United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 3, 2016

President Nicolás Maduro
Miraflores Palace
Av. Nte. 10
Caracas, Venezuela

Dear President Maduro:

We write regarding the case of Judge María Lourdes Afiuni Mora, who was detained under deeply troubling circumstances for two years in 2009 before being moved to house arrest in Caracas in 2011. However, since Judge Afiuni's conditional release in 2013, she has remained on trial, has made serious allegations of sexual abuse, and continues to face a number of restrictions, including on her travel, finances, and ability to practice law. Given what appears to be politically motivated charges and the cruel circumstances already experienced by her incarceration, we urge you to drop all charges and lift any remaining restrictions on Ms. Afiuni.

Judge Afiuni was first arrested on December 10, 2009, on dubious charges of corruption, favoring evasion of justice, and abuse of power after ordering the conditional release of a prominent Venezuelan banker who had been jailed three years without trial. In addition to being in accordance with Venezuelan law, Judge Afiuni's decision was also consistent with an opinion adopted by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. Following two years in the women's prison National Institute of Feminine Orientation (INOF) where she reportedly faced horrendous physical abuse, she was moved to house arrest in Caracas in early February 2011, at which point she was able to obtain medical care for her ill health. Her disturbing arrest and treatment was condemned by a number of reputable international human rights organizations, including the International Commission of Jurists and Human Rights Watch, and epitomizes the devastating undermining of Venezuela's judicial independence

While we were pleased to hear of Judge Afiuni's conditional release on June 14, 2013, she has remained subject to criminal prosecution, had to report to court every 15 days, and had a number of additional restrictions placed on her basic freedoms. Most concerning, were Judge Afiuni's allegations that she was sexually abused by INOF guards and officials of the Ministry of Justice during her time in the very prison that held individuals she had previously sentenced. Venezuelan Attorney General Luisa Ortega Díaz troublingly dismissed such claims of abuse and mistreatment during Judge Afiuni's retrial, a denial which the United Nations Human Rights Committee criticized last summer in Geneva. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention further "considers the detention of Ms. Afiuni as a measure of reprisal" and has called on your government to "immediately release Ms. Afiuni and to provide her with effective and adequate reparations."

Our nations have many shared interests in the region, which would benefit from improved relations between the United States and Venezuela. As such, we were encouraged by respect for

Venezuela's largely peaceful and democratic recent elections. Yet, we remain deeply concerned about the state of the judiciary and those facing politically motivated charges. We urge you to drop all charges against and lift any restrictions on Judge Afiuni, as well as investigate the allegations of her horrific mistreatment in prison. Doing so would contribute to restoring public faith in the fair administration of justice and the rule of law.

Sincerely,

Senator Richard J. Durbin

Senator Benjamin L. Cardin

Senator Barbara Boxer

Senator Amy Klobuchar

Senator Patrick Leahy

Senator Dianne Feinstein

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand

Senator Jeanne Shaheen

Senator Susan Collins

Senator Robert Menendez