

The Bench Press

The Federal Judges Association Newsletter

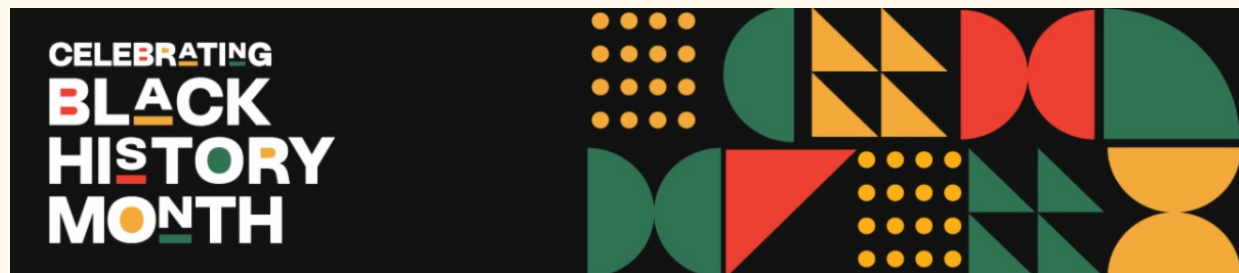
February 2024

Dear Federal Judges Association (FJA) Members:

February brings with it many occasions to mark: Valentine's Day, Mardi Gras, and the Leap Year. But February is also an important month to commemorate the history of those who have come before us. This month, we celebrate Black History to honor the courageous efforts and achievements of African Americans throughout history. We also observe Presidents' Day to honor the first President of the United States, George Washington, and those who have served after him. May we take this month to reflect on our past, cherish the present, and hope for the future.



FJA President, J. Michelle Childs,
United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit



New Member Highlight

The FJA Welcomes the Honorable Rachel Bloomekatz

The United States Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals welcomed the Honorable Rachel Bloomekatz on July 20, 2023.

Judge Bloomekatz was born in Detroit, Michigan and grew



up in Nashville, Tennessee. She received her bachelor's degree from Harvard College and her law degree from the University of California, Los Angeles School of Law.

After law school, Judge Bloomekatz worked as a law clerk for Judge Guido Calabresi on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. She then clerked for Chief Justice Margaret H. Marshall of the Massachusetts Supreme Court Judicial Court and spent one year as an assistant attorney general in the Massachusetts Attorney General's office. She then clerked for Justice Breyer on the U.S. Supreme Court.

Judge Bloomekatz subsequently entered private practice. She represented a diverse range of clients in appellate matters before the Ohio Supreme Court, the Third, Fourth, and Sixth Circuit Courts of Appeals, and the United State Supreme Court. At the time of her confirmation by the U.S. Senate, Judge Bloomekatz worked as a solo practitioner in Columbus, Ohio. Judge Bloomekatz has taught "Federal Courts" at the Ohio State University Moritz College of Law, as well as "Major Topics in Modern Constitutional Law" to Uruguayan law students at the Universidad Católica del Uruguay in the Facultad de Derecho.

President Biden nominated Judge Bloomekatz to the Circuit Court in May 2022. The United States Senate confirmed her nomination on July 18, 2023. At her confirmation hearing, Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown stated, "Ms. Bloomekatz brings with her not only impressive legal credentials but the empathy, the intellect, and the deep commitment to justice required to serve the people of the Sixth Circuit."

Judge Bloomekatz is a mother of two, and, if there is such a thing as spare time in her long list of obligations and commitments, in her spare time she loves woodworking. In particular, she loves refurbishing and repurposing old and discarded furniture, which she gifts to friends and family. Most recently, she refurbished an old desk and presented it to her son's friend as a Hanukkah gift.

We welcome Judge Bloomekatz as a new member. We look forward to meeting and working with her and welcome her input and involvement as a new judge.

Committee Updates

Our committees are working for you! Here are some highlights of their accomplishments!

Civics & Service

Chair: Robin S. Rosenbaum

Civics & Service is looking forward to a great 2024!

The Naturalization Civics Challenge—a program where high-school students who score at least a 90% on the U.S. citizenship test earn a certificate and an invitation to a local naturalization ceremony—had a wonderful inaugural

session, with 124 students from around the country participating.

