



Federal Judges Association

The Bench Press

The Federal Judges Association Newsletter

January 2024



Dear Federal Judges Association (FJA) Members:

Happy New Year! I hope each of you had an enjoyable holiday season. January marks the start of 2024, bringing with it new beginnings, new resolutions, and new opportunities for growth. This month, we also honor the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose courage and perseverance paved the way for equality. Dr. King said, “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’” Let us all be reminded of Dr. King’s legacy of service to others. Thank you FJA judges for all that you do.



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



New Member Highlight

The FJA Welcomes the Honorable Kai N. Scott



The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania welcomed the Honorable Kai N. Scott as a United States District Judge on January 19, 2023.

The Honorable Kai N. Scott was born and raised in Philadelphia. She was educated in the Philadelphia public school system, attending the Julia R. Masterman School and the Philadelphia High School for Girls. She enrolled at Hampton University in Virginia. Judge Scott graduated with honors, obtaining a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology. She graduated from the West Virginia University College of Law graduating as the W.E.B DuBois Scholar.

Judge Scott worked as a law clerk for Judge Poorman of the Pennsylvania Bureau of Workers Compensation for two years following law school. She then started her career as a trial attorney in 1998 as an Assistant Defender at the Defender Association of Philadelphia. Judge Scott accepted a position as an Assistant Federal Defender at the Federal Community Defender Office for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania in 2004. Judge Scott served as the Chief of the Trial Unit at the Federal Community Defender Office in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania for four years before her judicial service.

The citizens of Philadelphia elected Judge Scott to a ten-year term as a Judge of the Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia County in November 2015. She began her term in January 2016. She presided over 600 cases as a judge in the criminal division of the Philadelphia County Court of Common Pleas.

President Biden nominated Judge Scott to the District Court in July 2022. The United States Senate confirmed her nomination on December 7, 2022. Along with her commitment to the legal profession and her many social and community activities, Judge Scott is a dedicated mother of a teenage daughter.

Committee Updates

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

Education

Co-Chairs: Leo Gordon and Pamela Pepper

The Education Committee focused on fun for the December 2023 Thirst for Knowledge Thursdays program. On the evening of Thursday, December 14, FJA member and Education Committee co-chair Leo Gordon (Court of International Trade) had a delightful conversation with Hank Zona, of “The Grapes Unwrapped,” about sparkling wines for the holidays (or any other time!).



Hank is a New Jersey-area event planner, writer and consultant on all things wine and spirits-related. He touched on many aspects of sparkling wines during the conversation with Judge Gordon—how to select a good sparkling wine, how to store sparkling wines, how to “save” leftover sparkling wine and wine-making regions that are making good sparklers. Hank advised that instead of holding on to that “special occasion” bottle for years while you wait for the right moment, just drink it and make now the right moment. Good advice in many areas of life.

2023 was a busy year for the newly formed Education Committee. From August until year’s end, the committee presented five programs—three Thirst for Knowledge Thursday programs (one with Professor Julie Empric discussing the portrayal of judges in literature, one with Dr. Diana Uchiyama on tips and suggestions for interacting with people struggling with mental illness and the December presentation on sparkling wines) and two heritage month programs (an October Hispanic Heritage Month program featuring FJA members Esther Salas of the District of New Jersey and Marina Garcia Marmolejo of the Southern District of Texas, and a November Native American Heritage Month program featuring FJA members Diane Humetewa (D. Arizona, Hopi Tribe), Lauren King (W.D. Washington, Muscogee (Creek) Nation) and Sunshine Sykes (C.D. California, Navajo Nation)). The recordings of some of these programs are still available on the FJA website on the “Members Only” section; if you missed them, please visit the website at your leisure and enjoy!

There are more programs to come in 2024. Stay tuned to the newsletter and to your email for the details. Happy New Year from the Education Committee!

[Past Webinars](#)

Ethics

Chair: Al Diaz



The New Year brings (we hope) great cheer, but also the annual requirement to prepare and file financial disclosure reports. While the 2023 report is not due until **May 15, 2024**, you should be aware of two recent changes to the gift and reimbursement reporting requirements.

First, the aggregate gift and reimbursement reporting threshold has increased to \$480 (from \$415). **Second**, any gift or reimbursement with a fair market value of \$192 (previously \$166) or less need not be aggregated for purposes of the reporting rules.



Code of Conduct Resources

Access Code of Conduct resources including the *Ethics Deskbook for United States Judges* on the J-Net at <https://jnet.ao.dcn/policy-guidance/ethics-and-financial-disclosure/ethics-deskbook-united-states-judges>

Need ethics advice? First, you may seek an informal opinion from me; Robert Deyling, Counsel to the Committee and Assistant General Counsel at the Administrative Office; and Michael Delman, Assistant General Counsel at the Administrative Office.

