

AFJ INSIDER



Dear Friend,

It's hard to believe I've now passed the six-month mark in my presidency at the Alliance for Justice, and we are already preparing for the end-of-year. There's no question that 2025 has presented extraordinary challenges for justice and our collective work to realize a true multiracial democracy. But as we look toward 2026, I want to take a moment to reflect on the ways we've fought back and on the extraordinary work we've done together this year. Nonprofits are safer; the extremist records of judicial nominees are more scrutinized, and AFJ's 135+ members are stronger, thanks to the work of AFJ and you, our supporters. **In this season of gratitude, thank you for standing with us.**

More than ever, we need civil society to stand boldly against illegal executive actions and to be a resource for communities facing more desperate need. AFJ has always been a national leader in ensuring the safety of nonprofit organizations through our **Bolder Advocacy** work, which a funder recently called "*the country's most important resource*" for nonprofits. And in this increasingly hostile landscape, we have also launched the **Nonprofit Legal Defense Network**, and we began working on **AFJ Law** to take our support even further. You may remember both from the October issue of AFJ's Insider. You can meet the new [Director of AFJ Law](#), who was profiled last month, or learn more about NLDN by going [here](#).

AFJ's work on **judicial nominations** has always been the nation's go-to source for timely, accurate information on federal judicial nominees. But under the Trump administration, this has become an even more vital resource and a crucial, historical public record. While past administrations have customarily announced their nominees at least 28 days prior to their hearing, giving the public time to evaluate their qualifications, the Trump administration has announced them as close as just two days before hearings, frequently on TruthSocial.

As a result, **AFJ's research has often been the only public resource available.** In fact, our judicial nominations tracker has been cited by **Bloomberg Law, Reuters,** and local outlets because we provide what no one else does: transparency and accountability for lifetime judicial appointments. By exposing extremist nominees' records, we equip a broader public advocacy strategy to fight for the independence of our courts, like in my recent [interview with Marc Elias](#) focused on judicial accountability to safeguard democracy.

These efforts, and others, are part of what we are calling **"deep change work"** building long-term infrastructure for justice, strengthening the field, and supporting nonprofits on the frontlines.

In my first six months as president, I've seen firsthand the energy and love that surrounds AFJ. And I want to thank **you,** once again, for standing with us and for welcoming me so warmly into the AFJ family. It's the dedication of our staff, the courage of our nonprofit partners, and **you all, the generosity of our supporters,** that makes this work possible.

As you think about your end-of-year giving, please keep AFJ in mind, where your gift will be matched, 1:1, by a generous donor – up to \$175,000!

Justice is worth fighting for—and together, we can win.

Thank you for standing with us.

Thank you,

Rachel Rossi

President of Alliance for Justice



How We Fight Matters

Federal Courts

Trump's Judicial Nominees

- The Senate confirmed several nominees across the last month, and with limited exceptions, nearly all were confirmed on party lines. Three circuit court nominees, [Eric Tung](#) (9th Circuit), [Joshua Dunlap](#) (1st Circuit), and [Rebecca Taibleson](#) (7th Circuit), were confirmed, along with seven district court nominees: [Ann-Leigh Gaylord Moe](#) (Middle District of Florida), [Jordan Pratt](#) (Middle District of Florida), [Edmund LaCour](#) (Northern District of Alabama), [William Mercer](#) (District Court of Montana), [Chad Meredith](#) (Eastern District of Kentucky), [Bill Lewis](#) (Middle District of Alabama, confirmed 58–40), and [Harold Mooty](#) (Northern District of Alabama, confirmed 66–32).
- Two Mississippi nominees, [Robert Chamberlin](#) and [James Maxwell](#), were advanced out of the Senate Judiciary Committee on party line votes after being stalled since September.
- In a break from judicial nomination norms, Trump announced two new judicial nominations on Truth Social less than 48 hours before their scheduled Senate Judiciary hearings: [William “Will” Crain](#) (Eastern District of Louisiana) and [Alexander Van Hook](#) (Western District of Louisiana). They have since had their operative markups in the Senate Judiciary Committee and were advanced out of the committee — Crain on a party-line vote.
- Trump also did not formally announce his next set of three nominees for the federal bench. Instead, the Senate Judiciary Committee received completed questionnaires for these candidates, with no public or formal announcement from the White House. The nominees are [David Fowlkes](#) (Western District of Arkansas), [Nicholas Ganjei](#) (Southern District of Texas), and [Aaron Peterson](#) (District Court of Alaska). The Senate Judiciary Committee held their hearings on November 20th.
- Lastly, Trump also announced his next slate of new judicial nominations late last week on Truth Social: [Justin Olson](#) (District Court for the Southern District of Indiana), [Brian Lea](#) (District Court for the Western District of Tennessee), and [Megan Benton](#) (District Court for the Western District of Missouri).

