

AFJ INSIDER

President's Message



Dear Friend,

Spring has sprung in DC, and around the country. Despite a fierce desire to be outdoors, AFJ is buckling down and working harder than ever! In the last few weeks, we have launched (or relaunched!) numerous efforts which I am excited to share with you.

First, AFJ's Bolder Advocacy team just released the 5th Edition of our most used resource, [The Connection.](#)

This vital tool provides nonprofits with expert guidance on how they can engage with the public, lawmakers, and candidates to affect public policy, and how these organizations can coordinate together, even in an election year. It was important that this new edition, with the latest information, was launched in time to help advocates in 2024 and I am pleased to share it with you today.

Speaking of launching — we also relaunched our campaign to [“Fill Every Seat.”](#) The Biden administration has made historic progress in nominating outstanding jurists who expand the diversity and legal backgrounds on the bench. Yet, with a narrowing window to fill every seat in 2024, the pressure is on! Along with our sister 501(c)(4) organization, Alliance for Justice Action Campaign, we've created a [toolkit](#) for ways you can get involved in this work. Check it out at the link!

Lastly, on the communications front, I am proud to share that I have launched a podcast in partnership with Newsweek, [For Justice! With Rakim Brooks](#). In the pod I address some of the most topical political challenges and questions and try to make sense of things that don't make sense and chart a path forward. Check it out and let us know what you think!

Onward together,
Rakim



Our Impact

Federal Courts

The urgency to **#FillEverySeat** in the judiciary intensifies as the Biden administration strives to diversify the bench, with recent confirmations **breaking two all-white benches**. Judge Jasmine Yoon's confirmation to the federal bench for the Western District of Virginia marks a historic moment, as she becomes the **first-ever Asian American federal judge for Virginia**, while Judge Melissa Dubose's confirmation as a District Judge for the District of Rhode Island makes her the **first person of color and openly LGBTQ+ person** to sit on this court.

The administration pushes for swift confirmation of priority nominees like Nicole Berner for the 4th Circuit, Adeel Mangi for the 3rd Circuit, Mustafa Kasubhai for the District of Oregon, Eumi Lee for the Northern District of California, and Sarah Russell for the District of Connecticut. Dena Coggins, part of the latest slate of nominees, could become the **first Black woman federal judge in the Eastern District of California**, while nominees like Amir Ali, if confirmed, would bring diverse perspectives to the courts. In SCOTUS news, the recent ruling allowing Donald Trump to remain on the Colorado primary ballot highlights ongoing debates surrounding insurrectionist disqualification.

State Courts

Earlier this month, we launched the inaugural volume of our Faces of Justice series with the publication of our **Black State Supreme Court Judges report**. This series aims to spotlight state court judges who embody both professional excellence and personal diversity. The report focuses on the significant presence of Black state supreme court justices across the nation, highlighting historic milestones such as the first Black justices appointed to each state supreme court. Additionally, it delves into the ongoing progress these courts have made, while also shedding light on the concerning fact that **nearly one-third of state supreme courts have yet to seat a Black justice**.



In other state court news, Maine's Democratic Governor Janet Mills decided not to reappoint Justice Joseph Jabar, 77, to another seven-year term on the state's highest court. Governor Mills cited a desire to **enhance diversity on the bench** as a factor in her decision to decline the reappointment, which has left a vacancy on the court. Meanwhile, Super Tuesday saw crucial state supreme court primary elections in Alabama, North Carolina, Texas, and Arkansas. Notable outcomes included Justice Sarah Stewart's victory in the Alabama Republican primary for Chief Justice, and Justice Allison Riggs securing the Democratic nomination for the North Carolina Supreme Court. In Texas, three seats each on the Texas Supreme Court and the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals were up for election, with notable primary outcomes reflecting shifts in the judiciary's composition. Arkansas also held nonpartisan supreme court elections, with runoff elections slated for November, shaping the state's highest court's future.

Bolder Advocacy

Alliance for Justice's Bolder Advocacy team is excited AF to announce two new resources available now for our favorite nonprofit advocates and grassroots allies.

