



Federal Judges Association

The Bench Press

The Federal Judges Association Newsletter

March 2025

Dear Federal Judges Association (FJA) Members:

As my term as President of the Federal Judges Association comes to an end and the organization prepares for its new leadership in April 2025, I write to express my profound gratitude for the privilege of serving this distinguished organization and each of you, its dedicated members.

When I assumed this role, I understood the incredible responsibility of representing the interests of federal judges nationwide. What I could not have anticipated was how deeply rewarding this journey would be. Through challenges and triumphs alike, your unwavering support and commitment to our shared mission of an independent judiciary have been my constant inspiration.



Together, we have accomplished so much. To name a few projects, we hired an amazing management team in Inspire Association Management Company, strengthened our communications with our members through a monthly Bench Press newsletter, successfully advocated for judicial security initiatives and senior status judge retirement planning, publicly responded to threats to the judiciary and held a webinar addressing concerns on judicial independence, expanded our public civic education outreach and law school outreach for clerkship opportunities, increased our stature in the International Association of Judges, provided historical educational programs for members, defined health and long term care benefits for members through informational webinars, ensured that members stayed abreast of judicial ethics, advertised the officer nomination process, maintained significant congressional relationships, partnered with the National Judicial College for its Renaissance conference in Portugal, and planned for an outstanding 2026 Quadrennial. Most importantly, we have increased our membership through a robust membership outreach program, maintained adherence to prudent financial stewardship, made substantive changes to our bylaws, and engaged our board in strategic planning for the future of FJA.

None of these achievements would have been possible without your engagement, wisdom, and dedication. I am particularly grateful to our officers, Executive Board, committee chairs, and circuit representatives who gave so generously of their time and talents. I am also grateful to Inspire Association Management Co., our management team, and their staff for their extraordinary expertise. All of these contributions have been so invaluable to our mission.

As I pass the torch to President-Elect Karen Schreier, I do so with complete confidence that the FJA remains in capable hands. Though I am stepping down as President, my commitment to the FJA and its mission remains steadfast. I look forward to continuing service alongside you, as we work together to uphold the highest standards of our profession and safeguard the administration of justice.

It has been the honor of my professional life to serve as your President. Thank you for your support, and your friendship.

With deepest respect and gratitude,

J. Michelle Childs
President, Federal Judges Association



A Fond Farewell as Communications Chair

Serving as Communications Chair of the FJA has been an incredible honor, especially in the inaugural year of *The Bench Press*. I have been fortunate to work alongside a dedicated and supportive committee, whose commitment has made this role both fulfilling and enjoyable.

We owe a special note of appreciation to President Childs. *The Bench Press* is her brainchild, conceived as a means to have a direct channel to our members. She must be a clairvoyant. This initiative has strengthened our connections, raised awareness of the significant work of the FJA, and showcased our collective achievements.

To all our committee chairs and other contributing authors, your thoughtful and engaging work has enriched our publication, ensuring it remains a meaningful resource for our members. A heartfelt thank you to Judge Colville for keeping us informed about the contributions and honors of our colleagues across the country. And, of course, we owe a special thanks to Judge Thurston for conceiving of the newsletter's clever and fitting name.

I am especially grateful to our hardworking management team, particularly Amanda Davis, whose tireless efforts in handling last-minute changes, edits, and formatting have been invaluable.

Thank you all for your support—it has been a privilege to serve, and I look forward to seeing the newsletter continue to thrive in the capable hands of Judge Leslie Gardner.

Mary Scriven, Communications Committee Chair

Member Spotlight

The FJA spotlights Judge Mary Kay Lanthier

Judge Mary Kay Lanthier has been, since kindergarten, according to friends and colleagues, a pillar of excellence for friends, classmates, a person always on the look out to offer a helping hand and care for and about those around her. “She was the most intelligent person in our class from kindergarten through high school,” lifelong friend Julie Finnegan said. “But never in a way that made the other person feel they didn’t know. She helped me and our friends so at the end of it we felt as smart as she was. She never hesitated to help.”



Judge Lanthier was confirmed to serve as a United States District Judge for the District of Vermont on September 11, 2004. She grew up in Hydeville, a hamlet of Castleton, Vermont, population 4000. Her mother was a postmaster, her father worked in a slate quarry. “The youngest of three in her family, she always had an unusual ability to connect in an honest but loving way. It was such a joy to be her friend. From childhood to this day, when I ask for her advice and thoughts, I get what I need, no questions asked, no judgment.”

“I was from the get-go deeply impressed by how Judge Lanthier handled herself at trial,” commented Karen Poljacik, who has worked with Judge Lanthier for more than 15 years and is now her Judicial Assistant. Poljacik first met Judge Lanthier when Poljacik was administrative manager of the Rutland County Public Defender’s Office: “She was level-headed, direct, compassionate. She treated everyone with respect. Jurors. Prosecutors.”