Because of its reception, we have decided to make the Challenge a year-round program in honor of Constitution Day and Law Day, with two deadlines for submission each year: the first on May 1 and the second on December 31. Information on how students can participate is available on the FJA website. If you have contacts at any high schools, we'd be grateful if you passed the [link](#) or the flyer along to them.



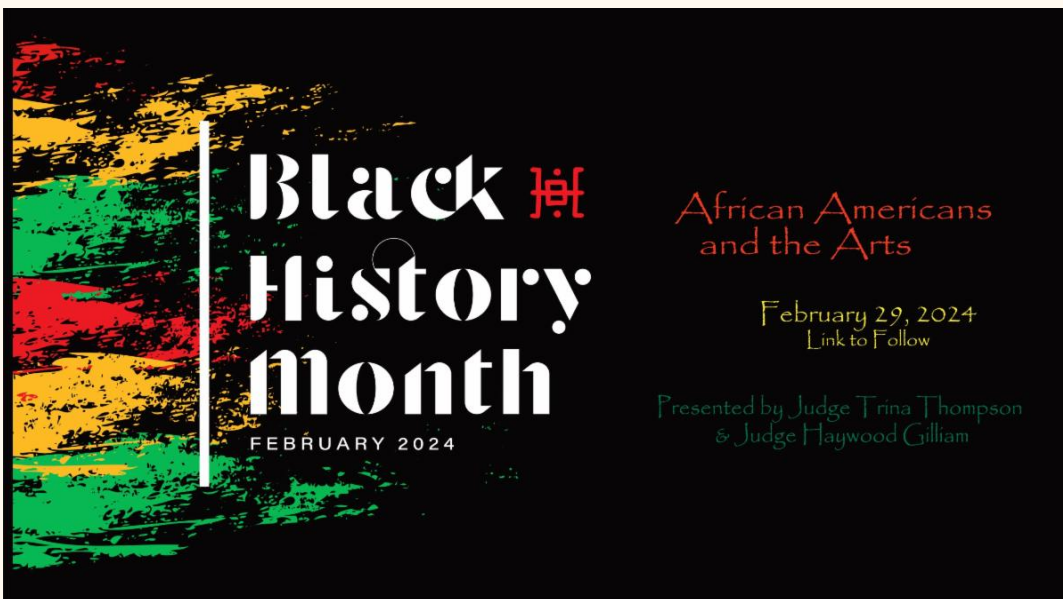
We are continuing our Clerkship Chat programs, which are panels on clerking that we hold at law schools that traditionally do not send many students to federal clerkships. Our programs in the fall were well-attended at Texas A&M School of Law and Arizona State University. In the spring, we look forward to holding two more Clerkship Chat programs. Upcoming newsletters will provide additional details.

And finally, we continue to gratefully accept submissions for the FJA's Speech Bank, which members can use as a starting place when they need to give speeches. The Speech Bank has speeches covering a variety of topics.

[Share the Civics Challenge](#)

Education

Co-Chairs: Leo M. Gordon and Pamela Pepper



African Americans and the Arts

*“Artists are the gatekeepers of truth.
We are civilization’s radical voice.”*

Paul Robeson (1898-1976),
concert artist, actor, athlete and activist

Celebrate Black History Month with your fellow Federal Judges Association colleagues. Our

very own Judge Trina Thompson and Judge Haywood Gilliam share their stories on how the arts have enriched their lives. **This pre-recorded webinar will be available on the FJA website on February, 29, 2024. A separate email will be sent to the membership when the webinar is live.**

Judge Thompson is a photographer and a watercolorist and introduces us to the artists who have inspired her in her own creative work. Judge Gilliam takes us on a journey through the evolution of jazz music and shares music from some of his favorite musicians.

We invite you to participate in this unique opportunity to experience Black History month through an artistic lens.

For more information about the impact of digital, literary, visual and performing arts by Black artists in our world, visit <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/initiatives/black-history-month-2024>.

About the Speakers

Judge Trina Thompson, United States District Court, Northern District of California

As an artist, I am committed to capturing the beauty and diversity of the human experience through my portraits and photography. I am drawn to the unique stories and personalities of individuals within our diverse community, and I strive to showcase their humanity and individuality in my work.

Through my paintings, I aim to create a connection between the viewer and the subject, allowing them to see the world through a different perspective and gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the people around them. I believe that every person has a story worth telling, and I am honored to be able to share these narratives through my art.

