

# The Bench Press

*The Federal Judges Association Newsletter*

October 2024

Dear Federal Judges Association (FJA) Members:

As we enter the heart of October, a month often known for a transition to Fall and unpredictable weather, we find ourselves in the midst of storm season. This month has already brought two significant hurricanes to states in the Southeast coast, leaving behind paths of destruction. On behalf of the FJA executive committee, our hearts go out to those in our judicial family who have been impacted by Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton, and we stand in solidarity with you during this challenging time.



At the same time, another type of storm is brewing in the judicial world. As mentioned in our last newsletter, the JUDGES Act calls for 66 new permanent judgeships in the jurisdictions most burdened by the increase in caseloads. The bill is currently pending before the House and is intended to be brought to the floor in November (after the recess). We urge that all judges in the affected districts reach out to their local representatives and continue the momentum during this recess period. While natural disasters may be beyond our control, we can navigate this “judicial storm” and shape the future of the judiciary for years to come.

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

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## Relief Resources on Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton

Last week, Hurricane Milton made landfall on the west coast of Florida, causing widespread damage and destruction. This storm arrived just a week after Hurricane Helene had already significantly impacted the region, compounding the challenges for affected communities. For those in our judicial family impacted by the hurricanes, please refer to our previous press release on disaster relief resources for Hurricane Helene. In addition to the resources for federal court staff listed in the press release, those in west Florida affected by Hurricane Milton may also look to the state bar hurricane information (<https://www.floridabar.org/public/consumer/hurricaneinfo/>). As we continue to face the unpredictable nature of storm season, we must remember the resilience in our communities. Please stay safe and reach out for support if needed.

# Member Spotlight

## **Second Circuit Judge Sarah A. L. Merriam Being Different and Making a Difference**



**Judge Sarah Merriam (left) and Judge Jennifer Thurston (right) pictured at their graduation from Duke University's Master of Laws program in 2018.**

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“Go do good, interesting things. Do them well, and it will work out.” Sarah A.L. Merriam often shares this advice with young people, but she has also lived it.

Born of her active-duty navy officer-father and her teacher-mother, Sarah Ann Leilani Merriam, began her life's journey in Honolulu, Hawaii. At six months old, her short stint in paradise ended when her family moved to North Carolina, and then, later, to New Haven, Connecticut, where she was raised.

Her father left active-duty service and attended law school (Sarah, as a grade-schooler, sometimes attended classes with him.) Her mother then left teaching to become a lawyer when Sarah was in high school. Despite having parents who both worked in the law, and while it is probably not too surprising that Sarah, ultimately, followed in their footsteps, Sarah didn't see her life going that way just yet.

Sarah eventually enrolled at Georgetown University where she studied comparative government and where her interest in environmental politics took root. Sarah's interest in state and local politics led her to volunteer for, and then work for, several political campaigns. Sarah loved nothing more than walking precincts and encouraging people to become involved in the political process. At the same time, she worked other jobs – everything from running a fuel dock at a marina to serving fried clams at a counter to being a live-in nanny for three small children.

Her love of grassroots action was motivated by a desire to help others – real people with real

problems. After graduating from college, and putting her skills in politics to work, Judge Merriam worked as the Political Director for a public employees' union. Working closely with the union's attorneys and with political leaders, Judge Merriam decided that becoming a lawyer would better position her to help those who most needed it. Due to her work in labor relations, Judge Merriam was offered a scholarship to University of Connecticut School of Law. She excelled at UConn—she was ranked first in her class—and later transferred to Yale, where she completed her legal education.

After leaving law school, Judge Merriam clerked for District Judge Alvin W. Thompson. While her clerkship was scheduled to last for one year, she stayed for two, not only because she excelled at the job, but because she enjoyed it so much. It was in that role, as a law clerk at the trial court level, that she first sensed that she wanted to work in criminal defense, and, specifically as a federal public defender. She, subsequently, clerked for Judge Thomas J. Meskill in the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, before going into private practice, where she split her time between civil and criminal cases. Though she loved the work, and especially her criminal defense work, she left the law and returned to politics when she received the call to work on a congressional campaign.

When the campaign trail came to its end, Judge Merriam pondered what to do next. As luck would have it, a position with the Office of the Federal Public Defender for the District of Connecticut opened up. At the time, there were only six attorneys working in that office, and vacancies were rare. Aware of the importance of, and satisfaction that comes with, representing criminal defendants, Judge Merriam applied immediately, gratefully accepted the job, and worked in that position for the next eight years. She describes that opportunity as one of the most challenging but rewarding experiences of her life.