Before joining the Public Defenders Office, Poljacik observed, she had not had much contact with criminal work. “Watching Judge Lanthier, who was the supervising attorney, I came to realize how much she and all the public defenders have to deal with: heavy caseloads, clients who have personal issues, mental health, addiction, homelessness, people who are not in a good space or place in their lives. Judge Lanthier was understanding, never judging, treating each client with respect, taking care of them and their legal issues.”

Asked about her two stints as a public defender — bookended by law firm practice on either end — Judge Lanthier offered: “I just very much enjoy being in the courtroom. I enjoy the human stories that get told there. And working directly with people. It is not easy work, it is challenging, it is hard to maintain boundaries. But it is really important work. It is most important in that setting feeling that a person feels that they are being heard.”

Judge Lanthier was asked if it concerned her that society does not always value the difficult work that public defenders do. She did not miss a beat: “I know and judges know and prosecutors know the value of this work. I know that there are people in the system who may not. My job was always to tell the story of one person in that process. I held my head high.”

Judge Lanthier’s career stands as inspiration to many. John Paul Sealey, a native Vermonter and grandson of famed Vermont attorney Paul Donavon Sheehy, now Paralegal to Chief Judge Mark Barnett of the U.S. Court of International Trade, commented: “Judge Lanthier has dedicated her career to ensuring that everyone, regardless of background, has a fair chance to be heard and have their day in court.”

Poljacik added: “It’s not just in the courtroom that Judge Lanthier is all about compassion. She cares a lot about her staff. We were friends also. It made it easy to work with her. Sometimes, in our community Judge Lanthier had a client with an extremely hard case. The

Judge knew that I might know someone involved, so she kept me out of the matter. She has an instinct to protect – protect the client, protect me. She cares how each person feels.”

“She made everyone want to do their job well so that it would allow her to do her job better,” Poljacik commented. “She does that now with the lawyers and everyone in her courtroom. I cannot say enough about her.”

As to shifting to become a judge, Judge Lanthier commented, level, understated: “It was not until a couple of years ago that I felt that I had had enough experience in the courtroom, that I was at a point in my career when I had something to offer.”

Has something surprised her about her new job? “As a public defender, I was very used to being told 'no'. Now, nobody will, but they should. I make sure to tell them that they should!”

And, beyond the courtroom? “Our kids are out of the house. I golf twice a week in the summer with Julie and other friends, am learning pickleball (I was a team sport person, soccer and basketball growing up) and am planning a trip for May with five friends from elementary school.” Oh, and reading David McCullough’s biography of John Adams.

Julie Finnegan closed: “One of the best things about Mary Kay is her laugh. For her family and friends, making her laugh is a joy. Her laugh is infectious and funny. When couples get together, it’s just laughter – boy does she love a good joke, and she loves to laugh.”

Karen Poljacik recalled watching Judge Lanthier in court: “I often saw her put her hand on a client’s shoulder, just trying to make that person feel safe.” The compassion and excellence apparently had a big impact. Judge Lanthier remembered the day she was confirmed to her judgeship. There was a headline in the local paper. The very next day, a client who at the time was homeless and suffering from mental illness arrived at Judge Lanthier’s office. The client had gotten a copy of the paper, found some scissors to clip out the headline, taped it to a piece of cardboard and wrote: “We are very proud of you.”

Committee Updates

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

Ethics

Chair: Albert Diaz



The Judicial Conference's Codes of Conduct Committee works continuously to provide updated advice and guidance to judges. Attached are notices of recent advice issued by the Committee. Update #1 summarizes advice that has been added to Committee's Compendium of Selected Opinions. And Update #2 includes revisions the Committee made to two published Advisory Opinions. Both the Compendium and the Advisory Opinions are available on the J-Net.

[Update #1](#)

[Update #2](#)

Membership

Chair: Nannette Jolivette Brown



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

Catherine Henry (E.D. Pa.)

In Memoriam

The FJA mourns the loss of the following members:



Hon. Alfred Vincent “Tim” Covello: Judge Covello was appointed to the Connecticut Circuit Court in 1974 by Governor Tom Meskill. He served on the Court of Common Pleas and the Superior Court before being appointed to the Connecticut Supreme Court in 1987. In 1992, he was nominated by President George H.W. Bush to the U.S. District Court for the District of Connecticut and confirmed by the Senate on August 12, 1992. He served as Chief Judge from 1998 to 2003 before assuming senior status. He remained an active Senior Judge until his retirement in 2022, concluding nearly five decades on the bench. He leaves behind a legacy of professional accomplishment, family, and friendship that inspires everyone who knew him.

