

AFJ INSIDER

Dear Friend,



As we close out Black History Month, my heart is full of gratitude for this community and the shared commitment we bring to the fight for a fair and equitable democracy. In a time marked by upheaval — uncertainty on multiple fronts and communities feeling the strain of escalating state and institutional overreach — our work has never been more essential. That's why I'm especially thrilled to share something we've been working toward with great care and purpose: AFJ's latest [State Courts report](#).

State courts shape so much of our daily lives — our rights, our freedoms, and the integrity of our democracy — yet they often receive far less attention than federal courts, even as the stakes grow. This year's report highlights how few movement lawyers are appointed to state supreme courts, the record-breaking spending transforming judicial elections, and the significance of the 66 seats up for consideration across 32 states in 2026. It also outlines critical cases on criminal justice, gun safety, workers' rights, civil liberties, and reproductive freedom — areas where state courts increasingly serve as the final word.

I believe this report will be an invaluable resource for advocates, community partners, and everyone committed to protecting rights and strengthening democracy.

This month, we also honored the brilliance, resilience, and courage of Black leaders who have transformed our legal landscape. We were proud to [uplift the stories](#) of several remarkable Black justices and judges whose contributions continue to inspire AFJ's mission. Their commitment reminds us that representation on the bench is not symbolic — it is essential.

Thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for being part of this community of hope and action. Together, we are ensuring that our democracy — and the rights it guarantees — remain strong and protected for everyone.

With warmth and gratitude,

Rachel Rossi

President of Alliance for Justice

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How We Fight Matters

Federal Courts

This month, the Senate confirmed six more of Trump's judicial nominees, bringing the total number of federal judges confirmed in Trump's second term to 33. Trump also announced seven more judicial nominees on Truth Social, covering judicial positions in Montana, Kansas, South Carolina, and on the Court of International Trade. Justin Smith, Trump's personal lawyer, has been nominated to the Eighth Circuit, which would fill the only remaining circuit court vacancy. AFJ will continue to [dig into the records of these nominees](#) and will provide more information as we surface it.

[**View all of the unfit and unqualified nominees →**](#)

State Courts

Defending Democracy

State supreme courts are constantly changing.

- On Feb. 11, New Hampshire Gov. Kelly Ayotte's (R) executive council [confirmed](#) her nominee to fill a vacancy on the state's highest court, Daniel Will, in a 4-1 vote.
- On Feb. 17, Colorado Gov. Jared Polis (D) [appointed](#) 8th Judicial District Chief Judge Susan Blanco to fill a vacancy on the Colorado Supreme Court.
- On Feb. 18, South Dakota Gov. Kelly Armstrong (R) [selected](#) Mark Friesse from a pool of six finalists to fill an opening South Dakota Supreme Court.



Check back here for updates about these and other vacancies, as well as the 66 state supreme court seats in 32 states that will appear on ballots in 2026, from AFJ's State Courts team!

[Help protect our state courts →](#)



Our Momentum



Bolder Advocacy

Protecting Nonprofits on the Front Lines

It may still be winter, but things are heating up at state legislatures across the country. Our Senior State Law and Legislative Counsel, Maggie Ellinger-Locke, has [the latest](#) on several legislative proposals that could dramatically impact how nonprofits register voters, engage with donors, and mobilize their communities.

[Stand with nonprofits →](#)

MEMBERSHIP & OUTREACH

A Stronger Movement — Because of You

During these dark times, it is important to celebrate all our wins. See below for an update from AFJ member organization [Pueblo Unido](#) about their recent work on the ground:

"Pueblo Unido recently helped secure the release of two community members detained in Oregon by enrolling them in the Equity Corps of Oregon through our Navigation Team. Additionally, we supported two Washington residents facing unexpected ICE check-ins by connecting them with legal representation from Gibbs Houston Pauw. Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, we were able to cover their legal fees — and both individuals left their check-ins without being detained."

[Join the movement →](#)



PUEBLO UNIDO
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IN MEMORIAM



REMEMBERING LESLIE BLACK CORDES

We're honoring the life and legacy of Leslie Black Cordes, AFJ's former Vice President of Programs and Operations (2017–2021), who passed away on December 30, 2025.

From **helping shape landmark federal energy policy** to **strengthening nonprofits** and advancing justice at AFJ, Leslie brought decades of climate leadership, strategic brilliance, and open-door mentorship to every space she entered. Even in retirement, she continued her life's work — **supporting immigrant refugees** in the DC area with the same **generosity** and **care that defined her career**. Her impact on AFJ and the broader justice community will endure.

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REMAIN A LIFELINE
IN A TIME OF UNPRECEDENTED
ATTACKS ON OUR RIGHTS.

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