In my photography, I seek out the raw and authentic moments that reveal the true essence of my subjects. Whether it's a candid shot or a carefully composed portrait, I aim to capture the spirit and personality of each individual, celebrating their uniqueness and diversity.

My ultimate goal as an artist is to promote empathy, understanding, and inclusivity through my work. I hope that my portraits and photography serve as a reminder of the beauty and strength that can be found in our differences, and inspire others to embrace and celebrate the diverse community we live in.

Judge Haywood S. Gilliam, Jr., United States District Court, Northern District of California
Judge Haywood Gilliam is a lifelong lover of music, especially jazz, R&B and old-school hip-hop. He is also the tenor saxophonist for The Recusals, the unofficial band of the Northern District of California. The lineup of The Recusals includes eight Northern District judges as well as court personnel and local attorneys. The Recusals specialize in Motown classics and other R&B and jazz standards, and have performed at the Northern District Judicial Conference, the Ninth Circuit Conference and as special guests at the 2023 Law Rocks battle of the bands event in San Francisco.

Judge Gilliam has served as a United States District Judge for the Northern District of California since December 2014. He graduated magna cum laude from Yale College in 1991 and received his J.D. from Stanford Law School in 1994. After law school, Judge Gilliam clerked for the Honorable Thelton E. Henderson, then the Chief Judge for the Northern District of California. Judge Gilliam was in private practice from 1995 to 1998 and from 2006 to 2014. He worked at the U.S. Attorney's Office in San Francisco from 1999 to 2006, ultimately serving as Chief of the Securities Fraud Section. Before his appointment, Judge Gilliam's law practice focused on white collar criminal and regulatory matters and internal

investigations.

Judge Gilliam is one of the judges who presides over the Oakland venue of the Northern District's Conviction Alternatives Program (CAP) court. CAP provides qualifying defendants with a framework of supervision and services, with the goal of helping them learn from their mistakes, make better choices, engage in productive behavior, overcome substance abuse challenges, and reduce the risk of reoffending. Participants who successfully complete CAP generally receive a noncustodial sentence.

[View Past Webinars](#)

International Rule of Law

Chair: Cynthia M. Rufe



The Federal Judges Association is a member of the International Association of Judges. The IAJ is a non-political group of international judicial associations founded in Austria in 1953 and has headquarters in Rome. Like the FJA, the IAJ stands for the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law. Of the many objectives of the IAJ's work, its delegates from each member country's judicial association contribute to judicial education with four study commissions on constitutional law, civil proceedings, criminal law and labor law.

The First Study Commission on constitutional law is led by FJA Past-President Marilyn Huff, who was re-elected to serve another two-year term at the Commission's helm. She is ably supported by President Michelle Childs who was recently elected to serve on the First Study Commission's Advisory Committee. To understand the work of this Commission, please see its 2023 General Report and Conclusions which were presented by Judge Huff at the Annual IAJ Meeting in Taiwan. The Topic was *The Effects of Remote Work on the Judicial Workplace and the Administration of Justice*.

The 2024 Questionnaire topic is *The Effects of Artificial Intelligence on the Judiciary*. Judge Huff and the First Study Commission are now working on the FJA response which will be presented at the next IAJ annual meeting in South Africa in October. THANK YOU to Judge Huff and Judge Childs for your contributions!

Look for more information about our delegates' contributions to the Second, Third and Fourth Study Commissions in the next newsletter and on the FJA website.

[2023 General Report](#)

[2023 Conclusions](#)

[FJA's Response](#)

[Visit IAJ Website](#)

Membership

Chair: Nannette Jolivet Brown

The Membership Committee has completed, and the Strategic Planning Committee has approved, a revised and streamlined recruitment strategy and procedure to further enhance and develop membership efforts. To bolster the process of personally reaching out to newly appointed judges and following up with sitting judges who have not yet decided to join the FJA, we have appointed Circuit Liaisons. A Circuit Liaison is a member or members chosen from each circuit to be the direct contact or responsible for following up with newly appointed judges upon learning of their confirmation. The Circuit Liaisons will be copied on all communications between the FJA and the newly appointed judge, beginning with an introductory letter sent to the newly appointed judge from the FJA president and continuing to the email confirmation of their membership and welcome to the organization. The following Board and Executive Committee members have agreed to be “Circuit Liaisons:”