Hon. Bruce M. Selya: Judge Selya was nominated by President Ronald Reagan on July 27, 1982, to a seat on the U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island vacated by Raymond J. Pettine and confirmed by the Senate on August 18, 1982. He served with distinction until November 24, 1986, when he was elevated to a newly created seat on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit where he served for more than 38 years. He assumed senior status on December 31, 2006, and served as an active senior member of the Court until his final day.

Senior and Retired Judges

Co-Chairs: Larry Piersol and James G. Carr



The Judicial Conference at its March 11 meeting adopted the recommendations from the Judicial Resources Committee that are set forth below concerning senior status judge staffing. At a separate session for the district judge representatives, JRC Chair Nancy Moritz and Budget Committee Chair Amy St. Eve recognized the contributions of Judge Piersol, Co-chair of the FJA Senior Judges Committee, for his contributions to the policy change. We further thank him for preserving existing resources for our members. Indeed, it is invaluable

that our organization has a seat at the table during these important discussions that affect the lives of our Senior Members and those of us who aspire to be Senior one day. Hats Off to Judge Piersol and his committee!!

Excerpt from JRC Report to JCUS - March 2025

Recommendation: That the Judicial Conference amend its 1950 policy on staffing for senior judges, permitting such judges to retain personnel provided they continue to perform substantial judicial work, and deferring to circuit judicial councils the determination of appropriate staffing for senior judges who the councils determine have performed substantial judicial work (JCUS-SEP 1950, pp. 21-22), effective October 1, 2027, to state as follows:

All circuit judicial councils shall adopt appropriate staffing guidelines for senior circuit judges and senior district judges adhering to the following requirements and criteria:

- a.** To qualify for a chambers law clerk, paralegal, or judicial assistant, a senior circuit judge or a senior district judge must carry a substantial caseload, that is, one sufficient to keep that chambers law clerk, paralegal, or judicial assistant engaged full time.
- b.** Each circuit judicial council's senior judge staffing guidelines must be based solely on objective, case related criteria, such as weighted case filings, pending case assignments, number of "sitting days" per year, case terminations, trial and non-trial bench hours, or other objective case-related criteria which the circuit judicial council deems to be appropriate.
- c.** Circuit judicial council staffing guidelines for senior judges shall not provide workload credit in the staffing formula based upon non-case-related duties, such as committee assignments, speaking engagements, ceremonial duties, or any other non-case-related duties. Absent advanced approval of the circuit judicial council based upon a clear description of specific tasks to be completed by chambers staff, staffing credit shall not be provided to a senior judge for non-case-related duties.
- d.** Each circuit shall provide an annual report of its senior judge staffing determinations to the Executive Committee of the Judicial Conference.

Quadrennial

April 27-29, 2026 in Washington, D.C.

Co-Chairs: Cathy Bissoon and Sara Darrow

FJA



Eleventh Quadrennial Conference

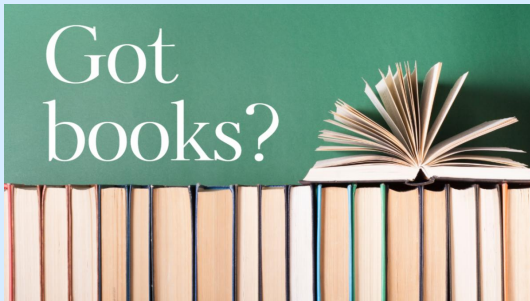
The "I"s have it!

APRIL
27-29
2026

Independence, Inspiration, Insights & Integrity

OMNI
SHOREHAM
WASHINGTON, DC

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 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

Western District of Pennsylvania Hosts 60th Annual Trial Moot Court Competition

For 60 years, the Western District of Pennsylvania has hosted an annual Trial Moot Court competition at the Joseph F. Weis Jr. Federal Courthouse in Pittsburgh, pitting law students from law schools across the country in full-day jury trials. . . . This year, teams from 10 law schools participated, and engaged in trials on February 20 before **Judges Cindy K. Chung**, William S. Stickman, Patricia L. Dodge, and Kezia O. L. Taylor, who were joined by Pennsylvania Superior Court Judge Jill Beck. . . . The finalists from that process were the award-winning teams from Howard University and the College of William & Mary, who squared off on February 21 before **Chief Judge Mark Hornak**.

Upcoming Events



FJA 2025 Board Meeting

The 2025 Board Meeting has been scheduled for April 2 - 4, 2025 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. 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.

FJA Members are invited to view portions of the board meeting via Zoom on Friday, April 4 from 8:00 AM - 1:00 PM ET.

FJA Members interested in attending the board meeting should register via the following link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/DWSSO0LmQ4CQCaQIVg4vxA>

April Edition | *The Bench Press*

Have a submission for the upcoming edition of The Bench Press? Please share it by **April 14, 2025**. 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

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