief, and work cases in a brief time period. He handles all things directed his way with professionalism and efficiency.

I know the Abbott family. Chris comes from a solid Montana family. He and his wife Jen have a young family of their own. He is a doting son, husband, and father. Chris and his wife are active in their community and in Montana. I recently attended a community function and saw Chris and Jen in attendance along with their young daughter.

I know that Chris will not only add a level of professionalism but the humanism that is so missing in our society today. Please let me know if you have any questions at (406) 439-3325

Sincerely,

Sheila Hogan

Harrison J (Harry) Freebourn
P.O. Box 221
Butte, MT 59703
hjfreebourn@bresnan.net
406-479-3889

September 18, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Commissioners:

My name is Harry Freebourn and I am the former, now retired, Executive Director of Montana's Office of the State Public Defender (OPD). I urge you to send Christopher Abbott's name to the Governor as one of your nominees for the open position of District Court Judge for the First Judicial District.

I first met Chris in 2007 while working at OPD. Chris was an attorney with OPD. During his time with OPD, Chris held several high-level attorney positions and even worked in our major crimes unit, which handles the most complex and high-profile cases in the state; including death penalty cases. His assignments demanded that he be one of the most skilled and well-trained attorneys in the state and he was. For your information, OPD is a Montana state agency that provides legal services to individuals charged with a crime in criminal cases and certain civil cases. A fascinating fact is that OPD operates in all 56 district courts (one in every county), in over 150 courts of limited jurisdiction (like justice, municipal and city courts), and in many specialty courts (like those that deal with mental health, veterans, and other serious issues). Chris worked in many courts and on many kinds of cases.

During my time with OPD, I was very impressed by Chris' education, experiences, his composure, temperament, and demeanor. Chris is not only a premiere attorney, but he routinely managed paralegals, investigators, administrative staff, legal consultants, mental health advisors, and others that served the over 1,000 cases assigned to him. This fact clearly shows that he can efficiently manage limited state resources. I recall that at times, Chris was asked by OPD to assist the agency on certain budgetary, legislative, planning, organization, and operational issues. Chris was a team player and always stepped up to the plate to help.

I believe that first and foremost, Chris, through education, training and vast experiences, has impeccable skills as a lawyer. He is able to communicate to all engaged in the legal process


(judges, other attorneys, consultants, juries and most importantly clients with various levels of education and mental capabilities) in a clear and understandable manner. He understands legal procedure and how to get the job done in a complex legal system in an effective and efficient manner. These attributes will make him a great judge.

I also know that Chris has a controlled demeanor and temperament which I think is important in conducting any legal proceeding. Also, a plus is his ability to make well thought out, fact based, timely decisions, while considering the weight of the decisions and those affected by the decision.

Finally, I want to mention Chris' devotion to do any job with integrity and honesty.

I ask that you nominate Chris for this Judgeship.

Respectively yours,


Harry Freebourn

Cook, Kevin

From: Menzies, Lois
Sent: Thursday, September 24, 2020 9:32 PM
To: Cook, Kevin
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott

From: STEVE ANDERSEN <STEVE@ANDERSENLAWOFFICE.onmicrosoft.com>
Sent: Wednesday, September 23, 2020 10:14 AM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Cc: cdabbott10@gmail.com
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Chris Abbott; Judicial Nominee

To the Judicial Nominating Committee,

Please accept my endorsement of Mr. Chris Abbott for the current vacancy in the First Judicial District Court for Lewis and Clark and Broadwater Counties. I've had the pleasure of knowing Mr. Abbott since his first days working for the Public Defender's Office in Helena. It was easy to see for anyone who looked that Mr. Abbott was a young attorney who cared deeply about his clients and their respective cases. The First Judicial District is typified by steady stream of criminal cases that can swamp and overwhelm most young public defenders. But as I represented my own clients and walked the same halls as Chris, and was listed on the same dockets, it was clear that Chris was quickly on his way to becoming a top notch lawyer and a credit to his profession. Chris managed to maintain an outrageous case load while carrying himself day in and day out with grace and composure, no easy task when you have been assigned over two hundred cases. Because of his talent and dedication, Chris was assigned to the major crimes unit and handled the most serious felonies taking many trials to verdict if not acquittal. For the last few years, Chris has worked for the attorney general's office in Helena, gaining in the process a broad, open-minded perspective that is rare and yet ideal for one who "takes the silk." Please accept my full endorsement for Mr. Chris Abbott as the next district court judge in the First Judicial District.

Steve Andersen

Attorney at Law
11 Friendship Lane
Montana City, MT 59634
406-442-9700

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Thursday, September 24, 2020 9:32:30 PM

From: Terry Minow <terry.lynn.minow@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, September 23, 2020 12:57 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Letter of recommendation, Chris Abbott

To: Lois Menzies, Judicial Nomination Commission
From: Terry Minow, 502 Lower Valley Road, Boulder, MT 59632
406-225-4397

I am pleased to recommend Chris Abbott for District Court Judge in Lewis & Clark County.

Chris has the calm temperament, strong sense of justice and deep knowledge of the law that will make him an excellent judge.

I worked with Chris when I lobbied in Helena. I appreciate his passion for fairness and equity. When he testified on bills, he demonstrated his understanding of the political process and respect for the process of lawmaking and the people engaged in it. He knows the law from many perspectives, from the legislative side to the practical nitty-gritty application of the law in the court system, in the community and in the lives of regular Montanans.

Chris is a hard worker, a talented attorney and a person who has devoted his life to justice. He was a generous mentor to my daughter who is a public defender. His unique combination of excellent interpersonal skills, high intelligence, extensive knowledge of the law, deep compassion and ability to approach every legal question in an even-handed, fair way, make him an ideal judge.

Integrity, intelligence, knowledge, compassion, toughness, the willingness to go the extra mile...these are all traits that will make Chris Abbott a trusted and respected judge.

Thank you for your consideration.

Cook, Kevin

From: Menzies, Lois
Sent: Sunday, September 27, 2020 1:00 PM
To: Cook, Kevin
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott

From: Linda Gryczan <lindagryczan@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, September 26, 2020 9:36 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Cc: Christopher Abbott
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Letter Supporting Christopher Abbott for 1st Judicial District

Linda Gryczan
800 8th Ave
Helena, MT 59601
LindaGryczan@gmail.com

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
PO Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

September 26, 2020

Dear Members of the Commission,

I am writing to support the appointment of Mr Christopher Abbott to the upcoming vacancy in the First Judicial District with the retirement of Judge Reynolds.

As a mediator, I work in concert with the First Judicial District, helping divorcing parties make their own parenting decisions and divide property and debt. My clients who cannot create their own agreements depend on a judge who is fair and impartial, understands the needs of pro se clients, and who can make a fair decision.

Fairness requires the self awareness to be aware of one's biases, and I believe Mr Abbott will treat litigants fairly regardless of their gender, race or station in life.

Fairness requires an understanding the dynamics of domestic violence and how it impacts the parties' ability to negotiate for themselves. Mr Abbot has been trained by the best, at the Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, and I believe he will work to protect the survivors of intimate partner assault from being re-victimized through the court process.

Fairness includes allowing litigants to have a meaningful opportunity to be heard during their day in court, even if they are pro se, with little understanding of court procedure and rules of evidence. Through his work as a public defender, and his stated goal of allowing all parties to be treated fairly, I am confident Mr Abbott would serve all citizens regardless of their ability to hire counsel.

Our courts serve the citizens when even in an adversarial process, they can work to de-escalate conflict. One such way is to require those filing a parenting action to complete the Up To Parents program for divorcing parents. Children do best when their parents consider them first, and Mr Abbott is willing to make this a requirement.

I have discussed these issues with Mr Abbott and believe the citizens of the First Judicial District would be well served if he is appointed to this position.

Sincerely,

Linda Gryczan

Cook, Kevin

From: Menzies, Lois
Sent: Sunday, September 27, 2020 1:00 PM
To: Cook, Kevin
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott

From: Erin McMahon <ekmnr@msn.com>
Sent: Saturday, September 26, 2020 1:44 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Cc: Erin McMahon
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Abbott Nomination Letter

Erin McMahon
410 South Fee Street
Helena, Montana 59601
406-558-9062

September 24, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Via email: mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Re: Christopher Abbot

Dear Commission Members,

I am pleased to be writing on behalf of Chris Abbot for appointment to the Montana First Judicial District Court Judgeship.

Providing social and therapeutic services through agency work in Helena, I first became acquainted with Chris through his position as a State Public Defender. I experienced Chris to be a skilled and tireless attorney who showed enduring advocacy for his clients. Most notably, the relational and communicative approach I witnessed Chris relay to those he served was refreshingly gracious, compassionate, and reasonable.

Chris Abbot has proven himself to have the integrity, commitment, and fair-mindedness for this important position. I heartily invite you to recommend Chris to Governor Bullock for appointment to the First Judicial District Court Judgeship.

Sincerely,

Erin McMahon, BSW, MA-CMH
Licensed Addiction Counselor
Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor Candidate

Judicial Nominations Commission Montana Supreme Court
C/O Lois Menzies
VIA EMAIL ONLY

September 25, 2020

Honorable Members of the Judicial Nominations Commission:

It is my pleasure to recommend Christopher Abbott to replace Judge Reynolds in the First Judicial District. I have worked with Chris in a variety of way since 2009 when I joined the Public Defender's Office. I have also written a letter in support of Mary Cochenour, either of these candidates would make a positive addition to the First Judicial District.

Throughout my time at OPD, Chris showed dedication to his clients and their cases. Never faltering in his representation, even with an extremely high caseload. In addition, he was a mentor for all of us younger attorneys in the office. His door was always open to help on whatever issue arose.

Chris has an extensive knowledge of criminal law that will serve him well in this busy district. He would be able to step into the role with ease in all areas. His demeanor and respect for attorneys, victims and defendants will make him an ideal addition to the Court.

Chris has also spoken to me about his desire to maintain Treatment Courts. I personally worked very hard to open these Courts in the District and want to make sure these alternative courts succeed, Chris has assured me he will continue to support both the Family and Adult Treatment Courts in the First Judicial District.

Thank you,

Judge Anne Peterson
Helena Municipal Court
228 Broadway
Helena, MT 59601

Aislinn Brown
224 S. Cooke Street
Helena, MT 59601

September 26, 2020

Judicial Nominations Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Judicial Nominations Commission:

I have worked with Christopher Abbott at the Department of Justice for the past three years. Chris is very intelligent, well-spoken, and thoughtful, all qualities that will make an excellent judge. I am excited for the opportunity to nominate him to sit on the bench of the First Judicial District Court.

Chris's experience in both criminal and civil law give him a well-rounded perspective that is well suited to a position on the bench. Chris served as a public defender for ten years, and during his time at DOJ has done appellate prosecutorial work as well. This background will give him a good basis to be impartial in administering justice—probably the most important quality to being a judge.

I have been lucky to work with Chris on a couple of high-profile cases while at DOJ. Through these experiences, I have witnessed first-hand Chris's excellent writing and analytical skills. His ability to efficiently brief complex areas of law, combined with his trial background, give me no doubt that he will be an excellent asset to the bench here in Helena.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aislinn Brown', with a stylized, flowing script.

Aislinn Brown



ROATH LAW

Montana Criminal Defense

Shenandoah R. Roath
Attorney at Law

406.851.9219
roathlaw@gmail.com

September 27, 2020

Montana Judicial Nomination Commission
C/O Lois Menzies
Office of the Court Administrator

Re: Vacancy to the First Judicial District Court

To the Montana Judicial Nomination Commission:

I am a licensed Montana attorney in good standing with the Montana Bar Association. I was sworn into practice in April, 2015, and have been practicing across the state since then. I joined the Office of the Public Defender, Region 4 in Helena in April, 2017. When I joined that office, Christopher Abbott was still one of the senior attorneys in the office. Even before getting to know him and his encyclopedic knowledge of Montana law, I knew his reputation as one of Montana's best attorneys.

During our time as coworkers, I often sought Chris's advice on trial strategy and law. He was always the first person I spoke to because of his deep knowledge of case and statutory law, his quick and thoughtful consideration of collateral consequences to any advice given to our indigent clients, and his unfailing objectivity in considering the likelihood of any outcome. As a new attorney in the office, I learned as much as I could from Chris while I worked with him. In addition to his legal knowledge and trial skills, he also worked closely and congenially with the county attorneys, careful to maintain Montana's strong history of civility with adverse counsel.

Montana is a small town. The Montana bar is an even smaller community, working and socializing together across the state. In working and socializing with other attorneys, I have never heard a disparaging remark from any other attorney about Chris Abbott's knowledge, character, or integrity. And I have never met another attorney that I thought would be a better fit for the judiciary. Chris Abbott will be a fair and thoughtful judge and will be a great asset to the First Judicial District of Montana. I strongly recommend his appointment to the vacancy left by Judge Reynolds' retirement.

Sincerely,

Shenandoah Roath
Attorney at Law

ROATH LAW
P.O. Box 4081, Helena MT 59604
(406) 851-9219
roathlaw@gmail.com
roathlaw.com

September 26, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
Office of the Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena MT 59620-3005

Dear Commission Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to recommend Chris Abbott's application be forwarded to Governor Bullock for consideration to fill the vacancy created by Judge James Reynolds' retirement.

Chris and I worked together, although on opposite sides of the fence, for approximately 10 years. During that time, we tried many cases together, had numerous contested hearings and other more mundane matters. Chris was invariably well prepared for whatever proceeding we happened to be handling. He is an outstanding researcher and exceptional writer. Those traits one might consider obvious simply by reviewing his resume.

What sets Chris apart is his ability to communicate and relate to regular people, like jurors. During the numerous jury trials we had together, I was impressed by the rapport Chris established with juries and his professional demeanor with witnesses. Some attorneys automatically assume an aggressive attitude even with professional adverse witnesses. I never observed Chris to be anything less than courteous and professional. That innate inclination to be cordial even in adversity would serve Chris well on the bench. Over and above his legal skills, Chris would create a positive atmosphere in the courtroom that would benefit lay people, non-lawyer professionals and attorneys appearing before him.

The First Judicial District is incredibly busy with the caseload – both civil and criminal – increasing every year. Frankly it is a daunting prospect to assume an existing caseload guaranteed to grow rather than shrink. Chris has the work ethic and drive necessary to successfully undertake such an endeavor.

You have many fine candidates to choose from in this process. Thank you again for the opportunity to recommend that you forward Chris Abbott's name for consideration by Governor Bullock.

Sincerely,



Melissa Broch
Deputy County Attorney
Lewis and Clark County

Eric M. Brewer, Attorney and Counselor at Law
BREWER LAW FIRM, P.L.L.C.
1700 West Koch, #9
P.O. Box 1014
Bozeman, MT 59771
(406) 570-6664
ebrewer@bridgeband.com

September 25, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Re: Christopher Abbott

Members of the Judicial Nomination Commission:

I write without hesitation to strongly encourage you to forward Mr. Abbott's application to Governor Bullock for consideration for appointment to the soon to be vacant judicial position in the First Judicial District Court.

I first met Mr. Abbott when we were both employed by the Office of the State Public Defender (OPD). When Mr. Abbott was with the Major Crimes Unit of the OPD, I had the privilege of serving with him as co-counsel representing a defendant charged with deliberate homicide. Mr. Abbott impressed me as few attorneys have with his superior research and writing abilities, his courtroom abilities, and his compassion for our client and our client's family. As trial began, many last minute and important legal issues arose. Mr. Abbott handled these issues thoroughly and quickly, often working late into the night, yet he was always fresh and ready for another long day in court the next morning.

During my tenure with the OPD, Mr. Abbott was well known as the OPD attorney to contact when one was faced with a unique legal question. Although he always had his own excessive caseload, Mr. Abbott was very giving with his time and would go out of his way to help.

