

AFJ INSIDER



Dear Friend,

There is no way to sugarcoat it - dark days are ahead. I, and all of us at AFJ, fear especially for those most marginalized and most vulnerable among us. Not to mention the future of our democracy. It is that stark. But, as someone that has been part of AFJ for nine years, I know firsthand that this organization never backs down and, if we must be in this fight, I am grateful to be in it with team AFJ.

I have seen how we innovate to meet the challenges we face or pivot to seize the opportunities ahead. I have been with AFJ through both the challenging Trump administration and the possibility packed Biden administration. I have seen how the resistance we mounted in the former built power that fueled success in the latter. This new chapter will be no different. With our amazing staff, our incredible members, and our generous supporters, we'll meet this moment **together**.

In the immediate, we are laser-focused on advocating for the Senate to confirm every pending judicial nominee before the end of the year. Each judge confirmed is one more who could fortify the guardrails of our democracy, and one less vacancy left for Trump to fill.

We will mobilize our membership, allies, and advocates to oppose the extremists Trump is lining up for the federal bench. We will use every tool to delay and even defeat the worst of their nominations. We will monitor the sitting justices to hold them to account for ethical violations and call for reform.

We are supporting the movements organizing our communities and building power with our one-of-a-kind Bolder Advocacy resources to amplify their voice and keep them safe. We are building out new resources to defend your nonprofit against political attacks and updating state-level and issue specific tools and toolkits to amplify your advocacy safely.

We are deepening our work on state courts to hold the line against federal fascism. We will continue to advocate for judges who come from the movements we serve to sit on our state courts, educate the public about how to weigh in on the judges who fill these benches, and continue to build a national network of organizations prioritizing these critical courts.

We are building the bench of future judges committed to democracy and equality. Through our work in the state courts and building power on the front lines with our members, we are identifying some of the most talented and thoughtful lawyers around the country who are ready for current state court openings and will be ready for the federal bench in a future administration.

We stand with and support our 140 diverse member organizations with unique access to advocacy and capacity-building resources. No matter their issue our members will face unique challenges in this new administration while advocating to make or defend progress at all levels of government. Our strength is rooted in our members, and we are stronger united.

And throughout it all, **we will build the long-term power to emerge, if not unscathed, stronger and more committed to building a better tomorrow.**

Stand with us.

Onward,

Keith Thirion

Interim Co-President



No Vacancies. No Excuses.

4

Biden judges
confirmed in the lame-
duck session so far

217

total Biden judges
confirmed

15

nominees pending on
the Senate floor



Federal Courts

Time is rapidly running out to confirm Biden's remaining nominees. Since the lame duck session began on November 12, the Senate has confirmed four additional Biden judges, including AFJ priority nominees Jonathan Hawley (C.D. Ill) and Mustafa Kasubhai (D. OR). This brings Biden's total confirmations to 217.

Fifteen fair-minded, well-qualified nominees are pending on the Senate floor awaiting a final confirmation vote. We commend leader Schumer and the Democratic caucus for their heroic efforts last night to advance these nominees through the Senate, including the AFJ priority nominees **Rebecca Pennell (E.D. WA), Sarah Russell (D. CT), Amir Ali (D. DC), Anne Hwang (C.D. CA), Cynthia Valenzuela Dixon (C.D. CA), and Catherine Henry (E.D. PA)**. We look forward to their swift confirmation to the district courts.

We urge leader Schumer to keep up this pace to quickly schedule votes on all remaining judicial nominees, and to prioritize **Adeel Mangi (3rd Cir.), Karla Campbell (6th Cir.), and Ryan Park (4th Cir.)**. They are exceptionally qualified nominees who will bolster the demographic and professional diversity of our circuit courts. Failing to schedule a vote for these nominees means leaving critically important seats open for a loyalist Trump judge to fill.

In December, the Supreme Court will hear several consequential cases which pose threats to our fundamental freedoms and the condition of our democracy. These include [Skrmetti](#), concerning Americans' ability access to gender-affirming care and [San Francisco v. EPA](#), which will likely determine the survival of the Clean Water Act. To learn more about these cases, check out AFJ's [2024-2025 Supreme Court Preview](#).

State Courts

AFJ's State Courts team closely watched state supreme court election results on November 5. Most states kept incumbent justices in place, but there were a handful of exceptions.

Though justices are selected in non-partisan elections, Michigan Democrats expanded their majority on the state supreme court to 5-2 with the election of Justice Kyra Harris Bolden and law professor Kim Thomas. Due to a redistricting push to add a second majority Black judicial district in Louisiana's elections, voters flipped the First District to Democratic control, but the court is still under a Republican majority. Ohio Republicans won all three seats up for election and defeated two incumbent Democrats. They expanded their majority to 6-1. In Montana's non-partisan election, Katherine Bidegaray, supported by liberal groups, won election as associate justice. However, voters split their ticket and conservative-backed Cory Swanson won election as chief justice. In a surprising event, Oklahoma voters did not retain Justice Yvonne Kauger. The group leading the no retention campaign almost defeated the other two justices within a margin of a few thousand votes.