- First Circuit: Gustave Gelpi (Cir. Judge) and Patti Saris (DJ)
- Second Circuit: Janet Bond Arterton (Cir. Judge)
- Third Circuit: Esther Salas (DJ)
- Fourth Circuit: Pamela Harris (Cir. Judge)
- Fifth Circuit: Cory Wilson (Cir. Judge) and Marsha Crone (DJ)
- Sixth Circuit: James Carr (DJ)
- Seventh Circuit: Sara Darrow (DJ)
- Eighth Circuit: Stephen Bough (DJ)
- Ninth Circuit: Jacqueline Nguyen (Cir. Judge) and Dana Christianson (DJ)
- Tenth Circuit: Veronica Rossman (Cir. Judge)
- Eleventh Circuit: Mary Scriven (DJ)
- D.C. Circuit: Camelia Pillard and Michelle Childs
- Federal Circuit: Leonard Stark
- Court of International Trade: Timothy Reif and Leo M. Gordon

Congratulations to them for their selection and we thank them for their willingness to serve.

We also want to thank and acknowledge the support and outreach provided by FJA members Pam Pepper and Brian Jackson, who spread the good news, works and benefits of joining the FJA with newly appointed judges after teaching them at the September FJA Phase I new judge training. In recent discussions with FJC leadership, we confirmed the FJC’s assistance in providing us with dates and sites of the Phase I trainings and identifying the faculty to enable our continued outreach through our FJA members who are teaching in these programs. Our commitment to the FJC is that we will not promote the FJA during FJC programming. However, we will be allowed to discuss the organization during breaks or other times the programs are in recess. We have also gained permission to hold a reception after a program day of Phase II training this year where both appellate and district court judges appointed throughout the year will be invited to attend. We will begin planning as soon as a date for Phase II training is decided. The Phase II training is always held in Washington, DC.

The following judges have been confirmed since our January newsletter. Please join us in welcoming them to the judiciary and encourage their membership in the FJA!

Margret M. Garnett (S.D.N.Y.)
Karoline Mehalchick (M.D. Pa.)*
Jennifer L. Hall (D. Del.)

Jacquelyn D. Austin (D.S.C.)
John A. Kazen (S.D. Tex.)
Joshua Paul Kolar (7th Cir.)*
Cristal C. Briscoe (N.D. Ind.)*
Gretchen S. Lund (N.D. Ind.)
Kirk Edward Sherriff (E.D. Cal.)*
Shane Kato Crews (D. Colo.)
Sara E. Hill (N.D. Okla.)
John D. Russell (N.D. Okla.)

If you know any of these new judges, please reach out and encourage them to become a member of the FJA.

**Notes judges who have not yet been sworn in according to the information we have been provided.*

In Memoriam

We mourn the loss of **William Lee**, U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Indiana.

Pay and Benefits

Co-Chairs Leo M. Gordon and Dan A. Polster



The Pay & Benefits Committee is pleased to present its recently recorded webinar on Long-Term Care (“LTC”).

The webinar focuses on: (1) challenges for federal judges with government-supported LTC plans, like the CNA policy that was previously offered to federal judges and subscribed to by some of our members, and the existing, but modest, OPM LTC policy; and (2) options that exist in the

private marketplace.

The webinar features a discussion about these topics between James (“Jim”) DeLaTorre, the FJA’s insurance consultant, and the host judge Leo M. Gordon. Jim also discussed services, which are available to assist judges in navigating life events and which give rise to the need to invoke LTC policies, and other related services.

If there are other benefit issues that you would like the Pay & Benefits Committee to address, please contact either of the Committee’s co-chairs, Leo M. Gordon (Court of International Trade) or Dan Polster (NDOH).

[View LTC Recording](#)

Quadrennial

Co-Chairs: Cathy Bissoon and Sara Darrow

It's never too early to start planning! The Quadrennial Planning Committee held its inaugural meeting last month to begin preparing for the next Quadrennial to be held **April 27-29, 2026**. The members shared many exciting ideas, and we hope to build upon the amazing success of past Quads. We welcome any input from members. Please feel free to contact co-chairs Cathy Bissoon and Sara Darrow with your ideas!

Senior and Retired Judges

Co-Chairs: Larry Piersol and James G. Carr

The Senior Judge Staffing Subcommittee of the Judicial Resources Committee met by Zoom on January 11, 2024. President Judge J. Michelle Childs and Judge Larry Piersol attended and participated in the meeting.