1. Our [100th episode](#) of the Rules of the Game Podcast features **Nonprofit AF creator Vu Le**, who joins our team to discuss funders, Main Character Syndrome, inequitable systems, and more! Tune in now on our website or your favorite podcast platform.
- 2.
3. The 5th Edition of Bolder Advocacy's flagship resource, [The Connection](#), is ready for you to download and share. Curious about data sharing between affiliated 501(c)(3)s and 501(c)(4)s, PAC formation and reporting, or FEC text messaging disclaimer requirements? The Connection addresses all this and more and is your go-to resource for creating and operating affiliated organizations. That's why nonprofit advocates have relied on its guidance since the first edition was released more than a quarter century ago.



As always, we're here to empower you! Whether you're a seasoned nonprofit leader or passionate advocate, we've got your back. Explore our [free technical assistance](#) and [advocacy training](#) to unlock the tools you need. If you have questions about nonprofit advocacy, we have answers. Bolder Advocacy is your partner in building your nonprofit's power and driving meaningful policy change. Let's make a difference together!



Advocacy Wins

Houston in Action

While compliance with nonprofit tax laws might not be the first thing the public thinks about during an election year, it is essential for the thousands of organizations we serve through Bolder Advocacy.

As the ever-increasing threat from the far-right spreads, nonprofits like [Houston in Action](#) are arming themselves for the fights ahead with BA resources. (Houston in Action is also an [AFJ member organization](#).) **"The more we build power with and for communities of color, the more we become a target,"** explains Juan Cardoza-Oquendo, Programs Director at Houston in Action. "It is important compliance is tight."

Houston in Action is a collective impact organization: They facilitate relationships across the government and health sectors, private philanthropy, and community-based organizations (including their member organizations) to invest in Houston, particularly the city's communities of color and low-income residents. Since 2022, the organization has applied its learnings from BA services (our workshops, free technical assistance, and one-on-one office hours) to help its members pursue non-partisan voter engagement and lobbying.

Although many nonprofits believe they aren't allowed to get out the vote or lobby due to their 501(c)(3) status, they are — and BA is the expert on teaching nonprofits about (c)(3)-compliant advocacy to amplify their impact. **“Everything I know from (c)(3) compliance comes from Bolder Advocacy,”** Cardoza-Oquendo says. “I am not even exaggerating.”

Bolder Advocacy is proud to work with Houston in Action and over 2,000 other nonprofits across the country in the fight to make democracy work for everyone. Help us equip the progressive movement with the tools they need to fight back at the ballot box by [donating to Alliance for Justice](#).

Membership & Outreach Community

Our spotlighted member for February and March is [Mi Familia Vota](#). In case you missed it, our Member Spotlight for December and January was [Texas Watch](#).

Meet Our Staff Hayley Durudogan

Each year, Alliance for Justice welcomes two recent law school graduates as Dorot Fellows, whose fellowships are generously supported by the Dorot Foundation. Dorot Fellows provide vital research and capacity to AFJ's Justice team, helping identify, vet, and support diverse nominees to the federal courts.



This month, current Dorot Fellow **Hayley Durudogan** shares her experience at AFJ. (Last month, we heard from AFJ's other Dorot Fellow [Brianna Davis](#).)

What drew you to AFJ?

When it comes to judicial nominations and confirmations work, Alliance for Justice is the place to be! Since the 1970s, AFJ has been at the forefront of progressive efforts to build a stronger, more diverse judiciary; I wanted to be part of an organization with such an incredible history.

Describe a typical day/week of work for you!

A “typical day at AFJ” is much like a “typical day on the Hill” — it doesn’t exist. This day-to-day variability is perfect for me, however. I love that on Monday I could be finishing up a nominee report, while on Tuesday I could be in Hill meetings, and then on Wednesday I could be writing a blog post. The variability helps me gain new skills and hone old ones, and you can’t ask for much more in a workplace — I enjoy it tremendously.



I wish more people understood how the judicial nominations and confirmations processes work. In school, we learned about presidential and congressional elections, but students are rarely taught how federal judges come to sit on the bench (at least not in great detail). We need School House Rock to create a judiciary remix of “I’m just a bill sitting on Capitol Hill” entitled “I’m just a nominee sitting in Committee.”

Hayley Durudogan

Dorot Fellow

Head over to [our website](#) to read Hayley’s full interview, including her advice for people considering law school (don’t read too many Reddit threads!) and her favorite spot in DC for Thai drunken noodles.

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