

AFJ INSIDER



Dear Friend,

Less than one month into Trump's second term, the administration's assaults on civil, political, and other human rights, as well as attempts to dismantle our democracy have been breathtaking and, in most cases, blatantly unconstitutional. But judges, nonprofits, cities, states, and we the people are fighting back.

Our courts, at times, have held the line. Our history of advocating for qualified, diverse judges committed to equal justice has had a critical impact.

- **Judge Loren Alikhan**, appointed by President Biden, blocked (and then extended the block) on the Trump administration's bogus federal funding freeze.
- **Judge Amir Ali**, appointed by President Biden, found that Trump's foreign aid freeze was almost certainly an illegal and arbitrary abuse of executive power, and ordered the immediate restoration of all international assistance.
- **Judge Amy Berman Jackson**, appointed by President Obama, blocked the President's order to fire Special Counsel Hampton Dillinger, the head of the federal office that investigates government corruption and protects whistleblowers.
- **Judge Joseph Norman Laplante**, appointed by President George W. Bush, was the third judge to block Trump's order ending birthright citizenship for children of undocumented immigrants.
- Judge Royce Lamberth, appointed by President Reagan, temporarily blocked prison officials from moving transgender women to men's facilities.
- **Judge Carl Nichols**, appointed by President Trump, ordered a temporary halt to plans to put almost 3,000 U.S. AID employees on paid leave and stopped the 30-day deadline for USAID staffers to return home at government expense.

But it's not only judges.

The **Worcester, Massachusetts** city council just voted, 9-2, to make Worcester a sanctuary city after a local organization Queer Residents of Worcester and Our Allies filed a petition which *"specifically asks the city to not cooperate with federal and state policies aimed at harming transgender and gender diverse people, and to ensure that the LGBTQ+ community here has access to healthcare, housing, education, and employment without fear of discrimination."*

In **Dallas, Texas**, the interim chief of police has repeatedly reassured the immigrant community that his force will not take part in any deportation raids or arrests currently being carried out by ICE at the behest of the Trump administration.

In **Michigan**, Corewell Health, one of the state's largest health care providers did the right thing and restored gender affirming care for minors after intense advocacy by community members, organizations, elected officials, and more.

The resistance is mounting. While the onslaught of hourly updates is overwhelming to all of us, we remain focused on defending institutions core to our democracy: our courts and the role of nonprofits in protecting our rights. It's going to take all of us to fight back. Join us.

Onward,

Keith Thirion

Interim Co-President



How We Fight Matters

Federal Courts

AFJ will steadfastly oppose all unqualified nominees and those who threaten our democracy, civil rights, and the rule of law. We expect that will be most, if not all, of them. As it currently stands, Trump has 53 lifetime judicial vacancies to fill: four circuit court seats and 49 district court seats. You can rely on us to conduct deep dives into the backgrounds of nominees, forecast the destruction they may cause, and instruct our members on how to take action to prevent any unqualified or atrocious nominees from taking the bench.

So far, AFJ has published two letters of opposition to two Trump-loyalist executive branch nominees: [Pam Bondi](#) (now United States Attorney General) and [Kash Patel](#) (nominated to serve as Director of the FBI).

Fair-minded, qualified judges are needed now more than ever to provide a critical check on this unruly executive branch. Recently, our federal courts have been a vital backstop in the fight to push back against Trump's draconian executive orders:

- [Judge Paul A. Engelmayer](#) (S.D.N.Y.) restricted Elon Musk's government efficiency program from accessing the Treasury Department's data systems, citing concerns that doing so could cause "irreparable harm."
- Judges [Montecalvo](#) and [Rikelman](#), both on the Court of Appeals for the First Circuit, [denied](#) the Trump administration's request to block a lower court ruling. That ruling, issued by Judge John McConnell (D.R.I.), had previously blocked Trump's executive order to freeze federal funding.

State Courts

NOTABLE RECENT APPOINTMENTS

- Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen (R) selected 5th Judicial District Court judge and former career prosecutor Jason Bergevin to serve as the supreme court justice representing the state's 5th judicial district.
- Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R) appointed Texas Supreme Court Justice Jimmy Blacklock to become the court's next chief justice following the retirement of the court's longtime chief justice Nathan Hecht. On the same day, Abbott appointed his general counsel, James Sullivan, to fill the vacancy in the Place 2 seat left by his elevation of Blacklock.

- Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont (D) selected appellate court Judge William H. Bright Jr. to fill the vacancy created by Justice Raheem Mullins's elevation to chief justice in the fall of 2024.
- Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs (D) selected Arizona Court of Appeals Judge Maria Elena Cruz to fill a vacancy on the Arizona Supreme Court left by the retirement of former justice Robert Brutinel. Cruz is the first Black woman and the first Latina to join the state's highest court.