Administrative Office staff presented statistics on the amount and the cost of work performed by senior status judges. Among the issues being considered is the cost of the services rendered by some senior judges where it is perceived by some that a small number of judges may have more staff than is warranted by their caseload. There are public perception concerns on this issue as well. Another issue appears to be what, if any, credit should be given for non-case related work and whether that credit should be consistent across the circuits. The Subcommittee also addressed what static costs should be excluded from any valuation of the “cost of maintaining senior judges,” where, for example, the cost of office space would not be reduced if a judge were not performing senior status duties.

A robust discussion ensued. These discussions were considered preliminary in nature. No consensus was reached as to the central issues that should be addressed, let alone what proposed solutions would be recommended. It is anticipated that the Subcommittee will decide which issues will receive full consideration.

No formal action was taken by the Subcommittee. The next Zoom meeting of the Subcommittee will be in February. President J. Michelle Childs and Larry Piersol will continue to be involved. If anyone wishes to have input into these issues, they should reach out to Judge Piersol at larry_piersol@sdd.uscourts.gov.

Finally, the Senior and Retired Judges Committee has begun work on a primer to be published in the newsletter addressing considerations a judge should take into account when deciding whether to fully retire or to take inactive senior status.

Announcements

USSC Judge Sentencing Data Report
by Stephen R. Bough, United States District Court,
Western District of Missouri

Every federal judge knows that the U.S. Sentencing Commission



was created by Congress in 1984 to reduce sentencing disparities and promote transparency and proportionality in sentencing. The USSC collects, analyzes, and distributes a broad range of information. Many judges do not know, however, that the Commission can provide individual judges data on their own sentencing practices, compared with their home district and the entire nation. Judge Carlton Reeves, current chair of the USSC, notes “sentencing is certainly one of our more challenging responsibilities, but the Commission has all kinds of information

available that can ease the burden—whether that be analyses of specific or unusual sentencing scenarios, or summaries of a judge’s own sentencing practices. I have found this to be a valuable service in my time on the bench, as have many of our current and former judge commissioners. I encourage all judges to review their individual sentencing practices from time to time. This service not only helps judges with specific sentencing decisions, but it also can help judges and the Commission bring more fairness and uniformity to sentencing.” Any judge is free to reach out to Glenn Schmitt, the Commission’s Director of Research and Data, at Gschmitt@ussc.gov, beginning April 1st, to make requests for data from the most recent year.

USSC Judge Sentencing Data Report

Upcoming Events



FJA Board Meeting

WHEN: April 17 - 19, 2024

WHERE: The Hyatt Centric Chicago Magnificent Mile

There will be an opportunity for FJA members to attend portions of the board meeting virtually by Zoom on Friday, April 19, 2024. Details will be announced in the March newsletter for registration access and a separate email invitation will be sent.

The Swiss Institute for the Judiciary is organizing a webinar series on the topic AI & Judiciary:

2.16.2024: From Golem to Chat GPT - What is AI? An introduction

3.1.2024: How is AI regulated - USA, Asia, Europe, Switzerland?

Current status and outlook

3.15.2024: : AI products today and in the future: What potential benefits for the judiciary?

4.5.2024: AI and credibility in the judiciary: how do they fit together?

4.19.2024: Good governance of AI in the judiciary - What does court leadership need to do?



These webinars might be interesting for judges elsewhere. The webinar language is mostly German but we are using translated captions so that everybody has the possibility to follow.

Registration



[Learn More](#)

*Registration is limited.
Sign-Up Soon!*

Judicial Renaissance, National Judicial Conference

WHEN: September 9-12, 2024

WHERE: Portuguese Center for Judicial Studies

The FJA has partnered with the National Judicial College to join them for a seminar and conference in Portugal.

During Judicial Renaissance, judges rediscover the foundations of justice as embodied within the scope of lasting human achievements.

March Edition | *The Bench Press*

Have a submission for the upcoming edition of The Bench Press? Please share it by **March 4, 2024**. We would love to share your special news with the membership. [Email us!](#)

[Email Us Your News](#)



J. Michelle Childs
President

Mary Scriven
Communications Committee Chair

Federal Judges Association | fja@federaljudgesassoc.org

Federal Judges Association | PO Box 107, Hoschton, GA 30548

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