To whom it may concern:

I am delighted to strongly recommend Vikas PD Gawai for all faculty positions in economics, applied economics, and public policy, and other related fields. He is a technically skilled scholar working at the intersection of health, human capital, social well-being, and technology and has developed a novel research agenda to work both in the US and India.

I have known Vikas PD Gawai since he started working for me and my co-author as a Research Assistant in the 2020s, and I am glad that he is continuously working with me since then as RA and a co-author for several projects, and we will maintain the collaboration in other future works. He started working as a research assistant on a project of mine analyzing data on early life exposure to the Great Depression on later life mortality in the US. To extend this work for a better measurement of the Great Depression, Vikas found a unique data set at the yearly county-level bank deposits in the US pre and post great Depression. My coauthor and I were excited to learn about this unique dataset and we collaborate with others (Jason Fletcher and Hamid N.) to support our earlier works with this more granular-level data combined with the Census data. This joint work of ours is under review in a journal of

local participatory

institutions in Sierra Leone, and did a great job. Eleanor also excelled in my graduate development

economics course. I feel very comfortable commenting on her work and research trajectory.

Since early in her Ph.D. training, Eleanor has been fascinated by informal cross-border trade (what might

sometimes also be called smuggling) in low and middle income countries (LMIC’s). Informal border trade

accounts for a sizeable share of all trade, especially in African countries where it may account for roughly

a third of all trade volume, but is (unsurprisingly) largely missed by official statistics. Eleanor set out to

shed light on and better understand this important economic topic, and focused her empirical focus on

East African settings, and in particular on the Kenya-Uganda border. Informal border trade is quite

prominent in that region, and is carried out by both female and male traders who often transport

legitimate goods including agricultural commodities or consumer goods (e.g., clothes) across the

hundreds of small paths linking border villages.

Eleanor’s job market paper, “Border Trade and Information Frictions: Experimental Evidence from

Kenyan Informal Traders”, is the product of the last four years of hard work on this project. Eleanor

succeeded in collecting one of the first largely representative and large scale samples (to my knowledge)

of informal traders in an LMIC setting. She focuses on N=1100 active traders working in Kenya near the

Ugandan border. She managed to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for this project from a variety of

sources, and also successfully weathered the COVID pandemic, which temporarily derailed her data

collection and sidelined the team of dozens of enumerators she was managing, but also opened up new

analytical possibilities (which she was creatively able to harness).

A first main contribution of the job market paper is Eleanor’s ability to provide descriptive statistics on

this population of traders, and understand some of their main constraints. She shows that most are quite