

**STATEMENT OF JACQUELINE A. BERRIEN
NOMINEE FOR COMMISSIONER,
EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

November 19, 2009

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Enzi and Members of the Committee, it is truly an honor to appear before you today, and I appreciate this opportunity to speak with you concerning the important work of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. I thank President Obama for nominating me to serve on the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and I greatly appreciate the confidence that he has expressed in my ability to lead the Commission.

I especially thank my husband, Peter Williams, who is here with me today, as he has been at every important moment during 22 years of marriage. I also thank my brother Clifford and sister-in-law Danielle, and many more family members, friends, and colleagues who have provided tremendous support. My parents, Clifford and Anna Berrien, regularly sacrificed their own comfort to ensure that every need -- and most of the desires -- of their children would be satisfied. While I miss them tremendously today, I am blessed to carry indelible memories of their unfailing love everywhere that I go, including this Committee room.

My perspectives on public service were formed, in part, by my experiences as a native Washingtonian. As a child, I observed the hard work and dedication to public service demonstrated by many family friends, neighbors, leaders of my parish and other adults who were proud to say that they were federal employees. Most importantly, my parents were very positive role models of the best of public service. My mother entered federal government service as a student nurse at Freedmen's Hospital. She spent nearly thirty years as a federal employee, working for the U.S. Public Health Service, Freedmen's and Howard University Hospital. The image of her leaving for work in a perfectly pressed, white nurse's uniform remains with me to this day. That pristine uniform symbolized the preparation, care, and attention to detail that she devoted to her work. My father was a World War II veteran, and after his military service he worked evenings at the State Department to help pay his college tuition. His example showed me that federal government service could play a more limited, yet pivotal role in a person's life and career. Like my parents, I worked for the federal government to help finance my college education. I started as a clerk-typist at the bottom of the federal pay scale during my senior year of high school and returned to Washington to work for government agencies almost every summer while I pursued my undergraduate degree.

I share this background with you, Senators, because it helps to explain why I consider it such a tremendous privilege to be considered for the position of Chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and how I would approach my responsibilities as EEOC Chair if confirmed. I have high expectations for the EEOC, and I will work hard to meet the high expectations that Congress has for this agency. With the concerted effort of the staff and leadership of the EEOC and continued support of Congress, I believe that the agency will be able

to make further progress towards fulfilling the mission of ending unlawful employment discrimination.

In an effort to make the most efficient use of scarce resources, if confirmed, I will confer regularly with other government officials responsible for overseeing enforcement of federal employment discrimination laws, to prevent unnecessary duplication of efforts and ensure that enforcement activities are complementary wherever possible. It will be critical to work within the EEOC to deploy all of the agency's resources in the most strategic manner possible, with the goal of achieving greater impact. I also will seek ways to enhance the Commission's outreach to the public (including representatives of the private bar, business community, labor organizations, advocacy groups, and other interested parties), and heighten public awareness of the requirements of federal anti-discrimination laws. If confirmed, I would also work to improve relations with Congress, and look forward to working with the leadership and members of this Committee to achieve this goal.

In short, I welcome the opportunity to work with anyone, within or outside the EEOC, who is determined to fulfill the agency's mission. Although there are challenges facing the EEOC, I am optimistic as I prepare for this opportunity to lead the Commission. My motivation is the knowledge that the entire nation will benefit as we move closer to fulfilling the mission that guides the EEOC: to end unlawful discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, religion, and disability in the nation's workplaces.

Since 2001, I have served as the Associate Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the organization founded and directed by Thurgood Marshall to wage a campaign against state-enforced racial segregation. In more than twenty years of law practice, I have appeared before the U.S. Supreme Court and numerous federal appellate and trial courts, federal administrative agencies, and state trial courts. I have represented clients in cases concerning subjects as varied as pregnancy discrimination, employment discrimination on the basis of immigration status, voting rights, and access to affordable housing, and have worked on cases with lawyers from a wide range of practice settings, including state and federal government, other non-profit organizations, large corporate law firms, legal academia, and small and solo law practices, and appeared in state and federal courts across the country. I have also served on the adjunct faculty of New York Law School and taught trial advocacy at Fordham and Harvard Law schools. The breadth and depth of my employment experience, and professional and public service activities have all helped equip me to address the issues and challenges that are at the core of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's work today.

Like President Obama, I was born in 1961, four years before the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission opened its doors for the first time. When President Obama signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, he expressed his hope that the Act would help his daughters and others who follow them "to grow up in a nation that values their contributions, where there are no limits to their dreams, and they have opportunities their mothers and grandmothers never could have imagined." As I appear before you today, Senators, I am confident that I am here because many people who lived before I was born were determined that I should have opportunities that they could only witness in dreams and articulate in prayers. Everything positive that I have achieved in my life was possible because of the tireless work and courageous

efforts of people who came before me. My work has always been fueled by a passion to improve the quality of life for future generations, and if confirmed by the Senate, I will bring the same commitment and determination to my work as Chair of the EEOC.