

AFJ INSIDER



Dear Friend,

Democracy is not a historic premise or a lofty ideal. **It's about people. That is what drives us at AFJ**, even in the darkest moments facing our country today.

On January 18, 2025, as a Biden administration appointee walking out of the Justice Department one last time, I dreaded the dismantling of all the good we fought for.

And in just one year, the impact of the Trump administration has been even worse than expected: a cruel, reckless wrecking ball demolishing institutions, evaporating rights, ignoring science, warping education, trampling the rule of law, and erasing decades of progress. **At a time when the only remaining guardrails protecting our democracy are the courts, and the people, through the advocacy of civil society, AFJ is the only national organization leading to protect and fortify both.**

When nonprofits lose funding, face congressional investigation, and are threatened with the loss of their nonprofit status, the voice of the people is silenced, and the critical services these groups provide for the people who need them the most are eliminated. When courts are stacked with Trump loyalists, it green lights even more harmful and illegal executive actions — from disappearing people to countries they've never known, to enacting harmful economic policies and firings that drive low-income communities into deeper poverty.

I am privileged to lead AFJ at this time in our country. This work that we're engaged in is deep, powerful, and change-making. Whether it is advancing independent, fair, and professionally diverse lawyers to become judges on the federal, state, and magistrate bench, or to launch a program to provide legal guidance to nonprofits under attack, **AFJ is leading the way.**

And together with our 130+ member organizations, we are building power and standing with nonprofits and communities to fight back against our country's free fall into authoritarianism.

This work is hard, frustrating, and arduous. At times, it can feel impossible. But doing it in partnership with AFJ's incredible staff, Board, member organizations, and community supporters is joyful and rewarding. When we stand together, we are stronger than we think. Thank you for joining us in this fight for democracy and justice, for the people.

Thank you,

Rachel Rossi

President of Alliance for Justice

P.S. As you think about your end of year giving, please consider AFJ. Right now, every gift is matched, 1:1, up to \$175,000! With your support, AFJ can secure \$350,000 more to fight with, heading into 2026.

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How We Fight Matters

Federal Courts

Trump's Judicial Nominees

- The Senate confirmed several nominees across the last month. These nominees included [David Bragdon](#) (Middle District of North Carolina), [Lindsey Freeman](#) (Middle District of North Carolina), [Susan Courtwright Rodriguez](#) (Western District of North Carolina), [Matthew Orso](#) (Western District of North Carolina), [Robert Chamberlin](#) (Northern District of Mississippi), [James Maxwell](#) (Northern District of Mississippi), and [William “Will” Crain](#) (Eastern District of Louisiana).
- As of today, there are four nominees who have been marked up and reported out of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and ready for Senate floor votes: [Alexander Van Hook](#) (Western District of Louisiana), [David Fowlkes](#) (Western District of Arkansas), [Nicholas Ganjei](#) (Southern District of Texas), and [Aaron Peterson](#) (Alaska). Alliance for Justice and five other advocacy organizations voiced [concerns](#) about Ganjei's background, which includes extensive ties to far-right extremist organizations. The groups also question whether Ganjei has demonstrated an ability to stand up against unconstitutional and authoritarian actions committed by the Trump administration.
- Trump's latest slate of judicial nominations had their Senate Judiciary Committee hearings today. The three nominees, [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), all worked at big, corporate-focused law firms and are active members of the Federalist Society. All three denied that Joe Biden had won the 2020 election.

State Courts

With the last state supreme court election of 2025 wrapping up just last month, important elections that will happen in 2026 are already taking shape. The filing period for candidates in Texas closed on December 8, 2025. Texas has a court of last resort for civil matters and one for criminal matters, and elects its high court judges in partisan elections. In 2026, four seats on the Texas Supreme Court and three seats on the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals will be on the ballot; all are held by Republicans. All four incumbent Supreme Court justices filed to run for re-election, with several also receiving Republican primary opponents, and each received at least one Democratic challenger.

Two of the three incumbent Court of Criminal Appeals judges did not file to run for new terms and will retire from the court when their current terms expire in January 2027. Several Republicans and Democrats filed to run for each seat. You can view the full list of candidates for every seat on the Texas Supreme Court and the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals in 2026 [here](#).

