

AFJ INSIDER

President's Message



Dear Friend,

It's hard to believe I am writing my final "President's Message" for the monthly all AFJ e-news, The Insider, we launched last year. It is bittersweet.

As you likely know, I will be leaving AFJ in late summer, but I will never leave our movement and cause. I am grateful for the opportunity to take my learnings and experiences to a position with a much larger platform and wider reach to effectuate the change we're all driving so hard towards.

But, before I go, **I want to thank you.** From the bottom of my heart. The support, both financial and moral, has been so galvanizing. With it, AFJ accomplished a remarkable amount of progress. The organization I found in September of 2021 is vastly different from the one that I will leave in September of 2024.

The most important piece of that progress is my remarkable team. AFJ's staff is stronger, more diverse, and deeply committed to our new mission. While there is much more to be achieved, I am humbled to see how far we have come, and grateful for the support that got us there.

The staff and leadership team we have built are poised to continue our work without pause, there will be no hiccups. While we search for a new permanent President, AFJ's VP of Strategy Keith Thirion (see Staff Profile below) and VP of Operations, Betsy Miller Kittredge will serve as interim Co-Presidents, supported by the decentralized and extraordinary leadership team, and all AFJ's staff.

And while there's so much more to be done, I will remain a loyal and faithful steward of our efforts. Our mission is core to my being: Alliance for Justice champions, defends, and enhances the promise of our multiracial, constitutional democracy. Our three core programs — Justice, Bolder Advocacy, and Outreach & Membership — make up the foundation of our enduring commitment. As Aristotle said more than two thousand years ago, “A constitution without a democracy is a tyranny.” He might have continued, “if you want to destroy a democracy, destroy its constitution.”

AFJ has born witness to the diminution and subversion of the Constitution for over four decades. But, like my hero Barbara Jordan, we have not stood idly by. We fight for judges because our rights are only as good as the people who interpret them, and we embolden nonprofit advocacy because nonprofits are how Americans make democracy real.

Once more, my thanks for the journey and for all the support. The foundation we have built will catapult AFJ into the next phase of our fight to champion, defend and enhance constitutional democracy.

Onward and with gratitude,
Rakim



Our Impact

Federal Courts

Earlier this morning, our Program Director of Justice, Jake Faleschini, joined C-SPAN's Washington Journal to discuss upcoming Supreme Court decisions and ethics questions surrounding the court. [Click here to watch the entire segment.](#) You won't want to miss it!



Since May, our federal courts team has been navigating an ever-changing judicial landscape. President Biden announced his 50th and 51st slate of judicial nominees, and we are particularly pleased with the nominations of [Karla Campbell](#) (6th Cir.), [Catherine Henry](#) (ED PA), and [Mary Kay Lanthier](#) (D VT). Campbell, an all-star labor and economic justice lawyer, has a remarkable track record of fighting for American workers' rights. Henry and Lanthier bring a combined three decades of public defense experience to the bench, addressing the critical underrepresentation of public defenders in our federal courts.

We are also in the height of SCOTUS decision season, with 23 undecided cases left. Notable cases include *United States v. Rahimi* (Second Amendment), *Loper Bright* (administrative law), and *Trump v. United States* (presidential immunity). The Court recently issued decisions in [FDA v. AHM](#), where a unanimous opinion denied anti-abortion doctors' standing to challenge mifepristone, and [Garland v. Cargill](#), where a 6–3 opinion protected bump stocks from regulation, highlighting textualism inconsistencies. Additionally, recent Supreme Court ethics scandals underscore the urgent need for robust ethical regulations for justices. For more on these issues and key cases, please visit our [2023-2024 Supreme Court Term Preview](#).



Faces of Justice Volume 3



State Courts

In celebration of LGBTQ+ Pride Month, our state courts team is thrilled to announce the release of a special report, [The Faces of Justice Volume 3: LGBTQ+ State Supreme Court Justices](#). This report is the third installment in a series dedicated to showcasing the important role of diversity in the justice system. Dive into the history of LGBTQ+ state supreme court justices and their impact on justice for all. Last month, in honor of AAPI Heritage Month, we published [The Faces of Justice Volume 2: AAPI State Supreme Court Justices](#).