Mr. Abbott's dedication to public service is well documented. He has forsaken lucrative pay in his dedication to serving the citizens of Montana. But forsaking lucrative pay has given Mr. Abbott the unique opportunity to become well versed in both complex criminal and civil litigation, experience that will serve him well as a trial court judge. If Mr. Abbott is appointed to the bench it will be a loss to the bar, but seating him on the First Judicial District Court will be a service to justice, fairness, and the Constitutions of the State of Montana and the United States.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of a stylized 'E' followed by a long, horizontal, wavy line that tapers off to the right.

Eric M. Brewer

Nicholas Domitrovich
613 Peosta Ave
Helena, MT 59601

September 20, 2020

Office of the Court Administrator
c/o Lois Menzies
PO BOX 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

RE: First Judicial District Appointment

Dear Nominating Commission Members:

I am writing to express my utmost support for Chris Abbott's appointment to the vacant position in the First Judicial District Court. My professional interactions with Chris have made it clear to me that he possesses the experience, intellect, and temperament to make a terrific district court judge.

I first encountered Chris when I was working for the Appellate Defender Division of the Office of the State Public Defender and Chris was working in the Major Crimes Unit. His reputation in the agency was that of the person you went to when you had a complex legal issue to work out. Chris and I had several of those conversations and it quickly became clear to me how he arrived at his reputation.

In in my present role as deputy chief legal counsel at the Department of Public Health and Human Services, Chris and I have worked together on a wide variety of issues. In his role at the Department of Justice Agency Legal Services Bureau, Chris has defended lawsuits against our agency and has also served as an appointed administrative law judge in contested case hearings under the medical marijuana program. He moves between the roles seamlessly and has always demonstrated a preternatural ability to become an expert in short order in whatever subject matter we throw at him. As an administrative law judge, he is professional, respectful of all parties, and diligent.

More recently, Chris and I have worked together on the small legal team handling Montana's response to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. We have primarily worked together on numerous directives issued under the Governor's emergency powers to implement public health interventions to combat the spread of the virus, but we have also defended those measures in litigation. Even though I come to the group as the public health law expert, I learn from Chris during every encounter. His collaboration is thoughtful, thorough, and dutiful. I honestly believe that the outbreak situation in Montana would be considerably worse right now if it weren't for Chris's individual efforts. The First Judicial District Court would be greatly complimented by the addition of a judge with Chris's skills and sense of duty.

Thank you for taking my recommendation under consideration.

Sincerely,



Nicholas Domitrovich, deputy chief
DPHHS Office of Legal Affairs

Judicial Nomination Commission
C/O Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Re: Letter of Support for Christopher D. Abbott

Dear Ms. Menzies:

I am writing this letter to support the appointment of Christopher Abbott for the First Judicial District Court Judge position. I have worked with Chris the last several years on a variety of issues, and he is well-qualified to assume this judgeship. He has the right blend of experience and temperament necessary to do an outstanding job. He is a great asset now to the legal profession, and he will continue to be as a district court judge.

Chris has the requisite skills. He writes and speaks well, and he is analytical, able to separate the wheat from the chaff and get to the heart of legal issues. I have read and critiqued several of Chris's briefs and these skills are evident. Just as important, he will evaluate your comments and adjust his thinking and writing as necessary-or explain why he believes his position is the best approach. This willingness to adapt and change means Chris is a good listener, a skill that a quality judge must have. A judge cannot make the right call without understanding as best as possible what a person is saying—and sometimes not saying—and then following that with the appropriate questions.

Broad experience is an important characteristic of a good judge. Given the wide array of issues that a district court judge faces-reflecting the rainbow of humanity-such experience creates the framework to balance the rights and responsibilities that each case brings. Particularly working for the Office of Public Defender, Chris gained valuable trial experience, handled difficult cases, and was able to appreciate good prosecutorial skills. His work for the Ninth Circuit and Agency Legal Services has broadened his knowledge of other legal areas, which will enhance his judicial skills. He is also a diligent and hard worker, providing draft briefs with plenty of time for review and comment.

Harder to measure but just as important are the soft skills a good judge must have-humility, respect, and courage. Chris cares about people as reflected in his community service with Habitat for Humanity and supporting his wife's work at the YWCA. This work reflects humility for the blessings of one's life and respect for other people-no matter their perceived station in life. Working for OPD is very challenging, and one must have courage to represent individuals who have had to travel difficult roads. For 10 years, Chris did this work.

In summary, Chris will be an excellent judge and a humble civil servant.

Sincerely,

/s/ Mike Manion
Bar No. 2479

John C. Melcher
729 Bridgeview Court
Helena, MT.
59601

September 26, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of the Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT. 59620
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Re: Chris Abbott

Dear Lois:

As detailed in letters already submitted, Chris is an attorney in the AG's Agency Legal Services Bureau. I am the Bureau Chief at ALS and I was responsible for Chris's hiring and I also supervise the attorneys of the bureau.

Chris has been with the bureau for the past three years. Chris came highly recommended and he has not disappointed. He is a skilled advocate and a hard worker. He is principled and insightful. He has a passion for his work. He is very respectful of coworkers and he collaborates well with all the staff. He has been repeatedly praised by the client agencies and state employees he represents. He has made my job easier.

Given his abilities, Chris is a surprisingly humble attorney. At times, he has gone out of his way to provide me with his own self-critiques. I think that is a rare quality, especially given that Chris's work has generally been above reproach.

I have no hesitation in recommending Chris as district judge. In my 33 years of practice, I doubt I have encountered an attorney better suited for the bench.

Sincerely,

/s/ John C. Melcher



WORDEN
THANE P.C.
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Established in 1924

Donovan Worden, Sr.
(1892 – 1967)
Donovan Worden, Jr.
(1918 – 2001)
Jeremy G. Thane
(1927 – 2016)

Ronald A. Bender
Martin S. King
W. Carl Mendenhall
Sean M. Morris
Reid J. Perkins
William E. McCarthy
Amy M. Scott Smith
Jori Quinlan

Jesse C. Kodadek
Chris A. Johnson (MT,WA)
Dana L. Hupp
Martin Rogers
Joel E. Henry
Brand G. Boyar
Natalie L. Black
Elizabeth W. Erickson
Clare Kealey

September 25, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov
via email

Judicial Nomination Commission:

We are writing in support of Christopher Abbott's application for the open seat on the First Judicial District Court bench. We know Chris because we have litigated against him—and lost—in both district court and at the Montana Supreme Court.

Chris would be an excellent addition to the bench for many reasons. First, he has considerable experience in both civil and criminal law. Crucially, he spent years representing criminal defendants, which gives him a perspective often lacking in Montana district courts. But Chris has also shown that he can work on the other side, where he now represents the government. So he has real-world experience representing both the most powerful and the least powerful, which will no doubt inform the many difficult decisions a district court judge must make every day.

Finally—and we believe this is the most important part—Chris is one of those attorneys who represents his clients with zeal but never makes it personal and is always friendly and professional. Indeed, if all opposing counsel were as easy to deal with as Chris is, our job would be far more pleasant. We are certain he would carry all of these same traits to the bench.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jesse Kodadek
jkodadek@wordenthane.com

/s/ Sean Morris
smorris@wordenthane.com

Cook, Kevin

From: Menzies, Lois
Sent: Saturday, September 26, 2020 12:07 PM
To: Cook, Kevin
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott

From: leslie50c@aol.com <leslie50c@aol.com>
Sent: Saturday, September 26, 2020 10:10 AM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Chris Abbott - Applicant for Judgeship

To the Judicial Committee:

I am writing to provide a letter of support for Chris Abbott. I am an attorney for Montana State University and Chris was assigned to work on a case that I was overseeing for the university. The case has been a long and complicated one and Chris has been diligent and well-prepared throughout the entire case. He has a great recall of the thousands of documents submitted through discovery and has been willing to meet the needs of the university in analyzing various aspects of the case. I think he would make a good district court judge.

Leslie Taylor
Attorney at Law

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Monday, September 28, 2020 6:48:42 PM

From: Jonathan Morgan <jmorgan75@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, September 27, 2020 1:04 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Christopher Abbott, Letter in Support of Appointment to 1st Judicial District Court

Members of the Judicial Nomination Commission,

I am writing in support of Christopher Abbott, and encourage the Judicial Nomination Commission to forward his name to Governor Bullock for appointment to the First Judicial District Court.

I have had the opportunity and good fortune to work with Chris at the public defender office in Helena, Montana. During my time at the Office of the Public Defender I often turned to Chris as a mentor. Chris's advocacy skills and judgment were second to none. Chris's ability and willingness to shoulder such a heavy caseload and eagerly assist others within the office speaks well of his skills as an attorney, his commitment to justice, and the value he places on diligent, thoughtful consideration of the factual and legal considerations within each case.

Chris has chosen a life of public service, and that, in my opinion, represents the highest purpose that our profession can strive for. His work ethic, experience (with both criminal and civil practice), and commitment to justice will be an asset to the bench. More importantly, those same virtues will serve the public--those that look to the court for justice--well. It is my sincere hope that the Commission forward Mr. Abbott's name to Governor Bullock for consideration as district court judge.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Morgan

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Monday, September 28, 2020 6:49:09 PM

From: Sealey, Jeff
Sent: Sunday, September 27, 2020 1:07 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: Christopher Abbott comment

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Members of the Commission,

I write to support Chris Abbott as a judicial candidate for the First Judicial District Court. I have known Chris for 13 years. For most of that time, he and I were opposing counsel on various criminal cases in Helena. During our time sitting at different tables in a courtroom, I have watched Chris try cases, make arguments, interact with other attorneys, and to a limited extent, interact with his own clients. He respects the process, and he respects the people engaged in it. I appreciate his approach, and I dare say, I emulate it.

Some of my former co-workers have raised eyebrows when I tell them I am writing a comment in support of a former defense attorney, but Chris has earned my respect and that of the other attorneys in our community. His intelligence and work ethic made him one of the most capable criminal defense attorneys in the State, which explains why he was tapped to try serious cases all over the Montana as a member of the Office of Public Defender's (OPD) Major Crimes Unit for three years. When I speak of Chris being intelligent, I speak in earnest. He will have no trouble successfully and efficiently analyzing the complex legal matters we see in the First Judicial District.

Like many judicial districts in the State, the First has too many cases for the four judges who sit on the bench here. Chris is well-qualified to handle that caseload. At OPD, I saw him take on a crushing caseload, and he did so in a way that never short-changed his individual clients. I can only imagine he worked significantly more hours than he should have been expected to in order to fully represent the interests of all of his clients.

Aside from being committed to his work, Chris is a compassionate person. From what I observed, he obviously cared about his clients and cared about helping them improve their often-challenging situations. That understanding is an important trait for a judge.

For all of the reasons above, I strongly encourage the commission to move Chris's application forward to the Governor.

Sincerely,

Jeff Sealey
Helena resident and attorney

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Monday, September 28, 2020 6:49:43 PM

From: Ford Hayes <fordbhayes@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, September 27, 2020 3:57 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Christopher Abbott Judicial Nomination Letter

September 27, 2020

To the Judicial Nomination Commission, c/o Lois Menzies

I am writing in support of the nomination of Christopher Abbott for the First Judicial District judicial vacancy. I have had an opportunity to work with Mr. Abbott as co-counsel on multiple cases in my position as Special Assistant Attorney General with the Montana Department of Administration. My experience with Mr. Abbott has been that he is an exceptionally prepared and hard-working attorney who has the proper temperament and impressive legal analysis skills required of a district court judge.

My cases with Mr. Abbott have been complex cases with hundreds of items in the docket, and have required extensive motions practice and discovery. Mr. Abbott has worked long hours into nights and weekends to obtain favorable results for the State of Montana in these matters. His skill analyzing issues has also helped us identify and obtain summary judgment on both state and federal matters. Finally, Mr. Abbott is extremely patient, which has been of benefit both to me learning as a young attorney working with him and in his representation of the State of Montana before tribunals when the State receives unfavorable rulings and deals with difficult opposing counsel.

I believe the most important characteristics for a successful district court judge to have are: patience with the parties before them, analytical reasoning to quickly analyze issues before the Court, and industriousness to issue rulings to parties in a reasonable time-frame to allow the expeditious resolution of cases. Mr. Abbott has all of those characteristics. As such, I believe he is fully qualified to be the next judge in the First Judicial District.

Sincerely,

Rutherford B. Hayes

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Monday, September 28, 2020 6:50:20 PM

From: Christine Kaufmann <ckauf51@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, September 27, 2020 8:05 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Recommendation for Chris Abbott

Dear members of the Judicial Nomination Commission:

I'm writing to recommend Chris Abbott to replace Judge Jim Reynolds in the First Judicial District. I know Chris and his family and believe you will not find any candidate with greater honesty, integrity, empathy, and compassion.

I know Chris has many excellent qualifications for the position, but what stands out to me is his long service as a public defender. Although I have not worked professionally with Chris, as a citizen and former legislator I have come to understand and appreciate the difficult role public defenders play in our society, providing representation for the most vulnerable among us. Chris was able to handle the most serious and complex cases under taxing circumstances, all while juggling an overwhelming caseload and struggling with the lack of appropriate resources.

It takes tremendous commitment to work as a public defender and I know Chris will bring that same commitment and hard work to a judgeship. The citizens of Montana will be well served by Chris Abbott should you select him to fill the vacancy.

Christine Kaufmann
Former state legislator
406-439-0256

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Monday, September 28, 2020 6:50:49 PM

From: Patricia Kemp <patriciak1971@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, September 27, 2020 8:38 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Recommendation for Christopher Abbott

To members of the Judicial Nomination Commission:

I have known Christopher Abbott personally for over five years and on one occasion our paths crossed professionally.

In my previous work as a child and family therapist and in my current volunteer work as a Court Appointed Special Advocate, I have provided reports and testified in First Judicial Court on numerous occasions. Often the families I work with are struggling with issues related to poverty, addiction and mental illness. In my experience, the judges who have made the greatest impact on parents have a respectful understanding of those challenging life experiences and at the same time are able to hold individuals accountable for their behaviors.

Christopher Abbot's work as a public defender shows his commitment to working with indigent clients. His belief that an individual has the ability to make life changes as well as his personal characteristics of being a good listener, demonstrating patience, and understanding others' perspectives will be tremendous assets as a judge.

Christopher's training and work experience as well as his personal characteristics are a match for the kind of person I want to work with as a district judge.

Sincerely,
Patricia Kemp
Court Appointed Special Advocate
406-439-7480

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Monday, September 28, 2020 6:51:44 PM

From: pennymartin@charter.net <pennymartin@charter.net>
Sent: Monday, September 28, 2020 9:49 AM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Cc: 'Penny Martin'
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Christopher Abbott

Judicial Nomination Commission:

My name is Penny Doig-Martin, and I was one of the Official Court Reporters for the First Judicial District from 1986 through 2016. I reported three years for the Hon. Gordon Bennet and 26 years for the Hon. Jeffrey Sherlock.

I started working with Christopher Abbott in 2007, when he became a public defender, through 2016. He appeared regularly in front of Judge Sherlock. He was always well-prepared, competent, even tempered, focused on the issue at hand, and capable of accepting an adverse ruling and moving on. Chris has extensive trial experience.

Chris was a very effective advocate for his clients, with the best possible resolution as the goal. Sometimes that meant going to trial. Sometimes that meant pleading guilty. If he took a case to trial, you could typically expect a plausible defense.

Given the relationships Chris forged with his clients, I believe he would have the compassion and understanding for situations defendants may find themselves in, yet dispense justice in the best interest of the community and possible rehabilitation of the defendants. I believe he would be fair and consistent in his rulings.

