

COUNTERBALANCE

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN JUDGES

Preserving the Rule of Law



**What we can do as
Judges and women**

Inside

MISSION

NAWJ's mission is to promote the judicial role of protecting the rights of individuals under the rule of law through strong, committed, diverse judicial leadership; fairness and equality in the courts; and equal access to justice.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

PRESIDENT

Hon. Michelle M. Rick
Michigan Court of Appeals

PRESIDENT-ELECT

Hon. Pamela Washington
Anchorage District Court

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

Hon. Karen Sage
299th District Court of Texas

ACTING VICE-PRESIDENT DISTRICTS

Hon. Pamela Washington
Anchorage District Court

VICE-PRESIDENT PUBLICATIONS

Hon. Heather Welch
Marion Superior Court

TREASURER

Hon. Victoria Willis
15th Judicial Circuit

FINANCE COMMITTEE CHAIR

Hon. Leslie A. Stroth
Bronx County Hall of Justice

SECRETARY

Hon. