

Specter: Let judge be heard

He said another Senate session could aid Frederica Massiah-Jackson's nomination.

By Chris Mondics
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WASHINGTON — Sen. Arlen Specter (R., Pa.), the prime sponsor of Frederica Massiah-Jackson's increasingly troubled bid for a seat on the federal bench, said yesterday that he was trying to persuade his Senate colleagues to hold further hearings on her candidacy.

In a telephone conversation with reporters, Specter said that Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott had told him there were enough votes in the Senate to defeat the Philadelphia Common Pleas Court Judge's nomination for a spot on the U.S. District Court here.

But Specter held out the possibility that Massiah-Jackson might prevail if given an opportunity to appear a second time before the committee to respond to critics in law enforcement who say she is soft on crime.

"He [Lott] told me he had the votes to defeat the nomination, and I told him she was entitled to be heard before judgments were made," Specter said.

The Senate Judiciary Committee recommended Massiah-Jackson, who was nominated by President Clinton, for confirmation by a vote of 12-6 in early November.

Since then, however, she has been the target of intense criticism from prosecutors in Pennsylvania, including Philadelphia District Attorney Lynne M. Abraham, who have cited dozens of cases in which they contend she was lenient on lawbreakers and hostile to law enforcement.

Specter, who has taken the lead in defending Massiah-Jackson's record, argues that she has been overturned in only a handful of cases and that her overall record is within the mainstream.

Mayor Rendell and leaders of the Philadelphia Bar Association have also rallied to her defense, arguing that even the cases in question do not support a claim that she is soft on crime.

In accordance with her instructions from the Clinton administration, Massiah-Jackson has declined to comment publicly on the allegations beyond the testimony she gave to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Specter acknowledged yesterday that Massiah-Jackson's nomination was in serious trouble, in part because Senate Republicans were looking for ways to challenge Clinton on the nature of his judicial nominees.

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