Chris is very qualified for the job and I support his appointment.

Penny Doig-Martin, RPR

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Monday, September 28, 2020 6:52:16 PM

From: Katy Peterson <kmackp@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, September 28, 2020 1:46 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Letter of Support for Christopher Abbott

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Dear Members of the Judicial Nomination Commission,

I write this letter in strong support of Christopher Abbott for district court judge in the First Judicial District Court of Montana.

If I was to appear before a judge in district court in Montana, I would hope that judge would be someone like Christopher Abbott.

I would want a judge well-versed in the law, with a wide range of civil and criminal experience.

I would want that judge to be humble and open-minded, so that he or she is able to hear the arguments or case presented without ego or personal bias.

I would want a judge who can evaluate cases dispassionately, but who believes passionately in fairness and justice for the community they serve—including people that don't share the same education, life experiences, religious beliefs, race or ethnic background.

I would want a judge who values the humanity of all who enter the courtroom and understands the gravity of their decisions, always remembering what may seem trivial or routine to the judge may be one of the most important events in my life.

I would want a judge who not only seeks to continually expand their knowledge of the law and apply it fairly, but who seeks to better understand our world and explore ways within the court system to make it a more just and peaceful one.

Christopher Abbott would bring this experience and character to the role of district court judge. I strongly support his candidacy for the First Judicial District Court of Montana.

I write as a resident (11 years in Broadwater County and five years in Lewis and Clark County) of the area that will be served by this position. As a professional who has worked in the healthcare industry for the past seven years, I write with an understanding of and appreciation for the critical role that this judgeship plays in the health and safety of our society. Many of our community's most pressing health challenges—such as mental health and substance abuse—are inextricably linked to the justice system.

Additionally, I have served on the board of the YWCA Helena for five years. A high proportion of the women served by the YWCA are involved with the criminal justice system. This population, and the communities in which they live, have benefited greatly from the drug treatment courts that are successfully addressing our state's drug epidemic. I welcome Mr. Abbott's support for innovative and successful ways the court system can encourage rehabilitation and reduced recidivism while protecting the public and holding people accountable for their actions.

I urge your support for Christopher Abbott for district court judge.

Sincerely,

Katherine E. Peterson
281 Filson Road
Winston, Montana 59647

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Monday, September 28, 2020 6:53:08 PM

From: Dana Friede <dana.friede@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, September 28, 2020 1:59 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Letter of Support for Christopher Abbott

To whom it may concern,

I am writing in support of the potential appointment of Christopher Abbott to District Court Judge.

I have known Mr. Abbott and his family for a number of years. They are deeply tied to the area and our beautiful state, and Mr. Abbott has always demonstrated an impressive and compassionate kinship for the people of Montana.

A kind approach to others is not all Mr. Abbott offers. His knowledge and experience with the law has benefitted many Montanans. His impressive academic record and list of awards speak to his desire to not only know the law, but practice it with excellence. Though he is a humble man and would be hard-pressed to share his accomplishments, Mr. Abbott has both defended those who needed his skills and experience most through his work with the Office of the Public Defender as well as building a case for the entire State of Montana against big tobacco.

It is clear to me that Mr. Abbott uses his experience and passion to practice law well, and he would be a fair and balanced judge should he be appointed.

Respectfully submitted,

Dana Friede
Helena, MT

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Monday, September 28, 2020 6:53:39 PM

From: Carolyn Kimball <kimball.carolyn@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, September 28, 2020 2:30 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Abbott recommendation

September 28, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Greetings Ms. Menzies and the Nomination Commission,

I am writing to recommend Christopher Abbott for the position of District Court Judge in the First Judicial District Court.

My family and I live just a few doors away from Mr. Abbott's family, and our daughters are about the same age. When I first met Mr. Abbott through his wife, he struck me as an attentive father and a very normal, quiet guy. It was only later, when I was speaking with some friends in Helena, that I learned about Mr. Abbott's reputation as a brilliant attorney and legal thought leader. I mention this because we live in a world where people with the loudest voices and extroverted personalities often receive the most celebration. Mr. Abbott is not a "showman"-- his career has been built on his thoughtful, intelligent, and diligent approach to his work. He has impressive credentials that would have qualified him for any number of high-paying employment opportunities, but he has chosen a career in public service because he appreciates the importance of this work. His compassion, humility, and thoughtfulness would render him an excellent judge. I hope you'll select him to fill the vacancy at the First Judicial District Court.

Thanks so much for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Cari Kimball
725 Hillside Street
Helena, MT 59601
(406) 672-0560

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Monday, September 28, 2020 6:58:33 PM

From: Bob Wood <woodbobo1204@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, September 28, 2020 2:55 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Chris Abbott

Judicial Nominating Commission
Supreme Court of Montana

Dear Ms. Menzies,

I hope you will add this to the collection of letters in support of Chris Abbott. I have known and worked with Chris as a prosecutor and judge. He has an exceptional intellect of course. However the primary reason I think he would make a fine judge is his demeanor. Chris had always acted with civility even as an advocate for his clients. In both of my roles with the Court I could count on his intellectual and behavioral integrity. He will make a fine and honorable replacement for Judge Reynolds.

Thank you.

Robert Wood

Municipal Judge. (Ret.)

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Monday, September 28, 2020 6:59:21 PM

From: Kim Abbott <kim.k.abbott@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, September 28, 2020 3:08 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Christopher Abbott

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Sent only by email

Judicial Nomination Commission,

I am excited to write to you today in support of Christopher Abbott's application to be nominated to the 1st District judicial vacancy. I have known Chris for almost 10 years and believe that he would be an excellent judge in the 1st Judicial District. I met Chris when he worked at the Office of the Public Defender and was always impressed with his commitment to justice, the right of every defendant to an adequate defense, and the belief that our justice system could only work effectively and meet its promise, if all the component parts were adequately funded and staffed with dedicated individuals.

It's Chris' commitment to a fair, transparent, and effective justice system that will make him a fair, impartial, and successful judge. I am especially happy to support a candidate who has experience in public defense. I truly believe that working as a public defender gives people an important perspective on our system and our judiciary. Of course, Chris has varied experience beyond defense work, and I appreciate the work he has done at the Department of Justice as well.

I hope the Judicial Nomination Commission will forward Chris' application on to Governor Bullock for consideration. I know that Chris would make an excellent judge and serve this community well.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or need anything else from me.

Sincerely,

Kim Abbott

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NOTICE: Legislators are publicly elected officials. Legislator emails sent or received involving legislative business, may be subject to the Right to Know provisions of Montana's Constitution and may be considered a "public record" pursuant to Montana law. As such, email sent or received, its sender and receiver, and the email's contents, may be subject to public disclosure, except as otherwise provided by Montana law.

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Monday, September 28, 2020 7:12:25 PM

From: Jenny Eck <jennyeck4mt@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, September 28, 2020 3:40 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment: Chris Abbott

Dear Members of the Judicial Nomination Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to express my support for Chris Abbott's nomination and appointment to the First Judicial District Judgeship vacancy. I have known Chris for at least 6 years, since becoming friends with his wife, Jen, who was a fellow legislator with me in the 2013 session. When we met, Chris worked as a public defender at the Montana Office of Public Defender, a position he held for 10 years. This is notable, because Chris is a talented attorney and could have easily found work at a high paying law firm. Instead, he chose to work hard to represent those who could not afford to hire an attorney and gave them excellent and dedicated representation. Because of his time at the OPD, Chris has extensive trial experience and great compassion for those who are often at the margins of society. This compassion would translate well into filling the seat vacated by Judge Reynolds and continuing on with the work of treatment court.

After leaving OPD, Chris went on to become an assistant attorney general with Agency Legal Services at the Montana DOJ. Through this role, he has garnered extensive civil legal experience. It is rare to find an individual with a strong background in both civil and criminal trial work, and it is even more rare to find one who has worked as a public defender. All of this experience makes Chris extremely qualified to be appointed as a judge in the First Judicial District. He is hard-working, compassionate, and very smart. He has represented the poor and disenfranchised and believes in upholding courts where the defense is guaranteed a fair trial.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jenny Eck
563 Third St.
Helena, MT 59601

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Monday, September 28, 2020 7:20:37 PM

From: Buddy Rutzke <brutzke@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, September 28, 2020 4:01 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment re: Christopher Abbott and 1st Judicial Dist. Ct.

Dear Members of the Judicial Nomination Commission:

I write to ask you to nominate Christopher Abbott for the Hon. James Reynolds' bench in the First Judicial District Court. I have known Mr. Abbott now for the better part of a decade, first as a mentor and colleague, then as a friend. There are two anecdotes I want to share with you that I think best illustrate Mr. Abbott's abilities and the way he inspires respect in his colleagues, opposing counsel, and people involved in the court system.

First, when Mr. Abbott left the Office of Public Defender ("OPD"), after a decade of service, he received a spontaneous standing ovation at the OPD annual conference. This was not a begrudging standing ovation where one person stands and the rest of the room tepidly joins out of a sense of obligation. This was an immediate, spontaneous and unanimous standing ovation from a group of more than 150 OPD attorneys, staff and administrators. I have never seen anything like it, especially not for an attorney who is leaving OPD for a prosecuting agency. Usually such departures inspire anything from an attitude of "good riddance" stemming from adversarial generalizations of prosecutors to begrudging acceptance that we need talented and humble prosecutors because they wield such enormous potential to influence whether any particular case arrives at a just resolution. It is difficult to overstate just how much this homage speaks to the degree that he inspired coworkers with his tireless advocacy, his legal genius, and mentorship.

The second anecdote I would like to share is a tongue-in-cheek award he received from opposing counsel after a particularly difficult case. The case resulted in an appellate decision that interpreted some evidentiary burdens decidedly in favor of prosecutors. Opposing counsel later sent him an award they made up essentially thanking him for that decision. I don't think

Mr. Abbott would necessarily highlight this on his CV, but I think it is a massive credit to him for several reasons. First, he fought hard and gave his client not just competent and effective counsel, but probably the best counsel one could possibly hope for. Despite no doubt having made opposing counsel work long and hard, and fought them every step of the way, he did so with the professionalism, skill and passion that inspired respect and the kind of rapport that made it possible for opposing counsel to tease one another. This is the kind of professional and courteous excellence in advocacy he would inspire as a presiding judge. Second, Mr. Abbott's reaction to the appellate decision shows a humble respect for the law that is such an indispensable characteristic of good judges. He did not react to the decision by complaining about it. He adapted his practice to the decision and went one step further by training OPD attorneys from around the state on how they needed to adapt as well. This humble acceptance of governing law is exactly what can be expected from Mr. Abbott on the bench. He can be trusted to know and follow the law on any and every legal issue argued in his court and to demand zealous but respectful advocacy from attorneys so that ultimately the litigants whose privacy, liberty, and property depend on his decisions will receive a fair process.

I won some sort of lottery when I first started practicing in Montana and I ended up in an office just a few feet away from Mr. Abbott's. I learned quickly that the most efficient method for researching a difficult legal question was to shout a question toward his open office door. He would immediately shout back not only with the governing rule, but also the citation to the applicable case or statute from memory. In following up, I never once found a time when he was wrong.

I hesitate to speak too much about the personal life of a judicial nominee, but I think Mr. Abbott's family life illustrates his wisdom and commitment to respectful debate as a route to improvement of one's self and community. In his wife, he found his intellectual rival and, consequently, a partner who would never be intimidated into silence by his intelligence and strength of conviction. With this home life, Mr. Abbott is sure to be a judge that will continue to grow, learn, and keep an open mind rather than stagnating into a set of concrete beliefs impervious to new information or arguments. He is smart enough to surround himself in his

professional and personal life with people who can challenge him, and courageous enough to seriously listen to them.

Mr. Abbott's depth and breadth of practical experience and legal knowledge is nearly impossible to match. He has plenty of experience with legal writing and arguments on points of law, from his time on the Law Review, to his clerkship with the Ninth Circuit, to his time working on appeals for both the OPD and the Attorney General's Office. He has plenty of experience in the procedural rules of trial and in the subject matter governing civil, criminal and administrative cases, and is one of the few attorneys in Montana who is qualified to even sit at counsel table in a capital punishment case. There are few attorneys who excel both in legal writing and trial advocacy, and quite possibly none in Montana who can do as well as Mr. Abbott in both in the context of such a broad range of subject matters.

If Mr. Abbott takes the bench, the people of Broadwater and Lewis & Clark Counties will benefit from a judge who is a walking encyclopedia and who will always be the hardest working and most prepared person in the room. I cannot overstate just how much of an asset he would be to the people who live within the territory of the First Judicial District and to the people of Montana in general. I respectfully and wholeheartedly ask you to forward his name to Governor Bullock.

Sincerely,
Buddy Rutzke

--

Buddy Rutzke | Esq., MSW

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Monday, September 28, 2020 7:25:25 PM

From: Cynthia Wolken <cynthia.wolken@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, September 28, 2020 4:25 PM
To: Menzies, Lois
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Recommendation for Christopher Abbott

Please accept this recommendation of Christopher Abbott to the First Judicial District judgeship vacancy. I have had the pleasure of getting to know Chris both personally and professionally over a number of years. I have always appreciated his keen intellect, measured approach to controversy, and commitment to values such as access to justice, both substantive and procedural equality, and the delicate balance between the three branches of government.

I believe Chris would make an excellent judge and his varied background in both civil and criminal matters, and on both sides of the case, will be a great asset to this district, which sees a wide variety of matters.

Thank you for your consideration,

Cynthia

--

Cynthia L. Wolken, Esq.
cynthia.wolken@gmail.com

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Monday, September 28, 2020 7:28:16 PM

From: Sadie Busch <sadie.busch406@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, September 28, 2020 4:51 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Christopher Abbott

Dear Judicial Nomination Committee,

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for Christopher Abbott's appointment as District Court Judge. I had the good fortune of working with Chris during my time at the Helena Office of the Public Defender. Chris is exceptionally knowledgeable on points of law, and had a compassionate but practical approach to even the most difficult cases. In addition, he was and is well thought of by his colleagues on either side of the bar, judges, clerks, and clients. I cannot imagine a better candidate for this position.

Sincerely,

Sadie Busch

Sent from my iPhone

From: [Menzies, Lois](#)
To: [Cook, Kevin](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- Abbott
Date: Monday, September 28, 2020 7:29:20 PM

From: Valentine, Gabriel
Sent: Monday, September 28, 2020 5:07 PM
To: MT Supreme Court,
Subject: Judicial Nomination Commission; letter of support for Christopher Abbott.

To: Members of Judicial Nominating Committee.

Please consider the following letter in support of Christopher D. Abbott, recommending that he be appointed to serve as First Judicial District Court Judge in place of the retiring Hon. James P. Reynolds.

Mr. Abbot and I have been acquainted since 2016, when I accepted a position as a staff attorney with the State Office of Public Defender in Billings. When we first met, I was thanking Mr. Abbott for taking time out of his already busy schedule to present a Continuing Legal Education course to my fellow public defenders at our annual conference. The course was titled "Litigating 404(b)", and Mr. Abbot's concise and elucidating presentation clarified what was for a me (and presumably many others) a rather murky area of evidence law.

Upon transferring to the Helena Office of Public Defender in 2017, I had an opportunity to observe Mr. Abbott at work on a regular basis. This experience only cemented my initial impression of him as being an erudite and very able trial attorney, with a firm grasp of Montana criminal procedure and evidence law. During his tenure as a Public Defender, Mr. Abbott was generous with his time and graciously served as a mentor and advisor to many young attorneys in our office. Personally, I often found that Mr. Abbott's breadth of experience in the court room and his encyclopedic knowledge of criminal case law made a short visit with him much more efficient and profitable than spending a comparable amount of time performing legal research on my computer.

Given his cerebral nature and his stature within our office, it fell upon Mr. Abbott to litigate many of the most complex and challenging cases assigned to the Office of Public Defender during his tenure there. He handled many cases that other attorneys would find not just technically difficult, but emotionally disturbing given the nature of the offenses alleged. By doing so, Mr. Abbott set an example for other jurists and observers, by always performing his duty to his clients not just competently, but with dispassionate dignity, no matter how grave the charge. Mr. Abbott's lack of squeamishness and his consistently even temper testifies to his professionalism and suggests to me that he will make an exceptionally fair and impartial District Court Judge.

On a more personal note, I have found Mr. Abbott to be a considerate and discrete man, but he is also personable, and even humorous. He is conscientious, and he has a calm and rational demeanor befitting a District Court Judge. And I am certain that outside of the workplace, he takes his personal responsibilities as a citizen and a neighbor in the Helena community very seriously.

Mr. Abbott's legal acumen, his diligence, and his professionalism are apparent to anyone that is familiar with his work. He was a great asset to us at the Montana Office of Public Defender, and time has proven him to be irreplaceable. Moreover, while Mr. Abbott has demonstrated that he can be an exceptional advocate, I believe that his intellect, his rational demeanor, and his even temper all combine to make him particularly well suited to be a District Court Judge. Indeed, I believe that Mr. Abbott has the potential to be one of Montana's historically great jurists, if he is given the opportunity to do so. I recommend that Christopher D. Abbott be appointed to serve as a First Judicial District Court Judge, replacing the retiring Hon. James P. Reynolds.

Sincerely,

Gabriel Valentine, Esq.

MT Bar ID# 11451.



CURT DRAKE
~Selected to the American Board of Trial Advocates~
curt@drakemt.com

MICHAEL A. KAUFFMAN
michael@drakemt.com

SARAH MAZANEC
sarah@drakemt.com

PATRICIA H. KLANKE
patricia@drakemt.com

111 North Last Chance Gulch
Suite 3J, Arcade Building
Helena, MT 59601

PHONE: (406) 495-8080

FAX: (406) 495-1616

September 28, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

VIA E-MAIL ONLY

Re: Application of Christopher Abbott for First Judicial District Judgeship

Dear Commission Members:

I write to express my confident and heartfelt support for Chris Abbott as an applicant for the judicial vacancy in the First Judicial District.

Chris's reputation as an excellent advocate preceded him in his role at the Office of the Public Defender, but I became personally acquainted with him after he joined the Agency Legal Services Bureau as an Assistant Attorney General. Chris and I both attended a moot for another attorney who was preparing for an argument before the Ninth Circuit. Chris's deep knowledge and understanding of constitutional law was immediately apparent. I was impressed by his ability not only to quickly and specifically understand and recall the facts and law applicable to the case, but also to marshal his broader legal knowledge and experience to inform his questions and argument. In short, Chris was one of the few attorneys who immediately made me think, "Oh, he's the real deal." I am far from the only one with this opinion.

I have been privileged since that time to discuss a few other cases with Chris and to get to know him and his wife as members of the Helena community. I know Chris to be a deeply caring, funny, hardworking, and engaged human, in addition to a genuinely impressive and powerful legal mind. I believe his well-rounded and diverse experience, including extensive trial work and both civil and criminal practice, stands out among the current applicants for this vacancy and makes him uniquely qualified to sit as a judge in the First Judicial District. I would have absolute confidence placing any of my cases before Judge Abbott.

Judicial Nomination Commission
September 28, 2020
Page 2

I hope the Commission will give his application the consideration it deserves and include Chris Abbott in the slate of nominees presented to the Governor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patricia Klanke', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Patricia Klanke

September 27, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

RE: First Judicial District Judgeship – Christopher Abbott

Dear Members of the Commission,

I write in support of Chris Abbott for the position of Judge in the First Judicial District. I have been in practice for over thirty years, with over 20 years representing the State of Montana including as Chief Counsel of a state agency.

I have had the privilege to work with Chris at the Attorney General's Office. Chris would bring to the Judgeship a unique blend of a strong criminal law background and significant civil law experience including complex litigation. Chris has a strong sense of the law and a judicial temperament.

I work with Chris on tobacco litigation to protect Montana's rights and multi-million-dollar annual payments under the 1998 tobacco Master Settlement Agreement (MSA). The MSA is a settlement agreement entered into by 46 states, five territories and the largest U.S. tobacco companies to resolve a myriad of state claims. The MSA is complex, over 100 pages and 21 appendices. Chris is part of the team that successfully sued in 2017-2018 to recover funds withheld by the tobacco companies and is currently suing the same 17 companies under multiple civil and tort claims.

Two of Chris's greatest strengths are his ability to quickly distill complex facts and his writing. New to tobacco in 2017, he was able to come up to speed on the MSA and quickly synthesize positions and legal bases. Chris's knowledge of procedure and rules of evidence is exemplary, as is his writing. He has the ability to cut to the core of a case in his writing and to speak clearly and succinctly.

Finally, as noted by many other commenters, Chris has a judicial temperament and a dedication to justice. He is a man of fair play and civility. He is patient and thoughtful, yet firm and decisive under pressure.

I believe that Chris would be an excellent addition to the First Judicial District Bench.

Very truly yours,

/s/

Anne W. Yates

Jeffrey M. Hindoien
1325 Charlie Russell Drive
Helena, MT 59601
(406) 461-4235
jhindoien@hindoienlaw.com

September 28, 2020

VIA E-MAIL

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of the Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620

RE: First Judicial District Vacancy – Chris Abbott

Dear Commission Members:

I am writing to urge your advancement of Chris Abbott to the Governor for his consideration as an appointee to fill the vacant District Court Judge position here in the First Judicial District.


I first met and worked with Chris during his time at the Office of the Public Defender here in Helena when I was serving as the Helena City Attorney. Although Chris was by then primarily handling felony matters in District Court, his appearances with me in Helena Municipal Court on misdemeanor cases always stood out as examples of great professionalism, competence and integrity. The manner in which he always conducted himself in his dealings with Judge Wood, with my office and with his client was something I took away from my time as a prosecutor as essentially a “gold standard” for how a criminal defense attorney should conduct himself or herself.

Several years later, I had the good fortune to work with Chris again at the Montana Department of Justice Agency Legal Services Bureau (ALSB). I went into my position at ALSB with many years of experience in defending claims against governmental entities and administrative law, and Chris did not have that same type of background and experience. However, I was immediately impressed with his work ethic, his intellect and his skills in handling complex civil matters in both state and federal court, and in handling the administrative law matters assigned to him as a hearings officer. As he had previously done at OPD as a criminal defense attorney, he very quickly established himself at ALSB as a highly competent and professional civil litigator.

I have spent nearly my entire legal career – over two decades – practicing law here in the First Judicial District. We have been historically blessed with very talented and dedicated District Court Judges, and you now have before you a slate of high-quality candidates who all want the opportunity to carry that tradition forward. I truly believe, however, that Chris' professional legal experiences – starting with his judicial clerkship at the Ninth Circuit and progressing through his years as a criminal defense attorney and now as a civil and administrative law practitioner at the seat of Montana's state government – make him uniquely qualified to replace Judge Reynolds and further strengthen the First Judicial District judiciary.

The job of a District Court Judge is a difficult one. We as citizens and community members have very high expectations that judges will always fill their societal role in administering justice with the appropriate quantities of professionalism, competence, intellect and compassion. My ultimate yardstick for judges after a quarter-century in the legal profession here in Montana is my level of comfort having the fate of my clients' situations – or heaven forbid perhaps even my own situation -- in the hands of any given jurist. I can unequivocally tell you that I would always be comfortable with Chris Abbott in that role, and I know that he would make a great addition to the Montana Judicial Branch here in the First District.

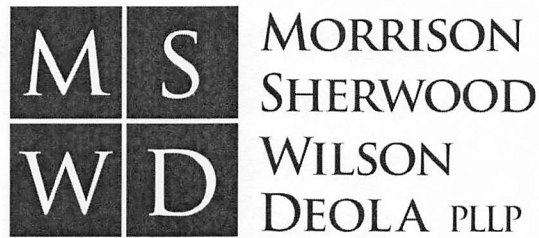
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey M. Hindoien", with a large, stylized loop at the end.

Jeffrey M. Hindoien

John M. Morrison
Frederick F. Sherwood
David K. W. Wilson, Jr.
Linda M. Deola
Brian J. Miller

bmillier@mswdlaw.com



Attorneys at Law
401 North Last Chance Gulch
P.O. Box 557, Helena, Montana 59624-0557
www.mswdlaw.com

Robert Farris-Olsen
Andrée Larose
Scott Peterson
Anne Sherwood

(406) 442-3261
(406) 443-7294 FAX

September 28, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
PO Box 203004
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

RE: *Nomination of Christopher Abbott*

Dear Ms. Menzies,

I am writing to give you my wholehearted support for Christopher Abbott for the First Judicial District Judicial Appointment.

I am an attorney in Helena, Montana, practicing in the civil and criminal areas. I have practiced in state and federal courts throughout Montana. In my opinion, there are two key qualities that every judge needs in order to bring justice to our courts. First, they have to be smart, understand the law, and be willing to apply it consistently and fairly to all cases that appear before them. Second, they have to have a balanced, calm temperament. Chris has these qualities.

I have sought out Chris' advice and counsel on a number of occasions when dealing with areas of criminal law. Chris knows this area of the law inside and out. Not only has he served as a law clerk at the highest levels of our judicial system, but he has also tried numerous cases and has real-world experience "in the trenches," so to speak. The combination Chris has of intellectual firepower, and real world experience, would make him an excellent judge. If Chris was presiding over a case, he would understand completely the rules of evidence, how to maintain order and fairness, and ensure that due process is provided to everyone. I believe that if Chris were to serve as a judge, his decisions would be fair, impartial, and always aimed at ensuring justice is served. I also know that Chris' time at Agency Legal Services has now given him a well-rounded understanding of civil law as well. I think that Chris' experience in both the criminal and civil realms gives him an

knowledge bases that is uncommon among attorneys practicing in Montana. I would wager that few attorneys in Montana have such an extensive experience with both the criminal and civil law.

In addition to Chris' knowledge, experience, and intellect, I also know that Chris is a kind, caring, and thoughtful person. These aspects of his character provide him with exactly the type of judicial temperament that is needed in our courts. In some respects, it might be said that a fair judicial temperament is even more important than a sharp judicial intellect, because without those human qualities, there can be no real justice. In my view, concern for others and the well-being of society should be at the root of our judicial system, and without that our system will not function to serve the people. I know that if Chris was serving as a judge, all in his court would be treated with respect and fairness, and that Chris would never let the judge's robes overinflate his ego.

I hope the commission takes my comments into account when considering Chris' nomination. Chris would make an outstanding judge and is extremely well-qualified. I wholeheartedly support his nomination to the First Judicial District Court.

Sincerely,



Brian J. Miller

ROBERT STUTZ

1925 Highland Street, Helena, MT 59601 • 406-422-8265 • stutz@montana.com

September 27, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Re: Public comment in support of Christopher David Abbott

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

Having known Chris in both a professional and personal capacity for years, it is an honor to write and encourage you to forward his name to Governor Bullock as a nominee for the First Judicial District Court Judge position. As a coworker at Agency Legal Services Bureau, Chris' broad legal background has provided the flexibility and acumen essential to addressing the diverse legal issues of clients across state government. Chris possesses the temperament, work ethic, and professional judgment to excel as a district court judge.

While there are many outstanding candidates to consider for the position, I strongly encourage you to include Chris on the list of nominees selected for further consideration.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Stutz", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robert Stutz
Attorney at Law

FAURE HOLDEN
attorneys at law pc

Jean E. Faure • Jason T. Holden • Katie R. Ranta

September 28, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Re: Christopher Abbott

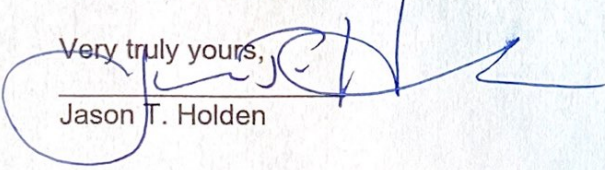
Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

I first met Christopher Abbott when I served on the legislative task force related to the office of the public defender. Through the hearings process we heard from stakeholders, and Chris, a then long-time public defender, spoke to us about his work. I had known Chris by reputation prior to his testimony, but his candid testimony struck me. He spoke of his endless commitment to the Montana Judicial System, justice and his clients.

A couple of years later I had the opportunity to work with Chris. He called me and explained that he was now defending the State of Montana in civil matters and was in need of an expert witness. I agreed to work with Chris on the matter and serve as an expert. During our work together I witnessed a lawyer who was at the pinnacle of his practice. Chris illustrated a mastery of the criminal practice in connection with a complete understanding of civil litigation. He showed a deep understanding of the facts, was committed to the truth, and never lost site of the goals of the litigation. I walked away from that experience thinking Chris' arc was very high.

I again received a call from Chris – this time asking for this letter. It is not often that someone like Chris comes along. He has the intimate knowledge of criminal law mixed with the deep understanding of civil litigation necessary to make him an appropriate name to forward to the Governor for appointment. He is committed to justice and has the integrity needed to ensure re-election and success should he be appointed.

Very truly yours,


Jason T. Holden

FAURE HOLDEN attorneys at law pc

PO BOX 2466 GREAT FALLS, MT 59403 • 1314 CENTRAL AVE. • GREAT FALLS, MT 59401
PHONE: 406.452.6500 • FAX: 406.452.6503 • www.faureholden.com

William F. Hooks
Attorney at Law
P.O. Box 118
Helena, MT 59624
406-465-6252

September 25, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Re: *Christopher Abbott*
First Judicial District Court vacancy

Dear Commission Members:

By way of introduction, I have been a lawyer in Montana for over 30 years, both in private practice and in the public sector as Chief Appellate Defender and as Chief Public Defender with the Office of the Public Defender. I worked with Chris Abbott in the public defender office for five years and I followed his career after I left the public defender agency. My experiences provide me with a perspective on Chris's character and abilities. I recommend Chris Abbott to fill the District Judge position being vacated by Judge Jim Reynolds.

Chris has demonstrated exceptional abilities during his legal career. He has a keen legal mind. He was assigned the most complex cases as a public defender and he has ably demonstrated his judgment and intellect while representing state agencies in his position with the Department of Justice. District court judges in the First Judicial District must resolve issues of state-wide magnitude, and Chris is up to the challenge.

Chris is a leader and enjoys the respect of his peers. Chris was elected by his colleagues in the public defenders' union to a leadership position. We sat across the bargaining table several times and I always found Chris to be a tough and fair advocate who fought hard in the best interests of his co-workers, attorneys and non-attorneys alike.

Judicial Nomination Commission

September 25, 2020

Page 2

Chris has a tremendous work ethic. He managed a substantial case load as a public defender. He will capably deal with a busy trial judge's heavy workload. He has the focus to resolve contested cases in a timely manner. His decisions will be well-reasoned and based on the law.

A district judge's docket is packed with cases involving people in distress. Divorce matters, child custody fights, employment issues, personal injury claims, business disputes, criminal cases – they all appear on a judge's desk, and they all require a firm but fair hand. Chris will treat all who come before the bench with an open mind. He will be fair and temperate.

The Commission has before it several qualified candidates with a variety of experiences. Among this group, Chris stands out. He has the character, demeanor, judgment and ability to be a respected District Court Judge. I recommend that you forward Chris Abbott's name to the Governor.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

/s/ William F. Hooks

William F. Hooks

WFH/bh

September 27, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

We are privileged to write in support of Christ Abbot for the position of District Court Judge in the First Judicial District. We have known Chris since we went to Capital High School almost 25 years ago, when he took senior-level calculus (as a junior) and we were all on the debate team together. Knowing him then, we are not at all surprised at the direction his career has taken, and how accomplished he has become in his chosen field.

We moved back to Helena six years ago, and reconnected with Chris and his family. Chris was a hard-working and respected public defender then, and is just as diligent in his work with the Montana Department of Justice now. Throughout this time, Chris has maintained his excellent reputation both in the legal profession and in the general Helena community. We believe Chris's broad range of experience would make him a superior District Court Judge.

We know that Chris has always been empathic, smart, and fair, and that regardless of his occupation he will continue to improve himself and his community. The First Judicial District would benefit from Chris Abbott being a District Court Judge here.

Sincerely,

/s/

Michael A. (Bar No. 9872) and Camas S. Kakuk

**Avignone, Banick
& Williams PLLC**
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

September 28, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
Via email: mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

RE: Recommendation for First Judicial District Judgeship

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

I write to express my support for Christopher Abbott as a candidate for the judicial vacancy in the First Judicial District created by the retirement of the Honorable James P. Reynolds.

I have practiced criminal defense in Montana since my graduation from law school in 2006. I started as an intern and later a full time attorney with the Office of the State Public Defender and in the past several years have continued in private practice. It was during my time as a public defender that I met Christopher.

Though we worked in different offices, Christopher and I worked together on specific legal issues and cases over the years and also had the opportunity to work together as instructors at the OSPD trial training events for newly hired attorneys. Christopher has numerous assets and a broader spectrum of experience than I am familiar with, so I will speak to what I know of him and why I think he would make an excellent judge.

Intellectual openness.

One of Christopher's strongest traits is one that is essential in a judge, that he or she be able to see all sides of an argument without prejudgment and to be open to persuasion. Whether in a brainstorming session for a motion or when discussing trial strategy, Christopher has always impressed me with his ability to keep an open mind regarding arguments different from and even contrary to his initial position. Not simply as a rote exercise of seeing the weaknesses in his own argument, but actually making an effort to see and understand opposing points of view.

Access to the courts.

Christopher has shown his dedication to equal access to the justice system in his years of public service while representing indigent clients. It is important that the party with the better argument and facts under the law in any given case prevails, regardless of their financial ability to retain counsel. Christopher has spent late nights and long hours representing clients with limited means, getting to know them as individuals and feel the importance of their cases first hand. I believe Christopher will treat all parties with dignity, but particularly those who, for one reason or another, are presenting their cases pro se.

Trial experience.

Intelligence is not always enough to come up with the right answer in the midst of a trial, when decisions and rulings need to be made quickly, often without the benefit of briefing or extensive research. Having a depth of trial experience in the serious cases that Christopher has gives a potential judge the bank of knowledge to be able to make such decisions as accurately as possible.

For all these reasons I recommend the Commission forward Christopher's application to Governor Bullock for consideration as a future District Court Judge.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Miller', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Nicholas Miller

AVIGNONE, BANICK & WILLIAMS, PLLC



MONTANA STATE SENATE

Senator Bryce Bennett

Senate District 50

DURING THE SESSION
State Capitol Building
PO Box 200500
Helena MT 59620-0500
Phone: (406) 444-4800
leg.mt.gov

COMMITTEES
Judiciary
State Administration
Highways and Transportation
Rules

HOME ADDRESS
444 Washington St
Missoula, MT 59802
Phone: (406) 546-3629

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

I am honored to be writing in support of Christopher Abbott's appointment to the First Judicial District and can think of no one better to be appointed to the bench. I have known Chris since 2013, and I strongly believe that his dedication and temperament will serve Lewis and Clark and Broadwater Counties well.

Chris has a strong commitment to public service. During his ten years as a Public Defender, he has been a tremendous advocate for the constitutional rights of those most in need in our society. In an agency that is continually understaffed, Chris took up the heavy workload because of his call to justice. Courts in Lewis and Clark County are already short on judges, and the workload is substantial. Chris's dedication to justice and willingness to put in the hours necessary will ensure his success.

But moreover, Chris has proven to be the kind of professional our judicial system needs. His integrity, professionalism, and dedication are unmatched. He is committed to public service, has extensive practice in both civil and criminal law, and has the academic and intellectual chops to dissect complex areas of the law. Further, his compassion for clients resulted in criminal defendants being served with dignity, no matter the outcome of their case. He is regarded highly by both advisories in the court and professionals who serve the needs of the indigent.

Finally, Chris understands how his actions would have lasting consequences for the parties before the court, be it criminal or civil matters. He knows decisions must be made deliberately, but for access to justice to prevail, also promptly.

As an individual with both academic grit and compassion that is not contrived, Chris is the right candidate to next hold the bench. It would give me great honor to call him Judge Abbott.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bryce Bennett".

Sen. Bryce Bennett
Senate District 50

Brenda L. Wahler
Attorney at Law

7 West 6th Ave, Suite 4B
P.O. Box 1455
Helena, MT 59624

phone: (406) 449-2060
fax: (406) 447-4255
montanabw@mt.net

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

September 28, 2020

To the Judicial Nomination Commission:

It is my honor and privilege to write in support of Christopher Abbott for the position of Judge in the First Judicial District.

I have known Chris since he was a teenager. He first came to my attention as a multi-year participant in the YMCA Youth and Government program, which I directed at the time. Having shepherded thousands of bright, promising young people through the program, Chris was one of the participants who stood out with a combination of positive leadership traits and maturity that exemplified the YMCA “servant leadership” ideal. He showed a judicial temperament and interest in the courts while in the program, taking a role in his senior year as a youth justice in the inaugural “session” of the then-new YMCA Model Supreme Court program.

As an undergraduate, Chris’s life and mine continued to intersect in various civic organizations to which we both belonged, and I observed him effectively work in cooperation with people from many walks of life. His law school accomplishments are well-outlined in his application materials, but it is significant that Chris clerked for the Ninth Circuit, a launching pad from which he could have become yet another “Montana export,” yet he chose to return to Montana and serve in the challenging role of a public defender for about a decade. Since then, Chris has obtained extensive civil and criminal experience, traveling all across Montana to practice in front of many different tribunals.

In my own years as an attorney, I have observed new judges “get their sea legs” in the First Judicial District as well in other district courts. While many newly-elected or appointed judges visibly struggle to come up to speed in areas of the law where they had not previously practiced, Chris has a remarkable variety of experience which, combined with a strong work ethic, bodes well for him to hit the ground running in this busy judicial district.

In short, Chris has the intellect, the experience, and the energy to become an outstanding jurist and to serve the people of Montana with distinction for many years to come. I look forward to his appointment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brenda Wahler", with a stylized, flowing script.

Brenda Wahler, esq.

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Dear Commission:

I am writing you today in support of Christopher Abbott for the position of First Judicial District Judge.

I have known Chris for fourteen years having worked with him at the State Office of Public Defender and couldn't be more pleased to support him. I am a former Police Officer and a current Criminal Defense Investigator. I met Chris through my work. Chris is a highly intelligent attorney with a varied background and a plethora of knowledge and expertise. Chris' background is perfectly suited to fill the role of District Court Judge. He is professional, educated and highly qualified. I have worked cases with Chris over my career and his attention to detail, his ability to distill complex legal issues and his ability to see all sides of legal matters are skills that will serve Broadwater and Lewis and Clark Counties well.

Sincerely,

Catherine Huston
Havre, MT

August Lynn Swanson
5003 Stoney Creek Rd
Unit 348
Culver City, CA 90230
(406) 437-1447
alynnswan33@gmail.com

September 26, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
% Lois Menzies
Office of the Court Administrator
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission,,

I would like to offer my support to Christopher Abbott for appointment to the 1st Judicial District as a replacement for Judge Reynolds.

My name is August Swanson. I am a former resident of Helena. I've known Chris since 2007 or 2008. I worked with Chris at the Office of Public Defender for two years.

Christopher Abbott would be a huge asset to the bench. He is one of the most dedicated and ethical attorneys that I've ever worked for, as a paralegal. He is thorough in his research and application of the law. He believes in justice for all people and he is more than willing to do what it takes to serve the 1st Judicial District.

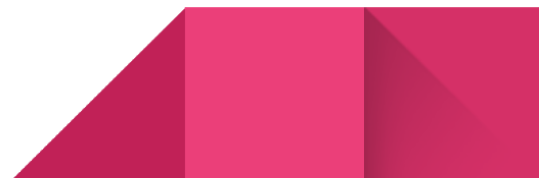
Chris Abbott also found time to work a couple of pro bono cases that I assigned in my capacity as the MLSA Pro Bono Coordinator for the 1st Judicial District.

Throughout the years, I've found Chris to be passionate about law & justice and willing to help all people. He is honest and he truly cares for his clients, co-workers, and community.

I believe as a Judge for the 1st Judicial District, Chris Abbott will continue to exemplify the traits and ethics needed to succeed in this role. Please consider him for Judicial Appointment in the 1st Judicial District for the State of Montana.

Best regards,

August Lynn Swanson
Paralegal





CURT DRAKE
~Selected to the American Board of Trial Advocates~
curt@drakemt.com

MICHAEL A. KAUFFMAN
michael@drakemt.com

SARAH MAZANEC
sarah@drakemt.com

PATRICIA H. KLANKE
patricia@drakemt.com

111 North Last Chance Gulch
Suite 3J, Arcade Building
Helena, MT 59601

PHONE: (406) 495-8080

FAX: (406) 495-1616

September 28, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
PO Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

I am writing to support Christopher Abbott's nomination for district court judge for the First Judicial District Court. I am confident that Chris would make an excellent District Court judge.

I have interacted with Chris primarily through my work as an attorney for the Drake Law Firm in Helena. In that capacity, I have been impressed with the quality of Chris's legal work, which is consistently professional, well-reasoned, persuasive, and thorough.

The wide range and depth of Chris's legal experience make him uniquely suited to succeed as a judge from day one. The breadth of Chris's experience is noteworthy – he has an extensive background in both criminal and civil litigation, and he also is well-versed in family and administrative law.

Chris's temperament also is well-suited to the bench. Chris is extremely intelligent and hard-working, but just as importantly, he is objective, thoughtful, even-keeled, caring, and patient.

It is clear from his application that Chris has been very successful throughout every phase of his life – in high school, college, law school, and at every level of his legal career. I strongly believe that Chris will use the same characteristics that have led to his consistent success to be an exceptional district court judge.

Sincerely,

Michael A. Kauffman

Judicial Nomination Commission

c/o Lois Menzies

Office of Court Administrator

P.O. Box 203005

Helena, MT 59620-3005

mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

This recommendation is in support of Christopher Abbott to serve as district judge of the First Judicial District for Broadwater and Lewis and Clark counties

I believe that Mr. Abbot possesses outstanding qualities that make him the best candidate for this judgeship. In the past, I have known Mr. Abbott as a student at Capital High School in Helena, Montana. During that time, I was the head coach of the Speech and Debate Team, where he competed in Policy Debate. He and his partner worked extremely hard with their debate coach to eventually place 2nd at the state tournament as well as win other tournaments in the northwest. Even then, I observed that Mr. Abbott had a deep sense of integrity. In high school debates, some students used tactics that took advantage of the rules and confused public judges as a way to win their side. Mr. Abbott and his debate partner never took those shortcuts. They argued the facts with compelling presentations and debate that allowed them to overcome the adverse arguments from less ethical opponents.

Today, I know Mr. Abbott as a friend with an outstanding family. He has the same set of high standards of fairness and integrity he had in high school. His education and wide range of criminal and civil legal experience means that he will continue to see cases from both sides and render decisions that are fair and just.

In short, Mr. Abbott is the best candidate for this judgeship, and I urge the commission to affirm him as such.

Sincerely,

William D. Kaiser M. Ed.

Technology Teacher

Capital High School

100 Valley Drive

Helena, Montana, 59601

Ph 406.459.1730

Home Address 1295 Mustang, Helena, Montana, 59602

September 28, 2020

Ann Waickman
1014 Hudson St
Helena MT 59601

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
PO Box 203005
Helena MT 59620-3005

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

I write in support of Chris Abbott's application as First District Judge.

I have known Chris Abbott since 2013. Jenifer Gursky, his partner, joined my staff at Helena Food Share that year. My respect and appreciation for Chris continues to grow.

Chris is smart, experienced in both criminal and civil law, a strong listener, and thoughtful in speech and action. I have appreciated his insightful comments on my work at Helena Food Share.

Chris cares deeply about the law and our wider community. I know that he will work tirelessly to ensure the sustainability and fairness of our court systems.

Given his deep experience Chris is the ideal candidate to work with the Treatment Court. His understanding of the law and of those whose lives are full of trauma gives him a unique background. He will continue and advance the great legacy of Judge Reynolds.

Thank you for considering this letter in support of Chris Abbott for First Judicial District Judgeship.

Sincerely,

Ann Waickman
1014 Hudson St
Helena MT 59601
406-202-2436

BRETT P. CLARK
3 STACIA LANE
MONTANA CITY, MT 59634
(612) 203-0970
BPCLARK.ESQ@GMAIL.COM

September 28, 2020

Via e-mail (mtsupremecourt@mt.gov)

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
PO Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Re: First Judicial District Court Vacancy

Dear Ms. Menzies:

My name is Brett Clark and I am a partner practicing in the Helena office of Crowley Fleck PLLP. I submit this comment on behalf of myself personally and not on behalf of my firm.

I hope that the commission will strongly consider recommending my friend Christopher Abbott for Judge Reynolds's seat on the bench in Lewis and Clark County. I have known Chris for more than twenty years, dating back to high school debate competitions here in Montana. Back then, Chris was considered one of the strongest and most formidable debaters in the state. After high school, Chris and I would continue to encounter each other at college debate tournaments around the Northwestern U.S. I have always known Chris to be intelligent, thoughtful and considerate. After college, he enjoyed success in law school, graduating in the top five percent of his class.

While Chris definitely has the temperament and intellect to serve the First Judicial District well, his diverse practice background will also be a tremendous benefit. Chris spent most of his career in criminal law as a public defender, but has been working in civil practice with the Montana Attorney General's Legal Services Division in the last several years. His experience on both sides of the law makes him an ideal candidate. Meanwhile, Chris has built himself a strong reputation among the local bar throughout his career.

Chris will be a considerate, hard-working, and fair-minded judge. I hope you see fit to recommend Chris for nomination.

Very truly yours,



Brett P. Clark

Katie Carlson & Tyler Gernant
P.O. Box 8307
Missoula, MT 59801

September 27, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Re: Letter of Recommendation for Christopher Abbott

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission,


We are writing today in support of Christopher David Abbott to fill the current vacancy in the First Judicial District. Chris has been a community fixture in Lewis and Clark County for a long time and is well-positioned to fill the rather large shoes being left behind by Judge Reynolds.

Chris brings a breadth and depth of experience to the law that would serve the residents of Lewis and Clark and Broadwater Counties exceptionally well. In particular, Chris's experience as a public defender would help provide the Court insight into the challenges faced by our citizens in greatest need of compassionate justice. During a time of social upheaval based on actual and perceived inequities in our justice system, Chris would be a steady and calming influence on the disposition of justice.

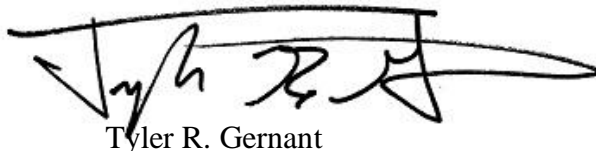
Additionally, Chris has worked hard to be an active agent for positive change in our communities. He works tirelessly for causes surrounding equal access to justice to ensure that our communities reflect the promise of impartial justice for all of our members. We see those values not just in Chris's work, but also in his interactions with his family. Chris and Jen are true partners, which is reflected in how they raise their daughter. Values tend to be reflected most in one's home life, when the rest of the world isn't watching. Chris lives those values.

We unequivocally and strongly endorse Chris's nomination to the First Judicial District Judgeship, and we hope that you will too. Should you need any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us at any time.

Sincerely,



Katie J. Carlson



Tyler R. Gernant



Steven T. Williams
Senior Attorney
27 Shiloh Road, Ste 10
Billings, MT 59106
williams@knightnicastro.com
T: 540-784-5957
F: 816-396-6233

September 28, 2020

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing to recommend Christopher Abbott for the upcoming district court judge vacancy in Helena, Montana. I worked with Chris for around 4 years when he was employed as a public defender in Helena. Chris was a lawyer who always had an extremely good reputation, not only with his coworkers, but with prosecutors and judges. All recognized that Chris was incredibly hardworking and knowledgeable. Chris was a passionate advocate would work tirelessly to ensure that his clients were getting the best legal representation possible.

I haven't worked with Chris for the past 5 years, but he's still the standard that I use when assessing attorneys that I deal with in private practice. He remains one of the best attorneys I have ever dealt with, and the qualities that I have observed in Chris would undoubtedly carry over to him being an outstanding judge for Lewis and Clark County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steve Williams", is written over a horizontal line.

Steve Williams

September 28, 2020

Page 2

September 28, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Re: First Judicial District Court Applicant Christopher David Abbott

Dear Commission Members:

It is my great pleasure to submit this letter in support of Christopher David Abbott's application for District Court Judge for the First Judicial District.

I had the distinct honor of working with Mr. Abbott in the Major Crimes Unit of the Office of the State Public Defender. During his time there, Mr. Abbott handled numerous homicide and other complex cases throughout the state. Mr. Abbott did a fine job handling a difficult case load, communicating with his clients, and providing zealous advocacy in every case he handled. Mr. Abbott filed numerous substantive briefs in his cases, which were always well thought-out and researched. It was common to see Mr. Abbott in his office after hours, which was a testament to his work ethic and dedication to the judicial process. Mr. Abbott was talented in explaining the most complex of legal issues to his clients and coworkers alike.

As a District Court Judge, I believe that Mr. Abbott would contribute to a judicial system which he is passionate about. He has one of the best legal minds I have witnessed in my thirteen years in the legal profession. He has the ability to absorb and analyze a great deal of complex information and express the salient points clearly. He can handle a great deal of cases and a busy docket while still giving every case the attention it deserves.

I encourage the Commission to appoint Christopher D. Abbott to the First Judicial District Court.

Sincerely,

/s/

Katrina Bolger, ACP
Advanced Certified Paralegal - Discovery

September 23, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of the Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Ms. Menzies and Judicial Nomination Commission,

I am honored to be submitting this letter in support of Christopher Abbott's application to the First Judicial District Judgeship vacancy for Broadwater and Lewis and Clark Counties. I have known Chris in both a personal and professional manner for the past four years. His wife Jenifer and I worked together for two years, as well as I am currently on the Helena Area Habitat for Humanity Board of Directors with Chris. Through both of these relationships in knowing Chris, I spend time with Chris, Jenifer and their daughter, Parker, on various occasions and get to see first hand his dynamic with his family. Chris is an incredibly supportive husband, and always involved in his wife and daughter's activities. He is a lifelong Helena native and is passionate about being involved and supporting the activities happening in the community.

On a professional level, working with Chris on the Helena Area Habitat for Humanity Board, I see how much his long service as a public defender carries through in his passion for making sure his clients have safe and affordable housing. He is a very engaged Board member that always comes prepared for meetings, pays attention to details and speaks up on intricate dealings, participates on the Resource Development committee, and most importantly, strongly encourages other members to be engaged as well.

I fully believe in Chris Abbott's ability to be a fair, efficient, and compassionate judge. For the reasons mentioned above, Chris has my full support and recommendation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kacie Tollefson".

Kacie Tollefson, Controller
Montana Community Foundation

September 26, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Members of the Judicial Nomination Commission,

I write to support Christopher Abbott's nomination for District Court Judge in the First Judicial District. Chris is an exceptional candidate, and Montana's citizens and courts would be well-served if you select him to fill Judge Reynold's seat.

I have known Chris for more than 10 years as a friend and colleague in Montana's justice system. I first met Chris during his tenure as a public defender, when I worked as executive director of the Montana Innocence Project. Chris' sharp mind and his impressive capacity to grasp and retain intricate matters—along with his passion for debating complex legal questions—make him an invaluable ally when discussing complicated cases and innovative theories.

Always generous with his time and advice, Chris shows genuine interest in helping not only his clients and their families, but also his colleagues. He cares deeply not only about the case and clients at hand, but also about the cascading impacts that a court's decision may have on Montana's justice system for years to come. His brilliant mind is matched by his discerning eyes, relentless work ethic, and big heart—an invaluable combination among attorneys and other human beings alike.

Chris never shies away from new challenges and opportunities to learn, and his relentless efforts are reflected in the wide-ranging experience he has developed in Montana's criminal and civil courts, serving as an ardent advocate for both the prosecution and the defense. In his work, as in his private life, he balances and meets the demands set before him with aplomb. He is known as a trustworthy and reliable person, not only in his professional work but in his community.

The combination of experience and talent that Chris brings to this nomination is rare. Thank you for this opportunity to provide input, and for your consideration. I respectfully urge you to select Chris for this position—he will be an excellent, fair-minded judge for the community where he has dedicated his work and life.

Sincerely,

Jessie Schandelson

Rev. Daniel Viehland
409 2nd St
Townsend, MT 59644

9/28/2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
% Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to encourage you to choose Christopher David Abbot for the open position as a district court judge in the First Judicial District.

I have known Christopher Abbot for about two years. I am writing this letter of support because I believe he has the qualities that I want to see as a judge. He has a long history as a public defender, serving low income people in our community. I believe this shows a sense of service and a commitment to justice for all. It also gives valuable experience with both criminal law and with the challenges defendants, particularly the most marginalized, face. As a pastor, who believes that a sense of justice, mercy, and compassion is a vital quality in our justice system, this is a deeply important quality that I believe would help him serve our justice system well. I see that in the way he approaches justice as well, such as supporting the continued use of treatment courts and other innovative approaches that seek to address the root causes of crime in a way that is compassionate and that reduces the crime rate and the recidivism rate.

I am also impressed with his service to the State of Montana in their Agency Legal Services Bureau. I believe that this balance of both criminal law at the service of low income clients and civil law at the service of the State will help him approach the law with a depth of understanding that is dearly needed.

Thank you for your consideration of my letter.

Sincerely,

Rev. Daniel Viehland

Davina Attar
4210 Arrowwood Drive
Billings, MT 59106
Bar No.: 12110

September 28, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of the Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
Sent via email to mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Dear Ms. Menzies:

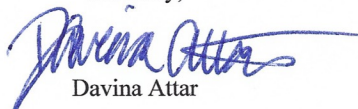
This letter is in support of Christopher Abbott for District Court Judge in Helena's First Judicial District.

I was sworn in as a licensed attorney nearly 10 years ago and immediately thereafter started practicing law for the Office of the Public Defender in its Region 4 office in Helena, MT. Among the most valuable experiences I had there as a young lawyer (and there were many), was the honor and privilege to work alongside Christopher Abbott. Chris not only still is the most intelligent, hard-working, passionate and knowledgeable attorney I have ever encountered to this day, but I will never forget or take for granted the lifelong, amazing impact he had on everyone who worked with him as an incredible mentor to most – if not all – of us during my tenure at the Public Defender's Office in Helena from 2012 through the fall of 2015.

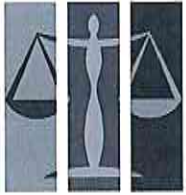
Before I left the Public Defender's Office in Helena to work for Brown Law Firm in Billings in the fall of 2015, Chris ran for the open Judgeship Jeffrey Sherlock's looming retirement would soon leave vacant. I similarly strongly supported Chris for District Court Judge at that time as well, knowing – with the utmost confidence – no one else could possibly be better suited for the role of District Court Judge. I was both highly disappointed and confused on behalf of the entire First Judicial District when Chris was not appointed a District Court Judge at that time.

Since then, nothing much has changed. Besides the fact that Chris has since compiled a record of handling state civil matters in his current position at the Attorney General's Office equally as impressive as his criminal case record Chris amassed as an extremely well-respected and accomplished attorney for the Office of the Public Defender for over a decade. I wholeheartedly support Christopher Abbott for District Court Judge with extreme enthusiasm, and I hope that you will as well.

Sincerely,



Davina Attar



DOUBEK, PYFER & STORRAR

HELPING INJURED PEOPLE

(406) 442-7830 office
(406) 442-7839 fax
lawyerinmontana.com
P.O. Box 236
307 N Jackson St.
Helena, MT 59624

September 25, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
C/O Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administration
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620

via: U.S. Mail

RE: Christopher Abbott

Dear Ms. Menzies:

This letter is intended as a letter of strong reference for Chris Abbott. As I get older and consider the fact that I have been practicing longer than some judges have been alive, I can venture a pretty good opinion about people in Chris' position.

I have watched him from a distance and seen his growth and maturity as an attorney. I have also visited with some of the judges about the work he has done as I like to make sure that I am familiar with folks before I give a letter of recommendation. Several other attorneys and judges have told me that they believe Chris is a very hard worker, he is dedicated to the legal profession, he acts professionally and is a professional as it relates to his interactions with others. That is a very big thing in this day and age, and I think that we are losing touch of that. I think that it is important to know that that translates into what I think would be a good judicial temperament and I think this is also very important and probably one of the major considerations for you in considering the various applicants for the positions of district judge.

Chris would be a very good judge and has the temperament to be a good judge. I realize there are some areas of the law that he may not be too familiar with because he has been intimately involved in certain legal areas and as the time goes by I find there are more and more of those areas in my own practice. Nevertheless, I think he is a student of the law and would become proficient in whatever areas he needed to be proficient in. I believe his courtroom experience will prove invaluable and enables him to relate to the attorneys practicing before him.

I recommend Chris highly.

Sincerely,

John Doubek
Attorney at Law
john@lawyerinmontana.com

JCD/rkf

Leo J. Gallagher, County Attorney
Melissa Broch, Deputy
Katie Jerstad, Deputy
Jeremy Gersovitz, Deputy
Ann Penner, Deputy
Fallon Stanton, Deputy
Charles Lane, Deputy
Nicho Hash, Deputy
Peter Delmoe, Deputy
Josh Nemeth, Deputy
Jacob Griffith, Deputy
John Nesbitt, Deputy
Rebekah Hall
John Hall



Lewis and Clark County
Courthouse
228 Broadway
Helena, MT 59601
Telephone 406-447-8221
Fax 406-447-8268

Lewis and Clark County
COUNTY ATTORNEY OFFICE

September 25, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administration
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honoured to write you on behalf of the application of Helena attorney Chris Abbott for the First Judicial District Judgeship.

I have been licensed to practice in the State of Montana since 1992. I first met Chris in 2007 when he was hired by the Office of the State Public Defender, where I was working at the time. From the start, he stood out as a brilliant attorney who fought tooth and nail for his clients. His briefs were without parallel and he quickly became a formidable courtroom advocate with a masterful command of the rules of evidence. Years later, we ended up at opposite ends of counsel's table, after I joined this office, and I felt the sting of his polished experience. He was one to push the envelope, for example with jury instructions, in an effort to make new law.

On a personal level, Chris genuinely loved the law, was exceedingly collegial and, when the fight was over, he was never one to hold a grudge.

I strenuously believe he would bring the same qualities to the First Judicial District Judgeship.

Please do not hesitate to call me should you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,


Jeremy Gersovitz

Colleen E. Ambrose
c/o P.O. Box 1796
Helena, MT 59620

September 28, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

I am writing in strong support of Mr. Christopher Abbott's application to be appointed a judge in the First Judicial District.

I have worked with Chris since he began his position as an assistant attorney general at the Agency Legal Services bureau in the Department of Justice. As chief legal counsel for the Montana Department of Corrections, I worked closely with Chris, when he represented the Department in prisoner civil rights litigation and employment-related litigation. Chris also worked closely with me and other Department attorneys in defending the Department's efforts to protect against the spread of COVID-19 in its facilities in a manner consistent with public health directives. I was continually impressed with his interactions with department personnel as he defended them in what often seemed frivolous lawsuits filed by pro se prisoner litigants, as well as his respectful dialogue with those pro se litigants.

In all of my interactions with Chris, he demonstrated his legal scholarship, his intellect, and his ability to see all sides of an issue. He communicates clearly, both verbally and in writing, defining the legal issues and potential impediments, as well as in recommending a course of action for the Department to take. Litigation related to corrections is often distinct from other typical state agency litigation or even criminal defense which is the area of law that Chris practiced before coming to Agency Legal Services. Nevertheless, Chris was a very quick study and seemed to revel in the legal research required to defend against many of the novel arguments often raised in prisoner litigation. He never shirked a new assignment and it was apparent he was a hard worker, as he carries a heavy workload in his current position representing various state agencies as well as the State in a variety of litigation.

In addition, in all of my interactions with Chris, he was always courteous, patient and even-keeled, willing to take in new information, process it and then take it into

consideration in his advice and recommendations. It was apparent in my interactions with Chris over the past four years that he clearly and thoroughly researched the law in preparing any pleadings prepared in defense of litigation representing our agency.

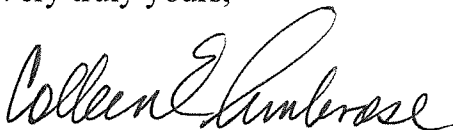
Finally, Chris' writing skills are without parallel. In 30+ years of practicing law, I have rarely, if ever, met an attorney with such skills to write clearly, concisely, and so persuasively. I worked directly with Chris in drafting pleadings in defense of the Department and marveled at his ability to take a draft and whip it into shape within a short time period, especially when it counted. This ability can only work as an important asset for a district court judge, in ensuring the timely issuance of well-reasoned and well written judicial orders or decisions.

Chris also has the skills of an arbiter as he has worked as a hearing examiner and administrative law judge, even when the Department is involved. In the Department's experience with him as hearing examiner, it is evident he clearly understands legal procedure and evidentiary issues very well. He issues timely and thoughtful rulings, again an attribute that will hold him in good stead as a district court judge in the First Judicial District.

I did not know Chris when he worked at the Office of Public Defender, but as a fellow traveler, I, too, believe that the experience in indigent criminal defense brings with it an empathy and compassion for all persons who appear in our courts and judicial system. With this experience, he will bring to the bench an understanding and empathy for all who appear before him, in whatever type of litigation they may pursue.

I truly believe that Chris Abbott has all of the attributes that would make him an excellent jurist: his intellect, compassion, advocacy skills, litigation experience, legal scholarship, and temperament. I strongly recommend his nomination for the position of district court judge.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Colleen E. Ambrose". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Colleen E. Ambrose



CURT DRAKE
~Selected to the American Board of Trial Advocates~
curtd@drakemt.com

MICHAEL A. KAUFFMAN
michael@drakemt.com

SARAH MAZANEC
sarah@drakemt.com

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111 North Last Chance Gulch
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PHONE: (406) 495-8080

FAX: (406) 495-1616

September 28, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
PO Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Ms. Menzies;

I am writing to support Chris Abbott's candidacy for the First District Court judge vacancy.

I have known Chris for several years, in both a personal and professional capacity, and have been impressed by his work ethic, his intelligence, and his open demeanor. I believe my respect for Chris is widely shared by those in the local bar who know him.