AFJ APPLAUDS

The Nomination of Judge Maria Elena Cruz, the *first* Afro-Latina woman to serve on the state's highest court

COMING UP

Hawaii's judicial nominating commission is currently seeking applicants to fill the vacancy that will be created by the impending retirement of Hawaii Supreme Court Chief Justice Mark Rektenwald. The commission will interview applicants and forward finalists to Gov. Josh Green (D). Green will choose a finalist, who must be confirmed to the 10-year term by the state senate. The deadline to submit an application for consideration to fill the vacancy is **February 20, 2025**. Information about submitting an application [can be found here](#).

Bolder Advocacy

Bolder Advocacy's newly updated ***Robocalling Rules*** guide is here to help your nonprofit reach more people while staying on the right side of FCC, FEC, and FTC regulations. Whether you're mobilizing voters, rallying supporters, or launching an advocacy campaign, this is your must-have playbook for making the most of robocalls and robotexts — check it out now! Speaking of playbooks, in case you missed it — ***The Advocacy Playbook social justice series*** is also complete!

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. The full series of eight publications is live, covering environmental justice, criminal legal reform, gender and reproductive justice, labor and economic justice, LGBTQ+ and HIV communities, health disability rights, voting rights, and immigrant rights. These resources are here to help you navigate advocacy rules with confidence!

We are also excited to announce our new ***"Advocacy Check-up: Nonprofit Self-Assessment"*** resource. This tool is designed to help 501(c)(3) public charities assess their overall compliance with federal and state advocacy tracking and reporting requirements and identify opportunities to build organizational advocacy capacity.



Don't miss our latest video series, Bolder Basics, starring our Bolder Advocacy counsel, Brittany Hacker. The series is your go-to guide for understanding nonprofits — how they work, why they matter, and how you can make an impact. Follow along on Instagram and Tik Tok. Lastly, Bolder Advocacy is here to help with our new [on-demand nonprofit advocacy trainings](#), available 24/7 to fit your schedule. 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 are thrilled to uplift our newest member, [The Jeremiah Program](#). The Jeremiah Program is a national organization focused on disrupting the cycle of poverty for single mothers and their children by providing a holistic approach that includes access to college, quality early childhood education, safe housing, career support, and a supportive community, aiming to empower mothers to achieve economic mobility while supporting their children's development as well. Learn more about them [here](#).

Staff Profile: Tish Gotell Faulks



Victor Rivera Labiosa

Bilingual Counsel, Bolder Advocacy
Based in Houston, TX

**Building Power, One Community at a Time:
How Victor Fuels Advocacy and Hope in Houston**

When asked how he maintains hope in this political landscape, and how he reminds others to remain hopeful, Victor refers to his degree in history and his understanding that throughout history, there are ups and downs, ebbs and flows, progress and regress. But always, arguably the most important work, and the change that most impacts people's day-to-day life happens at the community level. Neighbors help neighbors build community and positive change. Holding that awareness of history, and the mindset that helping each other is how to make change, allows him to keep hopeful and inspire hope in others.

Victor joined AFJ in January 2022 as part of our Texas Bolder Advocacy team. Previously, he lived and worked in Puerto Rico, for a law firm specializing in real estate and corporate affairs as an associate whilst waiting for his bar admission. He moved to Texas after the pandemic hit, to be with his then-girlfriend, now spouse and with the recognition that he wanted to change his work environment. Throughout law school he'd worked in the law school practicum clinic supporting immigrants' rights organizations and individual immigrants, with their visa applications and other processes.

He was drawn to AFJ, and this position on the Bolder Advocacy team, because there was an appeal of "working with an organization that worked on so many issues — immigration, health equity, and more." He also was excited by the idea of helping Spanish speakers, the Spanish speaking community, and community leaders and organizations in Houston to have a bigger voice. He says, "Bolder Advocacy is focused on helping other nonprofit organizations understand what they can and cannot do per their tax-exempt status and providing other tools and resources and a helping hand – helping them understand that they can do so much more with their own voices and as nonprofits and if they join forces with other nonprofit organizations towards their goals."

Victor lives in Houston with his wife, a veterinarian, and their four rescue mutts: Duke, Leo, Benny, and Santi. As a metaphor for this time we're living through, we must keep moving. To that end, Victor is an avid runner and marathoner. He's run the Houston marathon twice, the Chicago marathon once, and will run the Berlin marathon later this year. Through running, he keeps moving, giving him the power to keep moving professionally in his work in Houston and with AFJ.

[Read the full profile on Victor here.](#)

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

What concerns you now and in the future?

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

DONATE



If you believe you received this message in error or wish to no longer receive email from us, please [unsubscribe](#).

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