In 2015, Judge Merriam applied to become a Magistrate Judge in the District of Connecticut, though the Court, like many other Districts at that time, had never appointed an Assistant Federal Public Defender to a judicial role. Foreseeing the brilliant jurist she would become, the District of Connecticut Judges appointed Judge Merriam as a Magistrate Judge. Then, in 2021, President Joe Biden appointed Judge Merriam to be a District Judge for the District of Connecticut. Less than one year later, President Biden appointed her to be a Judge for the Second Circuit.

Judge Merriam believes that she is the first former Magistrate Judge to be appointed to the Second Circuit, and she is one of a very few to serve on the Court who have a background in criminal defense. Judge Merriam recognizes the importance of having a diversity of professional experience on the bench, saying: “I knew my professional background was different when I applied for the position, and I hoped that could help me make a difference.” Since becoming a Judge, she has appreciated how her great diversity of personal and professional experience, both on and off the bench, brings significant knowledge and insight to bear in each case.

When asked what advice she gives young people, Judge Merriam gave the advice that she has spent her adult life following: “Do things that give you real-life skills and make you interesting. Go do good, interesting things. Do them well, and it will all work out.”

## Committee Updates

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

## Ethics

*Chair: Albert Diaz*



The Committee on Codes of Conduct has published the latest version of the Ethics Quiz for Federal Judges. This quiz (click button below) includes questions on (1) privately funded seminars, and (2) disqualification based on a parent-subsidiary relationship between corporations. If paper isn't your thing, an electronic copy of the quiz is available on the J-NET.

If you have questions about the quiz or need general ethics advice, please contact your circuit's representative on the Committee on Codes of Conduct, or any member of the FJA's Ethics Committee.

[Take the Ethics Quiz](#)

## International Rule of Law

*Chair: Cynthia M. Rufe*



**International Association of Judges**

*promoting an independent judiciary worldwide*

Cape Town, South Africa is the site of the International Association of Judges Annual Meeting, which starts October 17th-23. Your FJA Delegation will contribute to all facets of the gathering of 92 member countries' delegates, participating in each of four Study Commissions, a Working Group for the Assistance of Judges, and meetings of the Central Council, also known as the General Assembly. The following two Reports from the First and Fourth Study Commission have been codified from each member country's Questionnaire Submissions. Prepared and presented by the Presidents of the commissions, Senior District Judge Marilyn Huff (First SC) and Senior Circuit Judge Margaret McKeown (Fourth SC), these Final reports are printed, in full for your information.

Also, the emphasis on AI in the legal world will be discussed by Margaret McKeown who will also present a Power Point at the General Assembly meeting. This will be provided next

month.

On September 20th, Marilyn Huff also contributed to a special Podcast presentation for the International Forum (“High Culture of Jurisdiction” on the impartiality and quality of the judge). Click [HERE](#) to open the presentation program.

All six FJA Delegates will attend and participate in the ANAO geographic group meetings on Oct. 17. ANAO is led by former FJA President Allyson Duncan who also serves as a vice-president of the IAJ.

We will file a comprehensive report of this year’s IAJ meeting next month.

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The following links can be opened to read the FJA submissions to the Study Commissions:

2024 General Report of the First Study Commission of the IAJ, "**The Effects of Artificial Intelligence on the Judiciary**" Submitted by Judge Marilyn L. Huff. This report is also available in Spanish [here](#).

2024 General Report of the Fourth Study Commission of the IAJ, "**Digital Revolution Impact on the Labor Market: Platform or Gig Economy and Artificial Intelligence**" Submitted by Judge M. Margaret McKeown.

## Membership

*Chair: Nannette Jolivette Brown*

The Membership Committee invites you to a reception for newly appointed judges during Phase II training on Wednesday, December 4th at the Phoenix Park Hotel in Washington, D.C. (520 North Capitol St NE, Washington, DC 20001) The reception will follow the training at 6:00 P.M. If you are in or around Washington, D.C. and can attend, please RSVP by emailing [fja@federaljudgesassoc.org](mailto:fja@federaljudgesassoc.org).

The Membership Committee also invites all new members and non-members to join us on Thursday, December 12, at 4:00 PM ET by Zoom to learn more about your FJA membership benefits and ways to get involved. Click button below to RSVP.

[Orientation RSVP](#)



Do you remember when you were a new judge? Were there things you wish you knew then that you know now? The Membership Committee is creating a ***Top 10 Things I Wish I Knew*** list for new judges. Your ideas would be very helpful in creating this list. Please submit ideas to: [fja@federaljudgesassoc.org](mailto:fja@federaljudgesassoc.org).

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*welcome*  
A B O A R D

The Membership Committee welcomes the following new members to the FJA:

David A. Ruiz (N.D. Ohio)  
Jasmine H. Yoon (W.D. Va.)

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

Adam B. Abelson (D. Md.)  
Georgia Alexakis (N.D. Ill.)  
Amy M. Baggio (D. Or.)  
Mary Kathleen Costello (E.D. Pa.)  
Mary Kay Lanthier (D. Vt.)