Second, you may request the advice of the full Committee through a formal opinion. To request a formal opinion, please e-mail the Chair of the Committee, Judge Jennifer Walker Elrod, or send your written request to:

Jennifer Walker Elrod
United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit
Bob Casey United States Courthouse
515 Rusk Street, Suite 12014
Houston, TX 77002

International Rule of Law

Chair: Cynthia Rufe

The Federal Judges Association is a member of the International Association of Judges. The IAJ is committed to preserving judicial independence and protecting judges around the world who find themselves reprimanded, removed from office, or jailed, and their families left destitute, only because they fulfilled their judicial responsibilities to uphold the rule of law.



The annual IAJ meeting was held in September 2023 in Taiwan. Along with educational presentations, to which our delegates contribute and lead, the assembly of judicial delegates from 93 countries, learned of the plight of judges in Poland who found themselves in need of public support. They addressed this need in an interesting and brave way. Linked below is the statement from IAJ President Duro Sessa calling for the

United Nations to name January 11th “International Day of Judicial Independence- 1000 Robes March,” as a symbol of the universal value of a democratic society and as a tribute to those who risk their lives and freedom to defend it.

After a more recent attack on the independence of judges in Yemen, the IAJ issued a statement concerning a Yemeni judge who was removed from his home and detained; his whereabouts remain unknown. Click below to read more.

More information about the activities of the IAJ and the FJA contributions to its mission can be located on the IAJ website.

[1000 Robes Day](#)

[Statement on Yemen](#)

[Visit IAJ Website](#)

Membership

Chair: Nannette Brown



The FJA Membership Committee wishes to welcome all new judges, congratulate judges taking senior status in 2024 and extends well wishes to all Article III judges as we embark on a new year and recommit ourselves to the values and principles we are sworn to protect. We enter 2024 with very strong membership numbers. Based on information provided to the FJA by various sources, as of January 8, 2024, we have 1,093 members of the Federal Judges’

Association out of a total of 1,423 total Article III judges.

There were 15 Article III judges confirmed between October and December 2023; six have not yet been sworn in, according to our most recent information. Judges must be sworn in to be eligible for membership. The recently confirmed judges are:

Margret M. Garnett (S.D.N.Y.) *
Jamel Semper (D.N.J.)
Jennifer L. Hall (D.Del.)*
Irma C. Ramirez (5th Cir.)
Brandon S. Long (E.D.La.)
Jerry Edwards, Jr. (W.D.La.)*
Jeffrey M. Bryan (D.Minn.)
Ana Isabel de Alba (9th Cir.)
Monica Ramirez (C.D. Cal.)
Shanlyn A.S. Park (D. Haw.)*
Micah W. J. Smith (D. Haw.)*
Richard E.N. Federico (10th Cir.)
Sara E. Hill (N.D.Okla.)*
John D. Russell (N.D.Okla.)*
Loren L. AliKhan (D.D.C.)

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

We welcome **Rachel Bloomekatz** (6th Cir.) as a new member. We look forward to meeting and working with her and welcome her input and involvement as a new judge.

We mourn the loss of **Edward Smith**, U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania and **LeRoy Hansen**, U.S. District Court for the District of Mexico.

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

Pay and Benefits

Co-Chairs Leo Gordon and Dan Polster

With the 2023 open season for health benefits behind us, the Pay & Benefits Committee is turning its attention to issues related to Long-Term Care (“LTC”). We have scheduled two webinars for **Thursday, February 8th**, one at 1:00 pm EST and the second at 3:00 pm EST. These times are designed to accommodate the members around their respective lunch breaks.



The webinars will focus 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 interactive webinars will feature a discussion about these topics between James (“Jim”) DeLaTorre, the FJA’s insurance consultant, and the host judge (Leo M. Gordon for the 1:00 pm session and John Gerrard for the 3:00 pm session). Feel free to submit questions in advance of the webinars to ensure that we address your concerns, or you can ask questions during the session. Jim will also discuss 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. Please mark your calendars for either of these webinars. If you cannot attend, we will post the webinars on the FJA website for your viewing at another time.

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).

Reserve Your Spot at an upcoming Long Term Care webinar!

[Register Here for 1:00PM](#)

[Register Here for 3:00PM](#)

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 Carr



Instead of addressing senior judge staffing at the November meeting of the Judicial Resources Committee, the Administrative Office determined that the senior judge staffing should be considered by a subcommittee of the Judicial Resources Committee. The subcommittee includes:

- Brian Miller (Eastern District of Arkansas), Chair of the Judicial Resources Committee
- Reena Raggi (Second Circuit)
- Terry Doughty (Western District of Louisiana)
- Beth Freeman (Northern District of California)
- Mary Rowland (Northern District of Illinois)

We understand that the subcommittee will report to the full committee, which will then report to the Budget Committee. The subcommittee held an organizational meeting the first week of December. The staff was asked to compile more information, such as senior judge trial data. As non-subcommittee members, we are being provided access to the relevant data at the meetings.