Chris' criminal law experience would be a great asset to the First Judicial District, and he has a strong base in civil law as well. Perhaps as important from my point of view, however, is that Chris is respectful and open in his interactions with those he encounters professionally and personally.

Sincerely,

Curt Drake

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

September 28, 2020

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission,

I am hereby submitting this letter of support for Chris Abbott in my individual capacity and not on behalf of any group, board, or organization. As such, I believe Mr. Abbott is the best choice for the current vacancy in the First Judicial District, Broadwater and Lewis and Clark Counties.

I first encountered Mr. Abbott in my previous work with the Office of the State Public Defender (OPD). In that time, I know Mr. Abbott to be a diligent, thought-driven, thorough advocate and legal guru to both new and seasoned criminal defense attorneys. Though his court-room, brief-writing experience and depth of legal knowledge is impressive – his ability to look at all angles of legal issues is what I believe sets him above any other candidate. In a state that encompasses several other indigenous nations, he goes above and beyond his colleagues to understand the complexities, inequities, and social and legal injustices Indigenous people face in Montana through the criminal justice system. Mr. Abbott has educated himself about these issues in a system that offers very little information. Indigenous peoples of Montana only represent 6-7% of the State population but disproportionately represent the prison population at over 30%. Having spoke with Mr. Abbott several times about these issues, he has taken it upon himself to research federal, state and tribal codes to be able to uphold his stellar advocacy as a criminal defense attorney.

Upon continuing his well-earned career, I have known Mr. Abbott to continue his work in representing various parties and holding the appropriate parties accountable. When it comes to filling the position for the First Judicial District, I hope this committee sees why Mr. Abbott is the best pick. Not just because he is a great lawyer, but because he goes above and beyond great lawyers in whatever capacity he is filling.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,



Kristina Lucero
Bar #11429
406.240.3372
kristina.lucero@gmail.com

9/25/2020

Judicial Nomination Commission c/o Lois Menzies Office of Court Administrator P.O.
Box 203005 Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Ms. Menzies and Judicial Nomination Commission,

It is an honor to write to you in support of Christopher Abbott's application to the First Judicial District Judgeship vacancy for Broadwater and Lewis and Clark Counties. Chris is a close friend, much like family. For many years Chris served as an Assistant Public Defender, where he represented each of his clients with dedication and fairness. Chris is passionate about the law and deeply cares about the legal system. Spend any amount of time with Chris and you will quickly see how deeply he cares about Helena and its residents.

I am certain Chris Abbott is uniquely qualified for this judgeship. He has years of experience as a public defender in Helena, and extensive experience in both criminal and civil law. He is even handed and compassionate. He recognizes the need to achieve justice for victims, while doing everything he can to ensure the judicial system promotes healthy, stable, and successful individuals and families. He supports the continued success of alternatives like treatment court, which provides a restorative alternative to the criminal justice system. Everyday Chris brings the very best of himself to his work and selflessly gives of himself to promote a more fair and just community.

I am confident that as judge, Chris Abbott will be efficient, even-handed, and compassionate. For the reasons I have provided, Chris Abbott has my highest recommendation and my unreserved support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jessica Stewart-Kuntz', is written over a large, faint circular outline.

Jessica Stewart-Kuntz



Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission,

I'm writing this because Chris Abbott is the best candidate for a judicial nomination that I've seen in any district at any point in my legal career. His life experience, legal knowledge, skill, and temperament are what we all wish every judge had.

I got to know Chris through several mutual friends in Helena and have had the privilege of working with him on two civil cases, one of which is ongoing. We both represent the State against the tobacco companies, and the issues are complex and obscure. Chris and I have worked closely on briefing, hearings, negotiations, overall case strategy, and trial preparation. I learned something quickly about Chris while working with him that is best put this way: The case we have been working on typically takes months to begin to make sense of—Chris mastered the details in his first two weeks. I've watched a lot of attorneys come and go in the unique world of tobacco litigation, and Chris is the first and only to make sense of it that quickly. In the world of civil litigation, where you compete for judges' attention with many hundreds of criminal and dependent neglect cases, judges who can quickly understand the issues in your case and speak to them intelligently are rare and cherished.

Chris isn't just a civil whiz, though. Chris and I both have a background in criminal law and have bonded over comparing notes on practicing criminal law in Montana. It's clear he has an encyclopedic knowledge of the relevant cases, constitutional provisions, and statutes. More importantly, he has a substantial body of real-time experience litigating criminal cases and dealing with the human issues inherent to that work. It can be exceedingly difficult to practice criminal law in front of a judge with no background in criminal law. While we have a large number of district court judges who were formerly prosecutors, we have too few who have also done criminal defense. We have a variety of issues that plague our communities and show up in our courts—mental health and substance abuse, predominantly—and defense attorneys necessarily develop an intimate knowledge of how those issues play out, what helps, and what does not.



Chris's commitment to treatment courts is to his credit. Anyone who has been in the trenches with the substance abuse and mental health issues clogging our courts has learned that there are no quick fixes, the approach has to be individualized, and you have to know when to be tolerant and when to be firm. Only experience can teach that, and Chris has it to a degree that few judicial candidates do. If we want our judicial system to help us protect and improve our communities, we need judges like Chris deciding issues in cases involving our most intractable problems.

Ideally, a district court judge has an intimate knowledge of criminal and civil procedure and the rules of evidence. It creates significant problems for everyone when a judge lacks knowledge of any of those areas. Having tried a case in front of a judge who had only a loose grasp of trial rules, I can tell you that more than trial experience, someone who has the rules for trial readily in mind is invaluable to the bar and the public. The public wants a fair trial, and the bench and bar do not want to see a case tried twice. Chris has the kind of mind that can store, access, and apply the rules you need to move a case efficiently and justly from pre-trial through trial. We need more of that.

Chris also commands respect and has a temperament well-suited to the bench. His practice has been noteworthy for garnering the respect of judges and opposing counsel. At our first appearance in the civil matter on which we worked together, Judge McMahon's first words were that he was pleased to see Chris back in his courtroom, and he clearly meant it. Similarly, from conversations with prosecutors who have worked opposite Chris, I have learned that even from the perspective of opposing counsel, Chris stands out for both his legal skill and integrity.

In summary, Chris is exceedingly intelligent, hard-working, knowledgeable, and can grasp what is at issue and what must be done more readily than most—not just in terms of technical legal decisions, but also in terms of the real human issues inherent in most litigations. He is what litigators wish every judge were. We will have a better judiciary and a better community if he is appointed, and his roots in Helena and strong connections to all parts of the bar will help him hold the seat come election time.

Sincerely,

Paul M Leisher
Paul M. Leisher

September 25th, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

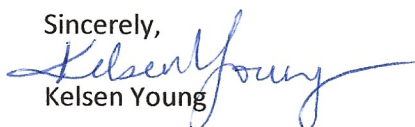
To Whom It May Concern:

Greetings. I write in support of Chris Abbott's candidacy for the First Judicial District for Broadwater and Lewis & Clark counties. I have known Chris professionally over the past decade. We have had the opportunity to work together in a number of different capacities. I also have a personal and professional relationship with his spouse, Jen Gursky. Both Chris and Jen, are active members of our Helena community and are people I respect and admire. As people who operate in the same general social sphere, I know them to be honest, generous, committed to social justice, and demonstrating a deep faith and commitment to their family and community.

As you know, Chris has extensive legal experience for someone his age. When considering who to support for this judicial nomination, I chose Chris because of his work as a public defender. I believe that our criminal justice system, as well as our dependent/neglect system, rely on a highly skilled, committed and determined defense. In my experience, sometimes determined can mean aggressive and dismissive. And that has never been my experience with Chris. I have been opposite him on perspective and opinion at times, but we have always been able to disagree with respect and appreciation for the other's perspective. Chris has been able to understand the needs of his clients in a way that I haven't seen many in his position be able to replicate. We have worked together on expert witness testimony that would address the impacts of domestic violence on the survivors he was worked with. He has also volunteered his time to work with our organization to train domestic violence advocates to be expert witnesses themselves. His work as a public defender is highly respected throughout the community – including those who have been on the opposite side of him in court. In this day and age of divisiveness, that is something that should be celebrated and appreciated.

I have talked with Chris about the issues I am most concerned with in the criminal justice system, and he has demonstrated a deep commitment to being an effective judge. I believe he will be a great judge to replace Judge Reynolds as they hold similar views and judicial temperament. The citizens of Lewis and Clark county rely on our judicial system to be fair, effective, and adaptive. I believe Chris will bring a high priority and willingness to be an effective judge from the beginning and throughout his career. He is ready to hit the ground running. Chris and Jen are incredibly hard workers and are able to balance a young family, their careers, and being dedicated volunteers in their community.

I wish you the best in your decision making and hope that your selection will reflect the values of our community and the ideals we have established for a fair and just system.

Sincerely,

Kelsen Young

To the Judicial Nomination Commission:

September 28, 2020

My name is Kiley Gage and I am a former Case Manager for YWCA Helena. I also served as the Vice Chair of the Citizens Advisory Committee in Lewis and Clark County to advocate for criminal justice reform. During my tenure I worked with a number of clients who had legal system involvement. A former client of mine had an assault charge against her after a domestic dispute. This client had a history of traumatic experiences, multiple children and a history of drug use. The client was still very young and had many years still ahead of her. Chris Abbott was her public defender and worked very hard to get her the help she needed. She was able to go to drug treatment. Mr. Abbott was an incredible advocate for this young woman and helped her through the legal process so that she could start to straighten her life out. Mr. Abbott had an enormous caseload but still found time to advocate to get this woman help.

In addition, I previously served on the First Judicial Family Treatment Court. I have seen what can be accomplished through a groundbreaking program like this. Mr. Abbott would make a wonderful judge to head up both Family Treatment Court and Adult Treatment Court. It takes a patient and caring person to provide leadership for the treatment team members as well as for the participants. I strongly believe that Mr. Abbott would be an excellent candidate as he has proven to be qualified and fair. Most importantly, I recognize his commitment to bettering his community and contributing to the greater good. If you have any follow-up questions for me, I can be reached at 865.323.1512 or kileygage@gmail.com . Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kiley M. Gage

September 25, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
C/O Lois Menzies
Office of the Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission,

I am writing in support of Christopher Abbott in his application for District Court Judgeship in the First Judicial District. As a way of introduction, I am the Clinical Director at Intermountain Children's Services, here in Helena. Through my position, I have been involved with the First Judicial District Family Treatment Court since its inception and was on the workgroup that brought it to life here in Helena. Prior to Intermountain, I worked for several years with youth and families including a treatment program for youth involved in Youth Court who were placed in an intensive (9 month) residential and wilderness treatment program. Prior to that I had extensive experience working with citizens of all ages who were coping with the storms of life – aging, poverty, trauma and various other life challenges.

I find Christopher Abbott to be the kind of human and professional who has the breadth of experience, the temperament, integrity, professionalism and the tenacity to be an excellent judge. Christopher adheres to a high moral and ethical code in all areas of his life. I appreciate his ability to manage an extensive workload while also parenting and finding time to give to our community's worthy causes – especially those of the YWCA, the Friendship Center and other agencies dedicated to collaboratively supporting others in creating a healthy community.

I am also impressed with Christopher's obvious dedication to public service. A lawyer of his accomplishment and experience could be easily enticed by the potential of serving clients in a private law firm. However, Christopher has dedicated his time and talents to working for the State of MT in various capacities which has exposed him to quite a variety of complex issues and myriad of venues. His breadth of experience has also afforded him the opportunity and need to be well read and to collaborate with many others. He is respected as a leader. Clearly, he is a constant learner.

Although Christopher is clearly a hard worker who is not restricted by a time clock, he also has been able to fashion a nice balance of other interests in his life. While also parenting his 3 year old daughter, Parker, Christopher has also managed to find time to enjoy our great state and the outdoors and to carve out time for himself for restoration and fun. In my line of work, I am always promoting self-care and restorative practices to our front line staff who are so dedicated to service that they can sometimes fail to focus on their own needs. Christopher has figured out how to do that which will serve him well in the position of a District Judge.

Thank you for your consideration of my support for Christopher Abbott. I am completely confident of his capacity, competencies and personal character- which are all traits we are seeking in a District Judge.

Sincerely,



Kimberly Gardner, LCSW, LAC
1814 Livingston Ave.
Helena, MT 59601
(406) 465-7568

September 28, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to recommend Christopher Abbott for the judicial position for Montana First Judicial District Court, Lewis and Clark County. As a member of the legal community in Helena, I have had the great pleasure of getting to know Christopher Abbott. Christopher has a reputation and record for being an attorney of high integrity and excellent character. Chris has proven his dedication to meaningful justice through his decade long work at the Montana Office of the State Public Defender where he vigorously and tirelessly defended clients with charges ranging from misdemeanor to capital offenses. Christopher has had the opportunity to learn and familiarize himself with both state and federal laws through his work as a law clerk for the Honorable James R. Browning of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit and also his position as Assistant Attorney General at the Montana Department of Justice. In addition to exhibiting excellence in his professional career, Christopher has an outstanding academic record that illustrates his keen organizational, critical thinking, and time management skills.

Please contact me if you have any further questions regarding Christopher Abbott.

Sincerely,

Akilah Lane
Staff Attorney
Montana Legal Services Association

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
PO Box 203005
Helena MT 59620

Members of the Judicial Standards Commission,

I submit this letter in support of nominating Chris Abbott to fill the current vacancy in the First Judicial District. I've had the honor of knowing Chris for the last decade. I had the privilege of working alongside Chris at the start of my career. He was a fantastic attorney then, a teacher, a role model and a friend. Since that time I have only seen him expand his legal knowledge and skill.

Chris offers a rare opportunity for the First Judicial District. The First Judicial District has an intense workload, and new judges often face a steep learning curve, being specialized solely in criminal or civil law. Chris has been both a public defender and Assistant Attorney General in the Agency Legal Services Bureau. He can handle the regular flow of criminal proceedings. He can tackle the varied and important civil matters that routinely come before the First Judicial District. He has regularly served as a Hearings Officer over the last three years and has experience in a quasi-judicial role.

Chris Abbott is the best candidate for First Judicial District Court Judge. I urge you to move his name forward to the Governor.

Sincerely,

Andres Haladay
Helena City Commissioner

September 27, 2020

815 Maple Street
Helena, MT 59601

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
PO Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Members of the Judicial Nominating Commission:

I am writing to recommend Chris Abbott for appointment to the position of district court judge for the First Judicial District to fill the seat being vacated by Judge James Reynolds.

Chris was a colleague at the Office of Public Defender for three years of our overlapping tenures from 2014 through 2017. Since becoming legal counsel for the Department of Corrections in late 2018, I have had the opportunity to confer with Chris occasionally on matters involving prisoner civil rights litigation and extraordinary writs.

Chris' desire to serve as district court judge seems to be a natural evolution in his practice of law. Chris has been a teacher to me and to other attorneys since I first met him. At the Office of Public Defender, Chris taught me important trial skills and practice skills beneficial to my specialty representing clients in dependency and neglect cases. Chris was an instructor and mentor to many OPD attorneys. As an Assistant Attorney General, Chris still makes himself available to confer on difficult questions and complex issues. Other attorneys and I especially value his talent for writing and editing to achieve clarity and persuasiveness.

At the Office of the Public Defender, Chris' strong work ethic was demonstrated by his regular presence in the office on Sundays, when the most diligent attorneys prepared for the coming week. At the Attorney General's Office, Chris is more responsive to queries emailed on the weekend than many attorneys are during the week.

