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SCHOOL OF LAW

Statement at the Swearing in Ceremony of Alexander Williams, Jr. to be a member of the U.S. District Court of the District of Maryland

October 24, 1994

This is an historical event in the history of the federal judiciary. The U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland is about to receive Alexander Williams, Jr., lawyer, to serve as a U.S. District Judge with the blessings of a unanimous vote by the U.S. Senate. The Senate made the right decision for the people. Further, the nomination by President Clinton and the confirmation by the U.S. Senate attests to the tenacity and perseverance of Alexander Williams, Jr., two qualities, among others, that he brings to the Court. His confirmation by the Senate, after delay, affirms the principle that "the cream does rise to the top."

Howard University School of Law is proud of Alexander Williams, Jr. The faculty and students are proud of him, and the Alumni of our law school, in diverse ways, send Alexander Williams, Jr. warm expressions of congratulations from across the country.

But this occasion cannot close without a very brief reflection on the legal history of Maryland. Between 1875 and 1880, a black lawyer by the name of James Harris Wolff came to Maryland to practice law. At that time blacks were barred from being admitted to the bar in the state of Maryland. However, James Harris Wolff became the first black lawyer admitted to practice in the United States Circuit Court of Maryland around 1878. Today, some one

hundred and sixteen years later, Alexander Williams. Jr. joins a list of other black lawyers to serve on the federal bench of Maryland. James Harris Wolff is remembered today.

Also remembered today is Rev. Harvey Johnson, the pastor of Union Baptist Church, who contested the exclusion of black lawyers by the State of Maryland. In 1885, Rev. Harvey Johnson, came to Howard University, in Washington, D.C., and personally persuaded Everett J. Waring, who was about to receive his law degree, to apply for admission to the bar in Baltimore. Rev. Johnson had determine that a system of justice and the application of fair and neutral rules of law could not be entrusted to a bar composed entirely of white lawyers and judges. On October 10, 1885, Everett J. Waring, a Howard University Law graduate became the first black lawyer in the history of the State of Maryland.

And, here we are today. Here we are, gathered with a Howard University Law graduate, a son of Everett J. Waring, and a son of James Harris Wolff, and to witness, yet another result of an affirmative act by Rev. Harvey Johnson.

In closing, Alex, your colleagues at the Howard University School of Law, who I represent today and Dean Henry Ramsey, who is out the city today, want you to remember the two professions that brought you to this point; the law, represented by Messrs Wolff and Waring, and religion, represented by Rev. Johnson.

We are proud of you, Judge Williams. Go forth and do justice for all.

Professor J. Clay Smith, Jr.
Howard University School of Law