The filing period closes on Friday, December 19 for a seat on the North Carolina Supreme Court that will also be decided in a partisan election in 2026. Filing periods for several other states, including Tennessee, Kentucky, Wisconsin, Nevada, and Alabama, will close in January. Watch this space next month for AFJ's State Court Justice Project's 2026 Annual State of Justice report, with details about these and other 2026 state court elections, vacancies, and other important updates!

Bolder Advocacy

'Tis the season to reflect on both challenges and successes, and AFJ's Bolder Advocacy team is taking the time to do just that. While the last several months have proved immensely difficult for nonprofits working to advance their missions in the face of [legal, physical, and other threats](#), our team has carefully tracked these developments and created new resources to arm nonprofits with the confidence they need to continue their bold advocacy.

Just this year, we crafted our "[Break in Case of PANIC!](#)" hub to prepare nonprofits to weather the storm and strengthen their advocacy strategies, and we joined in partnership with We the Action to launch the [Nonprofit Legal Defense Network](#) for organizations looking to shore up their defenses in the face of ever-evolving threats to their existence and their work. Not only that, but we also expanded our on-demand webinar offerings to include training ([in English](#) and [Spanish](#)) on how to prepare for the potential of politically motivated attacks. And, we updated our "[Focus on Foundations](#)" resource page to encourage funders to boost their support of grassroots nonprofits, who are striving to protect our democracy and support our communities.

Bolder Advocacy is grateful to all of you for supporting us in this work, and we look forward to continuing to stand with you in solidarity in 2026 and beyond.



Membership & Outreach

ICYMI: On Wednesday, December 17, we hosted our last Holding Court of the year featuring Lisa Graves, author of the new book, *Without Precedent: How Chief Justice Roberts and His Accomplices Rewrote the Constitution and Dismantled Our Rights*. The discussion, moderated by AFJ president Rachel Rossi, covered the 20 years since John Roberts was appointed Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, along with what judicial reforms the progressive movement needs to champion. Watch Holding Court: How Chief Justice Roberts Dismantled Our Rights [here](#).

Not All Heroes Wear Capes



A rare moment of downtime for the BA team as they take a break from annual planning to take a cooking class!

Some Come with PowerPoints and IRS Regulations Expertise

In this year of unprecedented assaults on nonprofit organizations, Alliance for Justice and specifically, our Bolder Advocacy team, has stepped to the plate in extraordinary ways. Not only have we continued our singular efforts like webinars, workshops, and technical assistance (as of November 1, 2025, **Bolder Advocacy** held 260+ workshops and answered 700 TA requests, **served 6,500+ individuals** and **2,000+ nonprofits and foundations**), but members of the team have also stepped up in two significant ways.

1. The BA team has partnered with We the Action to launch the **Nonprofit Legal Defense Work**. Bolder Advocacy attorneys are training We the Action's network of 54,000 pro bono lawyers on nonprofit compliance and tax law – as of today, they've trained some 400+ lawyers to be more knowledgeable and therefore, more helpful, to nonprofit organizations struggling with compliance concerns. Further, along with We the Action, Bolder Advocacy has used its Advocacy Checklist tool as the basis for two legal clinics for nonprofit organizations with many more to come in 2026. Together, the attorneys walk nonprofits through the checklist to make sure their operations are completely compliant. This was on top of BA's usual work, and increased demands due to the Trump administration's constant and evolving threats to nonprofit organizations.

2. While AFJ Law will be a separate program from Bolder Advocacy that will provide actual legal advice (not solely education, the mandate of BA), staff from BA have been central and instrumental to developing this program on everything from vision to implementation, from who to serve to which software to use. When we formally launch AFJ Law next year as a pilot program, though it will stand apart from Bolder Advocacy, it will be because of the yeoman's work put in by that team's staff, above and beyond their traditional work.

In a time when heroes can be hard to find, there's no doubt that AFJ's Bolder Advocacy team deserves that recognition. **Thank you, BA, for all you do!**



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