I have been impressed by Chris' commitment to his community. For instance, as a public defender, he represented his fellow public employees as a union officer, a duty which clearly entailed many extra hours of work and learning. In another instance, I was pleased to serve with Chris at a high school speech and debate event last winter, where he and other government attorneys and I spent a Friday night and a Saturday judging debates.

Through his legal acumen, work ethic, generosity, and civic involvement, Chris Abbott models an ethic of law practice as a public service. I am pleased to offer this public comment in his support. I am sure that the people of Montana would be well-served by this appointment.

Sincerely,

Roger Renville
Roger Renville

Dear Members of the Judicial Nomination Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to lend my support for an appointment to the bench for Chris Abbott. My enthusiastic support of Chris's candidacy for appointment to the First Judicial District Court comes easily.

I moved to Helena six years ago. One of the first people I was introduced to in the community was Jen Gursky, Chris's wife. Jen was the Development Director for Helena Food Share when she reached out for a cup of coffee to welcome me to the community. That cup of coffee led to an eventual hiring of Jen to my team one year later. Through Jen, I became acquainted with Chris. I've found Chris to be a person who is intellectually thoughtful, is committed to compassionate solutions for our less fortunate neighbors, and is deliberate in decision making. I understand that Chris graduated as a valedictorian in high school, eventually earning top honors and graduating from the top of his class at University of Washington Law.

While my area of expertise is not law, but community philanthropy, I write because I think it important to evaluate the character of those who make decisions with significant consequences for our community and our state. In the five years that I have known Chris Abbott I have seen dedication to his work and know that he regularly works extended hours. I have had conversations with him (and Jen) about generosity and what organizations in Helena he supports. I observed his compassionate support for his wife in the unexpected loss of her father. And for over a year, I was a front seat witness to his approach to fatherhood. I know Chris holds the character to sit on the bench. I know Chris will hold the weight of this position in balance to his values.

Finally, I would like to note that Chris seeks to serve his community with his experience, his talents, and his finances. When asked to join the board of the Helena Area Habitat for Humanity, the only question I remember him asking is if he had the time to dedicate what he thought necessary to be a dedicated member. In his service to Habitat, he has learned about home ownership and community housing, utilizing both his legal analysis and compassion for the most vulnerable among us to serve our community.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this unequivocal support. I look forward to seeing Chris as a judge in our community.

Sincerely,

Mary

Mary K. Rutherford
4911 Fox Trot Dr.
Helena, MT 59602

September 26, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Commission Members,

It is my great honor to be able to write this letter of support for Christopher Abbott to serve as 1st Judicial Court Judge. I have known Mr. Abbott for 10 years and can attest to his high standards as an attorney and believe he is not only fit to fill the position of judge, but that he is an exceptional choice.

I served as a state probation and parole officer for over 20 years. In that capacity I prepared presentence reports for the district court, recommending appropriate sentences, not only for punishment for offenses, but considering the circumstances of each defendant and their needs for rehabilitation and future success. Mr. Abbott and I have not always seen eye-to-eye on every case, however I have never doubted his motivation to provide fair, just treatment for his clients. He approaches each client's case with a 360-degree view of their circumstances, the impact on victims and the challenges and needs of each of his clients. Mr. Abbott knows that "winning" a case means all parties are satisfied with the outcome – something I consider as true justice.

I have had the opportunity to discuss not only actual criminal court cases with him, but social justice and our ideals of what is right and wrong with our legal system. He advocates for those whose voices are lost in a system that operates on historical procedures and identifies systemic injustices imposed on those individuals.

I have served as the chairman of the board at the Helena Indian Alliance and have heard the stories of our native population and the frustrations they face when confronted with a system that has cultural biases and overlooks the historical and cultural identity of American Indians. I believe Mr. Abbott possess not only the analytical skills, but the ability to set aside his own biases to truly appreciate the situations and challenges faced by people of color. It would not be an overstatement of hyperbole when I say that I myself attempt to model his approach to understanding each person's individual situation and in my own analysis find myself asking how he would view it.

I have worked in multiple judicial districts and can say that I have seen many good judges and would venture that Mr. Abbott would rise to the top of that list if he were selected to fill the seat in the First Judicial District. His criminal and civil experience, along with his trial experience, give him a well-rounded resume and put him in a category above many other individuals I have seen become judges.

As he replaces Judge Reynolds, he will bring the aforementioned skills to a treatment court that requires understanding, compassion and fairness, along with a firm commitment to imposing both sanctions and rewards evenly and with discretion. His administrative and judicial experience make him an ideal candidate to assume this role.

Lastly, and maybe most importantly, I know him to be a family man, a husband and father, who is a life-long resident of the Helena community. His values and commitment to serve his community make him a top choice.

I would urge the commission to give top consideration to a man who has shown his ability to accurately interpret, analyze and follow the law; a man who holds the values of integrity, intelligence, and compassion.

I would be happy to appear before the commission to answer any questions they may have regarding Mr. Abbott's fitness to serve as our next district court judge.

Very respectfully,
Michael A. Touchette,
2230 Wilder Avenue
Helena, MT 59602
(406) 461-4046

Molly Ward Disability Law, P.C.

*Molly C. Ward, Attorney
2722 Third Ave N, Suite 400
PO Box 1536
Billings, MT 59103
Telephone: 406-294-7694
Fax Number 406-206-3427*

September 28, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

I am writing to you in support of Mr. Christopher Abbott, who has applied for Judge Reynold's vacancy as district court judge for the First Judicial District.

Chris undoubtedly has the requisite knowledge and experience to be a district court judge. He has worked extensively in both civil and criminal litigation. He has considerable trial experience, administrative law experience, and he is one of few attorneys who was qualified to handle capital cases. Chris is extremely smart, and he knows the law and procedural rules inside and out. He is an excellent legal writer, no doubt because he is an excellent legal thinker. Chris certainly has the academic and professional background for this position.

More impressive to me is that Chris, who graduated in the top 5% of his class at University of Washington Law School, decided to forgo more lucrative career options and instead opted to work for ten years as a public defender. Chris worked tirelessly to represent the most vilified people in our state because he understands that for our justice system to work, the accused are entitled to competent representation. This philosophy is vital to the work of a district court judge: Chris is not only empathetic to victims, but he recognizes the humanity of the guilty.

I have known Chris for more than twenty-five years. He is unquestionably well-respected in the legal community for his brilliance and his temperament. Personally, Chris has a reputation for being thoughtful, respectful, and kind to others. His knowledge of the law and dedication to it are only surpassed by his compassion for his community and his eagerness to serve.

I cannot think of an attorney better suited to be a district court judge than Christopher Abbott.

Sincerely,



Molly C. Ward
Attorney at Law

LAW OFFICE OF
OWENS LAW FIRM, PLLC
54 N. Last Chance Gulch, Suite #7

TELEPHONE:
(406) 422-5744

SCOTT B. OWENS
Admitted in Montana

HELENA, MT 59601

E-MAIL:
scott@oel-law.com

September 28, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Re: Letter of Support for Christopher Abbott

Dear Sir or Madam:


I am an attorney licensed to practice law in the State of Montana. In my practice, I have litigated civil and criminal cases in state and federal courts. For the past several years, I have had the pleasure of knowing and working with Christopher Abbott, who is seeking consideration for nomination to the First Judicial District Court Judge vacancy.

I met Christopher approximately seven years ago, through the practice of law, while he was working at the Public Defender's Office. I have come to know Christopher as an intelligent, trustworthy, and hard-working individual who is also personable. While working at the Public Defender's Office, Christopher was expert in the practice of criminal defense law who was always willing to dedicate his time to assist/educate other attorneys. He not only spent his time assisting those attorneys in his office, but he was also willing to help anyone that sought his counsel. He assisted me on multiple occasions when I was trying to navigate complex legal issues. Christopher is well-organized, his legal research is cogent and concise, and he is an excellent trial lawyer.

Christopher Abbott is a well-respected attorney in the Helena community. His professional courtesy, knowledge, and reliability are the pillars of his reputation as an attorney. I wholeheartedly recommend his nomination to the First Judicial District Court Judge vacancy.

If you have any questions at all regarding this letter of recommendation, please do not hesitate to contact me at 406-422-5744 or scott@oel-law.com.

Sincerely,



Scott Owens
Attorney at Law

September 28, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
Office of Court Administrator
c/o Lois Menzies
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Ms. Menzies and Judicial Nomination Commission,

Please accept my letter of support for Chris Abbott's appointment as District Court Judge for the First Judicial District.

I have worked in state government for more than 25 years and am currently the Director for the Office of Public Defender. While working at the Department of Justice, Chris has assisted our agency on multiple levels. I appreciate the way he listens, asks questions and responds with thoughtfulness. Chris has a calmness that resonates when he speaks and an appropriate humorous side, which helps when sorting through difficult discussions.

The thing that stands out most about Chris is his integrity and legal knowledge. He works hard to understand both sides of issues and demonstrates patience when working for resolution.

I believe Chris brings the right temperament, legal knowledge, and integrity to be a great judge in our community. Thank you for the opportunity to provide my support.

Rhonda Lindquist
Director, Office of Public Defender

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Ms. Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Commission Members:

I am writing this letter to express my enthusiastic support for the appointment of Christopher D. Abbott as a District Court Judge for the First Judicial District. He possesses a great knowledge of the law and a tireless work ethic. He is a man of ethics and fairness. The First Judicial District would benefit greatly from his presence on the bench.

I first met Chris in May of 2008. He was working as an Assistant Public Defender for the Office of Public Defender (OPD) in Helena. I was a new hire with less than a year of practice under my belt and zero experience working with indigent clients. Immediately upon my arrival in the Helena office, Chris offered to help me learn the ropes. Even for a new attorney as myself, it was obvious that Chris was gifted with an amazing legal mind and an incredible work ethic. Throughout the years I worked with Chris, this became more and more glaringly obvious. He relished in puzzling over and extensively briefing complicated issues that would make the most seasoned attorney throw their hands up in exasperation. As he tackled many of these complex issues of law, however, he never neglected his heavy case load. When many of our co-workers were leaving for the day, Chris would just be getting ready to head over to the jail in order to meet with his numerous clients. Chris was commonly known to be one of the first in the office in the morning and the absolute last one out in the evening.

At the time of my employment with OPD, we were an office mainly consisting of attorneys with less than five years of experience. We often consulted with and depended on our fellow OPD attorneys for advice on how to handle various issues of law or trial strategies. As a result, we became very closely knit and had friendships which extended far beyond the confines of our office. Looking back, I firmly believe this feeling of camaraderie benefitted every attorney who had the opportunity to work with Chris, as he had a major part in its creation. Chris would often gather our attorneys to eat lunch together. He was a regular (and much needed) player for weekly trivia nights, as his vast amount of knowledge did not stop at the law, but extended into almost every topic imaginable. No matter how busy Chris was with his own cases, however, he never turned away an attorney who came to him for advice or support.

Chris's legal skills did not just begin and end with research and briefing. Although he was always meticulously prepared for court, he was also very skilled at trial. While I was aware of Chris's reputation for excellence in trial, I saw this development with my own eyes after I left OPD and took a job with the Lewis and Clark County Attorney's Office. Chris and I were opposing counsel in a very emotional and contested criminal case that proceeded to a trial by jury. I was incredibly impressed with what I saw from Chris during this trial. He related well to

the jury and advocated for his client effectively. In a contested trial such as the one we faced together, I believe it would have been easy for Chris, as the defense attorney, to be aggressive and adversarial with the State's witnesses. Instead, he chose the fair and ethical approach and treated all witnesses with the utmost respect and courtesy. Although knowledge of the law is certainly important, I also firmly believe a judge needs to have the ability to relate and speak to the public. After watching Chris in this trial, I have no doubt that he has the proper temperament to be a judge and handle the contentious issues that will undoubtedly cross his path.

I am also impressed with Chris's written commitment to the First Judicial District Treatment Court. In full disclosure, I have been the Deputy County Attorney assigned to the program since November 2019. That being said, however, I have witnessed the strength of the program and seen some of the program's most incredible successes. I strongly believe treatment courts are necessary and I have full faith in Chris's ability to lead an effective and successful treatment court.

Although Chris did not attend law school in Montana, he has lived most of his life in Helena. He grew up here. I strongly believe he is dedicated to making Helena a better place. Over the twelve years I have known Chris, I have enjoyed watching him transform from a young attorney to a devoted husband and doting father. He will be an excellent judge. He deserves to have his name forwarded to the Governor for consideration and I urge you to do so.

Sincerely,



Ann B. Penner
Deputy County Attorney
Lewis and Clark County

Wilmot Collins
2541 Overlook Blvd
Helena, MT 59601
September 27, 2020

Judicial Nomination Commission
c/o Lois Menzies
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Commission members:

Please consider this a letter of recommendation for Christopher D. Abbott for the vacant District Court Judge seat. I have known Chris for about eight years and during those years I found him to be an excellent attorney and someone who cares deeply about the law. During his years as a Public Defender, Chris was also an advocate for his clients. Chris often tried to understand his clients' unique and traumatic history which provided him a unique perspective on how to assist his clients.

Chris is a candidate with extensive criminal and civil legal experiences which makes him qualify and would be an excellent Judge. I have personally observed Chris working with Child and Family Services and he is very compassionate lawyer who also believes in the success of the Treatment Court which is a more holistic approach, a welcome alternative to the more adversarial system.

During Chris' many years as a lawyer not only has he won many awards and recognitions but also has excellent academic credentials.

Chris is aware of the often overburdened, understaffed and heavy caseload of the district court and he is uniquely prepared to carry on the duties. Should you need further information about Chris, please feel free to call or email me.

Respectfully,

Wilmot J. Collins

Mayor, City of Helena



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Helena – Lewis and
Clark National Forest

2880 Skyway Drive
Helena, MT 59602
406 449-5201
1220 38th Street North
Great Falls, MT 59405
406 791-7700

Date: September 24, 2020

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

I am writing this letter of public comment in support of the character and proficiency of Christopher Abbott, a student intern of mine, during the summers of 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001. Mr. Abbott was part of an inaugural team of 4 high school students, competitively selected to be citizen scientists in what was then, the Helena National Forest. More than 20 years later, our forest has combined to become the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest, and the citizen scientist program, Youth Forest Monitoring Program, has successfully continued every year because of the excellent work and foundation set by those original students.

Allow me to expand upon the expectations and outcomes from these very talented students, and Christopher Abbott, in particular. Students were selected to represent their home community and its relationship to public forest lands. Christopher had the maturity and technical experience to work with his fellow citizen scientists, poring over the 1986 Forest Plan and determining what aspects of forest health high school students could monitor with minimal equipment and experience. During those early years, students focused on photo points, noxious weed populations, and stream health on the Helena National Forest. Christopher was responsible for organizing this information, developing an effective workflow, and creating a presentation at the end of each field season with recommendations to the Forest. He became a team leader after his first season and lead editor of student group documents. Because of his excellent work, our program has been able to expand and reach up to 12 students each year while including additional monitoring of wildlife, archeology, and soil health.

Christopher has been greatly influenced by his four summers spent observing and recording data on national forest land. He had to be consistent in data collection, returning to previous sites for accurate photo comparisons, and researching management objectives for study sites. In addition, his presentations were on-point, accurate, and have been used as a template for other citizen scientists. The experience of watching changes over broad periods to time (through photo points) and short-term (through his four years of intense outdoor study), Christopher gained a deep appreciation for public lands and their value to a community.

It has been a pleasure to revisit the excellent work of Christopher Abbott during the early years of our Youth Forest Monitoring Program, provide performance feedback, and describe the positive impact he made on this program. Should you have any need for further comment on Christopher Abbott's character as it relates to this work, please contact me at elizabeth.a.burke@usda.gov or (406)461-7572.

Sincerely,

Liz Burke

Youth Forest Monitoring Program Manager
Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest



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