State Courts

Three Pennsylvania Supreme Court justices, all Democrats, were [retained by wide margins](#) to the state's highest court in the November 4 election. Pennsylvania Supreme Court justices are first elected to the court in partisan elections; justices who wish to remain on the court after their initial 10-year term run in retention elections, in which voters are asked to decide whether a justice should serve another 10-year term or be removed from the court. Past retention elections had typically seen justices easily retained, with little attention paid to their races. But this year, following a pattern that has emerged in other battleground state supreme court elections in recent years, the three justices faced intense campaigns from state and national Republicans who attacked their judicial records and urged voters to remove them from the court. If the Republicans had succeeded, the court's partisan balance would have shifted from five Democrats and two Republicans to an evenly split bench of two Democrats and two Republicans. With the state constitution requiring the state senate, controlled by Republicans, to confirm any interim appointment made by the governor, a Democrat, the seats may have gone vacant until new justices could be elected in a partisan election in November 2027. This scenario, which Republicans were hoping to trigger, likely would have left the court deadlocked on many important issues it considered while comprising only four members.

The increased attention on state supreme courts in recent election cycles may be due to the key role these courts played in battleground states in preserving the integrity of the 2020 presidential election. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court issued several key rulings in the weeks and months following the 2020 election in response to lawyers for then-President Trump, who asked the court to overturn the results of the election in Pennsylvania, alleging fraud in the state's mail-in ballot system and complaining that Republican poll watchers had been prevented from adequately observing ballot counting. The court rejected all the claims filed by Trump and his allies that sought to exclude certain ballots from the final tally, with the three justices Republicans tried to remove from the court in this month's election consistently joining the majority. Trump ultimately lost Pennsylvania by more than 80,000 votes in the 2020 election. Some court watchers had expressed concern that Republicans were seeking to deadlock or even take control of the court before next year's midterms and the 2028 presidential election, when Pennsylvania — which elected Trump by more than 120,000 votes in the 2024 presidential election — is certain to play a central role once again.

Bolder Advocacy

In recent months, nonprofits across the country have successfully advocated for critical local and state-level reforms. In Colorado, a coalition of nonprofits [passed two legislatively referred ballot measures](#) designed to increase funding for the state's Healthy School Meals for All program. And in Texas, advocates scored another legislative win when they convinced the [Houston City Council](#) to [approve \\$100 million for housing repairs](#) as part of the city's disaster recovery plan.

To assist groups like these, our Bolder Advocacy team continues to publish new resources detailing the rules nonprofits need to know when engaging in grassroots advocacy campaigns. The latest additions to our local and state law resource library include two factsheets for groups working to impact public policy in California. Our new ["Lobbying Decoded"](#) factsheet provides information about the lobbying disclosure rules that apply to county-level advocacy in Los Angeles. We also created a chart with helpful information regarding [California city, county, school, and special district lobbying ordinances](#). We hope that through resources like these, nonprofits will feel even more confident advocating for local and state-level reforms that [protect their ability](#) to carry out bold advocacy campaigns and support the needs of their communities.



Membership & Outreach

ICYMI: On Tuesday, November 18, AFJ President Rachel Rossi moderated the virtual discussion, “Holding Court: The Judicial Backstop During the Government Shutdown.” You can watch the discussion [here](#). Rachel was joined by Lisa Wayne, Executive Director of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (NACDL); Amelia O'Rourke-Owens, Executive Director of Resilience Solutions and former CFPB Union steward; and Kristin Bateman, Senior Counsel at Democracy Forward.

AFJ, in partnership with People's Parity Project and other organizations, co-hosted the Lawyers March for Democracy on Saturday, November 14 outside the Supreme Court. Legal professionals and progressive allies gathered en masse to say: “We will not stand silent as the Supreme Court abandons the rule of law and our constitution. We will not stand aside in the face of authoritarianism. This is just the beginning of our legal resistance movement.”

Team Spotlight



We are thrilled to introduce AFJ's new board chair, **Madeline (Maddy) deLone**, a longtime champion of justice, a visionary nonprofit leader, and a deeply valued member of the AFJ community. Since joining our board in 2020, Maddy has played an essential role in shaping AFJ's strategic direction and strengthening our organizational foundation. Now, as she steps into the role of board chair, we are honored to highlight her extraordinary career, her impact, and her unwavering commitment to advancing justice. Read more about Maddy's incredible career and her new role at AFJ [here](#).

Donor Profile

Our September Sustainer campaign was a success! Each new sustainer was entered into a raffle for AFJ swag. A very special shout-out to our sustainer raffle winner, **Jennifer Papp Newlin**! Our sustainers help AFJ receive predictable, continual funding throughout the year, and we are so grateful for their generosity.

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Alliance for Justice
11 Dupont Circle NW
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20036
United States