FJA President J. Michelle Childs and FJA Senior Judge Committee co-chair Larry Piersol attended the subcommittee zoom meeting on January 11, 2024 and represented the interests of the FJA at the meeting.

Legislative Update

Co-Chairs: William Kuntz, II and Charles Simpson

**By: David Best, Legislative Affairs Officer,
Administrative Office of the Courts**



Article III judgeship recommendations are approved by the Judicial Conference on a biennial basis and are then provided to Congress. Congress has not passed a comprehensive judgeship bill in more than 30 years.

At its March 2023 meeting, the Judicial Conference approved recommendations from the Judicial Resources Committee to add two permanent judgeships to the courts of appeals and 66 permanent judgeships to the district courts, convert seven temporary district court judgeships to permanent, and seek extension of two temporary district court judgeships for an additional five years.

[READ FULL UPDATE](#)

Announcements



Effective January 1, 2024, judges received an increase in compensation. Court of Appeals judges' salaries were increased to \$257,900 per year and all other Article III judges' salaries were increased to \$243,300 per year. The increases will appear in our February 1, 2024, salary payments.

The increases reflect the adjustment in the Cost of Living Allowance for federal employees. Judges were denied COLA increases for many years. We receive them now thanks to litigation efforts led by several FJA members under the leadership of Past Presidents Royal Furgeson (W.D. Texas, retired) and Margaret M. McKeown (9th Cir.).

Prior to the successful conclusion of the pay restoration litigation, judges' salaries were linked to congressional salaries. District judges received the same salary as members of Congress (other than a few leaders) and circuit judges received only a small amount more. Congress has not raised its compensation since 2009. But for the successful pay restoration efforts, judges' salaries would still be \$174,000 for district judges and \$184,500 for circuit judges. Instead, each judge receives about \$70,000 more each year. Because the link to congressional compensation has been permanently broken, the pay restoration effort has provided all judges with a benefit that keeps on giving and growing.

The FJA Pay and Benefits Committee, under the leadership of co-chairs Leo M. Gordon (Court of International Trade) and Dan Polster (N.D. Ohio), continues to watch for opportunities for a comprehensive compensation adjustment and work for improvement in other employment benefits. Please contact either of them if you are interested in participating in those efforts.



We are pleased to announce that beginning November 1, 2023, the FJA Executive Committee initiated a transition to a new association management company, Inspire Association Management Co. (Inspire AMC). The transition is scheduled for completion by January 5, 2024.

Jennifer Brinkley, our new Executive Director, is the founder and Chief Executive Officer of Inspire AMC. In 2005, Jennifer decided to pair her years of experience as an Executive Director of an Atlanta based law firm with her association board volunteer experience to start an association management company. Since then, Jennifer has worked alongside legal associations to develop, deliver, and expand their mission.

Amanda Davis is a Partner and the Chief Operating Officer of Inspire AMC. Amanda is also a former legal administrator of a boutique Atlanta law firm. Amanda fulfills the role of Operations Director within the association and oversees member management, website development, financial management, and other project management.

The FJA Executive Committee dedicated considerable time and effort to finding the right management partner to further the board's goals of enhancing the benefits we provide to our members. We are confident that Inspire AMC is the ideal choice. Already, Jennifer and

Amanda have begun collaborating with board members on developing future plans for FJA. This includes initiatives aimed at enhancing member benefits, raising awareness of our offerings, and strengthening our engagement through enhanced communication and educational opportunities.

Our former management company and Executive Director, Susan DeCoursey, have been an instrumental part of FJA's success thus far. We are grateful for their years of service to our association and their professional support during this transition. We wish them the very best in their future.

The Executive Board is excited about the positive changes and opportunities that Inspire AMC brings to us and believes you will be as well. Their proactive, hands-on approach aligns with our commitment to serving our members with excellence. We anticipate a seamless transition and a strong partnership that will benefit all members of our esteemed association.

Should you have any questions or concerns during this transition, please feel free to reach out to President Childs or our new management team at (888) 329-1941 or fja@federaljudgesassoc.org.

Upcoming Events



FJA Board Meeting

WHEN: April 17 - 19, 2024

WHERE: The Hyatt Centric
Chicago Magnificent Mile



[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.

February Edition | *The Bench Press*

Have a submission for the upcoming edition of *The Bench Press*? Please share it by **February 5, 2024**.

We would love to share your member news, important information for our members and committee updates.

[Email Us Your News](#)



J. Michelle Childs
President

Mary Scriven
Communications Committee Chair

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