Laura M. Provinzino (D. Minn.)  
Stacey D. Neumann (D. Me.)  
Kevin G. Ritz (6th Cir.)  
Joseph F. Saporito (M.D. Pa.)  
Meredith A. Vacca (W.D.N.Y.)

The FJA has recently updated its membership brochure. If you know a fellow judge in your circuit/district that is not a member, please invite them to consider FJA membership! Click the button below to download a copy of the new brochure.

If you would like the FJA Membership Committee to invite a judge to become a member on your behalf, please send their name to [fja@federaljudgesassoc.org](mailto:fja@federaljudgesassoc.org) and we will send a personalized invitation on behalf of the committee.

[Membership Brochure](#)

## Nominating

*Chair: Richard Clifton*



We are pleased to announce the members of the FJA 2024 Nominating Committee. This committee is responsible for nominating the Officers and five Executive Committee members to serve a two-year term which will begin on April 4, 2025, and end at the Board Meeting in or around April 2027.

Thank you to these members for your time and efforts on behalf of the FJA!

Richard Clifton, Chair  
Sarah Evans Barker  
Stephen Bough  
Debra Brown  
Robin Rosenbaum  
Patty Shwartz  
Aleta Arthur Trauger

The Nominating Committee will consider candidates to fill the positions of President-Elect, Secretary, Treasurer, and five Executive Committee members. As Karen Schreier becomes our next President in 2025, she will be looking for additional leaders to serve on the Executive Committee and as Chairs of committees. If you are interested in serving the FJA in any leadership capacity, we encourage you to submit a Statement of Interest by November 22, 2024. Similarly, if you wish to suggest another judge for consideration, please let us know. All submissions will be considered. They should be submitted to [fja@federaljudgesassoc.org](mailto:fja@federaljudgesassoc.org).

Sincerely,

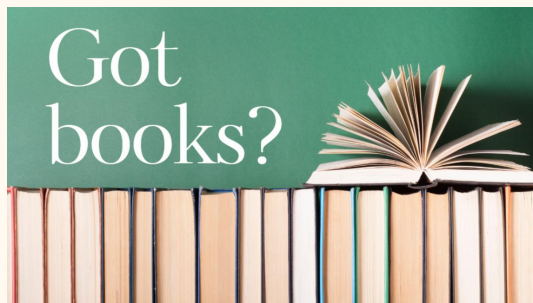
J. Michelle Childs, FJA President

[Statement of Interest Form](#)

## Quadrennial

**April 27-29, 2026 in Washington, D.C.**  
*Co-Chairs: Cathy Bissoon and Sara Darrow*

### Book Fair Survey



The FJA Quadrennial Book Fair has become a much-anticipated part of FJA's Quadrennial Conference, an event for federal judges and their guests held every four years in Washington, D.C. The committee is excited to host another Book Fair at the upcoming 2026 Quadrennial, and needs your help in identifying books and authors to highlight, specifically, books authored by our very own members. Please take a quick moment to

answer this survey so that we can begin compiling a comprehensive list of books and authors for the 2026 Quadrennial Book Fair.

Thank you in advance for your participation. Please feel free to reach out to the FJA with any questions at [fja@federaljudgesassoc.org](mailto:fja@federaljudgesassoc.org) or (888) 329-1941.

Sincerely,

Judge Debra Brown (N.D. Miss.)  
Judge Marina Garcia Marmolejo (S.D. Tex.)  
Judge Robert Lasnik (W.D. Wa.)  
Judge Jack McConnell (D.R.I.)

[Complete Survey Here](#)

# Members in the News



Member Judges around the country are actively involved in civics and service to the community. The FJA gives a shout-out to the following members:

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## 2024 Distinguished Federal Judicial Service Award

...and the winners are Judges Beth Bloom and Robin Rosenberg! The Supreme Court of Florida recognized the “outstanding and sustained service to the public” rendered by Judges Bloom and Rosenberg. The award honors each of their individual commitments to the community, but specifically highlights their development and dissemination of the Civil Discourse and Difficult Decisions Program which brings students, volunteer lawyers and federal judges together to discuss critical life skills, civil discourse and adult decisions with permanent legal consequences. The program has reached thousands of students across the country.

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## Oral History Tells the Story of Judge Cercone

The community came together to celebrate the life and service of Judge David S. Cercone of the Western District of Pennsylvania. The Western District of Pennsylvania’s Historical Committee interviewed Judge Cercone, family and friends who reflected on his life, legal career, and judicial service. Among those present for the presentation of the oral history were long-time friends, Chuck Fusina, Gov. John R. Kasich, and Judge Guido A. DeAngelis. After the presentation, Judge Mark R. Hornak, Chief Judge of the Western District of Pennsylvania said, “Judge Cercone’s oral history proves that nice guys do finish first.”