In other state court news, South Carolina Legislature is set to elect the next State Supreme Court justice from the candidates forwarded by the Judicial Merit Selection Commission. Following the withdrawal of Circuit Court Judge Jocelyn Newman, Court of Appeals Judges Blake Hewitt and Letitia Verdin remain in contention to replace retiring Justice Donald Beatty, the only Black justice on the court. Additionally, with the retirement of former Justice Kaye Hearn, the South Carolina Supreme Court currently has an all-male majority. Learn more about how to get involved in this vacancy [here](#).

In Connecticut, Chief Justice Richard Robinson will retire in September, two years before his term expires. Robinson, the first Black chief justice of the Connecticut Supreme Court, has served since 2013. Governor Ned Lamont will nominate his successor, requiring confirmation by the General Assembly. This follows a contentious previous nomination process last fall. Meanwhile, in Washington State, the upcoming November 5 election will see two incumbent justices running unopposed, while four candidates vie for the seat of retiring Justice Susan Owens. In recent elections, West Virginia and Idaho Supreme Court justices ran unopposed, and in Georgia, [Justice Andrew Pinson secured a full term on May 21](#), overcoming a challenge centered on his record with the state's six-week abortion ban.

Bolder Advocacy

Earlier this year, Bolder Advocacy released the 5th Edition of The Connection, a guide for 501(c)(3)s, 501(c)(4)s, and Political Organizations. Since then, exciting new developments have emerged, with an [FEC advisory opinion](#) impacting the work of some organizations engaged in door-to-door canvassing activities. For more details, [download your free copy](#) of The Connection and refer to a [client memo](#) by Trister, Ross, Schadler & Gold, PLLC for an in-depth analysis.



Tuesday
25

**How Your 501(c)(3)'s
Recordkeeping Can Enhance
Your Advocacy Potential**

Thursday
27

**Foundation Support for
Lobbying and Other Advocacy**



Advocacy Wins

Native American Youth And Family Center (NAYA)

Join us in celebrating the remarkable advocacy successes of Native American Youth And Family Center (NAYA). With support from Bolder Advocacy, NAYA has achieved significant milestones, from enhancing record-keeping practices to championing legislative victories. Through dynamic coalition building and expanded advocacy efforts, NAYA has made tangible impacts on issues vital to our communities. These accomplishments reflect NAYA's steadfast dedication to cultural empowerment and community well-being. Together, we're shaping policies and amplifying voices for a brighter future. Read more about their inspiring journey in [our latest blog](#).

Membership & Outreach Community

Our spotlighted member is [The Arc](#). The Arc is a nationwide network advocating for and serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), such as Down syndrome, autism, and cerebral palsy.



with Keith Thirion



In this Insider and next month's issue, we are highlighting our incoming Co-Presidents: [Keith Thirion](#) (current Vice President of Strategy) and [Betsy Miller Kittredge](#) (current Vice President of Operations and Chief of Staff)!

With nearly nine years at Alliance for Justice under his belt, Keith is one of AFJ's longest-tenured staff. In all that he does, Keith lends his compelling voice to championing the rights we hold so dear. Especially at this critical juncture in American democracy, we are truly grateful to have leaders such as Keith in this fight.

What are three words you'd use to describe AFJ today?

Vibrant, impactful, strategic.

What is your favorite part of working at AFJ?

Working with amazing colleagues to create lasting change. We have an incredible team, and the work we do touches every issue that drives me, from LGBTQ equality to climate and environment to racial justice to workers' rights and more. Our courts and nonprofit advocacy are critical to protecting the progressive advances we've made and moving closer to securing justice for all.

AFJ is dedicated to building power, transforming courts, and securing justice for all. Our work is ongoing; it also requires us to think in terms of decades, not just years. When the movement experiences losses, where do you find hope?

Harkening to my organizing roots, I find hope in the long term power we build even when we're losing in the short term. Having made it through the Trump years, I have no rose colored glasses about the impact on our world, but we saw incredible gains in progressive organizing with new organizations bursting onto the scene and established organizations embracing new strategies. And AFJ was at the forefront helping organizations maximize their advocacy and growing the courts movement to be ready on day one of the Biden administration.

And lastly: What are your go-to spots in DC for relaxing and decompressing from work?

I'm always up for finding a new restaurant or coffee shop, but my go-to's include Copycat, Slash Run, and The Little Grand. I also love DC's theater scene, namely Studio Theatre, Mosaic Theater at Atlas, Keegan, and Woolly Mammoth.

[Read the full interview here.](#)

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