Razor thin margins defined two other races in addition to Oklahoma's retention races. In a liberal stronghold state like Washington, Democrat Sal Mungia is ahead by just under 24,000 votes or 0.72% against an opponent who ran as a constitutional conservative. North Carolina Democratic incumbent Justice Allison Riggs had the closest contest by far. After a recount, Riggs began to pull ahead of her conservative challenger by 625 votes. A few counties are still certifying their results, but Riggs should be on a path to victory.

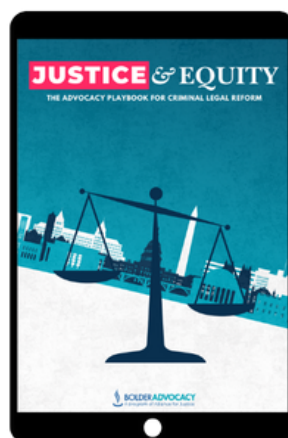


Arizona retained its two Republican justices up for retention election. But beyond elections, there is a critical opportunity for Gov. Katie Hobbs (D) to make her first appointment to the court. It would also be the court's first Democratic appointee since Gov. Doug Ducey (R) packed the court during his tenure as governor. The Commission on Appellate Court Appointments released the applicants' names for state supreme court. There are multiple professionally and demographically diverse applicants, including a number of former public defenders which the court is currently lacking.



Bolder Advocacy

We are excited to announce the launch of The Advocacy Playbook social justice series. Designed for social justice organizations, these playbooks offer a concise guide to the laws and regulations governing 501(c)(3) public charities as they engage in advocacy, including during election seasons. So far, we've released four critical publications: [**Earth & Equity: Environmental Justice**](#), [**Justice & Equity: Criminal Legal Reform**](#), [**Gender & Equity: Gender and Reproductive Justice**](#), and [**Power & Equity: Labor and Economic Justice**](#). Stay tuned for more resources to help you navigate advocacy rules with confidence!



Bolder Advocacy is also here to help with our new [on-demand nonprofit advocacy trainings](#), available 24/7 to fit your schedule. Whether you're navigating post-election advocacy or looking ahead to 2025, these expert-led sessions, available in both English and Spanish, will equip your organization with the tools to make an impact when it matters most.



Membership & Outreach

We will be hosting a [member-exclusive training on December 5](#). The training will feature an overview from Bolder Advocacy Senior Counsel Tim Mooney on **how you can engage in advocacy during this transition period**, including changes in how you can talk about Trump's and others' positions now that they are no longer candidates, and how to prepare to advocate under a new administration and Congress. As you form your plans both for the short-term and looking ahead to the new Congress and Administration, this training will answer all your questions around allowable advocacy activities.

We are also hosting an [AFJ Members Happy Hour on December 12 in Washington, DC](#). If you or any of your staff members are in the DC area, please join us for an informal gathering to enjoy some food and drinks and each other's company. This will be a time to socialize, relax, and enjoy drinks and dinner on us as we reflect on the year that is concluding and look ahead to how we will continue to support each other in the future. We hope to see you there!

Growing Our Justice Team – Just in Time

In the last couple of months, AFJ has hired some incredible new talent to bolster our Justice team, and they could not have come at a better time! Meet our new team members:

[Jaylin McClinton](#) joined AFJ as our Building the Bench counsel in September. In this role, he is helping to identify professionally and demographically diverse potential state and federal judicial nominees. He is a star! In addition to his work at AFJ, he is actively involved with the American Constitution Society (AFJ's partner on the Judicial Pipeline Project); the Cook County Bar Association; Just the Beginning – A Pipeline Organization; the Pretrial Justice Institute; and The Appellate Project. In addition, Jaylin mentors a host of high school, undergraduate, and law students. and they could not have come at a better time! Meet our new team members:



At a time when American institutions and the rule of law, are once again on the line, I am thrilled to work at the Alliance For Justice (AFJ) as we fight for an ambitious; justice-oriented; multi-racial; vibrant constitutional democracy where historically marginalized voices are amplified to upend exclusionary power structures and systems.



Alice Blease joined AFJ in May as a fellow. Originally from Northern Ireland, Alice came to the United States to complete an LLM at Georgetown, where she became fascinated by the U.S. judicial system. Once her summer fellowship ran out, we were grateful to be able to keep her on as a Dorot Fellow. She is focused on analyzing the records of the “movement” lawyers that have made it to the bench to make the case for how they are adding critical professional diversity to the bench while increasing access to justice.

Jamaal Lockings joined AFJ as a Dorot Fellow for the Federal Courts team where he champions the nomination and confirmation of highly qualified, fair-minded, and diverse individuals to the federal bench. During his tenure at University of Texas Law School, Jamaal held numerous leadership roles including as mentor for both the Thurgood Marshall Legal Society for Black Students and the OUTLaw organization for LGBTQ+ students.



“Working at AFJ during this pivotal moment allows me to fight for a judiciary that upholds the fundamental rights we all rely on, ensuring that courts remain a force for justice rather than an obstacle to progress.”

Important Dates

✓ **November 20**

Public Webinar: [How Texas Lobbying Disclosure Rules Affect Nonprofits When Lobbying for Lasting Change](#)

✓ **December 5**

Public Webinar: [How Your 501\(c\)\(3\) Can Influence Policy for the Greater Good](#)

✓ **December 10**

Public Webinar: [Foundation Support for Lobbying and Other Advocacy](#)

✓ **December 12**

AFJ [Members Happy Hour](#)

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

What concerns you now and in the future?

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

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