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## New Conference Committee Chairs

Chief Justice John G. Roberts, Jr., has named five new chairs of Judicial Conference committees and extended the term of five current chairs by one year. The appointments took effect Oct. 1, 2024. **Judge Robert J. Jonker** (Michigan-Western) succeeded Judge Jennifer Walker Elrod (Fifth Circuit) as chair of the Committee on Codes of Conduct. **Judge Michael Y. Scudder** (Seventh Circuit) was extended for one year as chair of the Committee on



Information Technology. **Judge Nicholas G. Garaufis** (New York-Eastern) was extended for one year as chair of the Committee on Intercircuit Assignments. **Judge William B. Traxler, Jr.**, (Fourth Circuit) was extended for one year as chair of the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability. **Judge Nancy L. Moritz** (Tenth Circuit) succeeded Judge Brian S. Miller (Arkansas-Eastern) as chair of the Committee on Judicial Resources. **Judge Richard J. Sullivan** (Second Circuit) was extended for one year as chair of the Committee on Judicial Security. **Judge Nancy E. Brasel** (Minnesota) succeeded Judge Marcia Morales Howard (Florida-Middle) as chair of the Committee on the Administration of the Magistrate Judges System. **Judge John D. Bates** (District of Columbia) was extended for one year as chair of the Committee on Rules of Practice and Procedure. **Judge Allison H. Eid** (Tenth Circuit) succeeded Judge Jay S. Bybee (Ninth Circuit) as chair of the Advisory Committee on Appellate Rules. **Judge Jesse M. Furman** (New York-Southern) succeeded Chief Judge Patrick J. Schiltz (Minnesota) as chair of the Advisory Committee on Evidence Rules. We extend our thanks to each of the new and departing Chairs for their service to the Judiciary.

Chief Justice Roberts has also appointed FJA President, **Judge J. Michelle Childs** to the Supreme Court Fellows Commission.

## Upcoming Events

Greetings from the Federal Judicial Center! The **Appellate Judges Education Institute** will be held on **November 14-17, 2024**, at The Westin Boston Seaport District Boston, MA.

Reimbursement authorization has been approved for eligible appellate judges.

**Summit Agenda:** Check-in and registration for the summit begins at 9:00 a.m. on Thursday, November 14, 2024. The formal summit begins at 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, and concludes at 12:30 p.m. on Sunday, November 17, 2024.



The Appellate Judges Education Institute Summit provides appellate judicial education and gathers federal and state appellate judges from across the country for practical, cutting-edge, educational programming. This is an educational opportunity you will not want to miss. Click the button below for additional information about the program.

**Accommodations:** The Appellate Judges Education Institute has secured rooms at The Westin Boston Seaport District 425 Summer Street Boston, MA 02210, which is the same location as the summit. For reservations: **The Westin Boston Seaport District** or contact the JW Marriott at (617) 532-4600 or 1-800-937-8461; please indicate that you are with the AJEI group. **Please reserve your room by Monday, October 24, 2024.**

**Reimbursement for Expenditures:** You may claim **Actual Daily Expenses of up to \$384** on November 13-15, 2024 (Lodging-\$289; M&IE-\$95), \$348 on November 16, 2024 (Lodging-\$289; M&IE-\$59) for lodging, meals, and allowable incidental expenses (\$95 on the last day of travel). (Some meals are being provided.) If you prefer, you may claim Actual Lodging of \$289 Plus the standard M&IE of \$79 on November 13-15, 2024, Actual Lodging of \$289 Plus M&IE of \$43 on November 16, 2024 (\$79 on the last day of travel). (Some

meals are being provided.)

Please contact Maureen Kieffer at (202) 868-9741; [mkieffer@fjc.gov](mailto:mkieffer@fjc.gov) if you have any questions about the program. Contact Yolanda Gonzalez, Program Coordinator, at (202) 961-4262; [ygonzalez@fjc.gov](mailto:ygonzalez@fjc.gov) or Joy Lyngar at (775) 327-8263; [lyngar@judges.org](mailto:lyngar@judges.org), with any questions regarding hotel and travel. We anticipate a productive summit and look forward to seeing you in Boston, MA!

[Learn More](#)



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The 2025 Board Meeting has been scheduled for April 2 - 4, 2025 in Philadelphia, PA. We are excited to host the 2025 Board Meeting at The Green Federal Building with a reception and dinner to follow at the National Constitution Center. We look forward to providing additional details in the near future.

### November Edition | *The Bench Press*

Have a submission for the upcoming edition of The Bench Press? Please share it by **November 7, 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](mailto:fja@federaljudgesassoc.org)



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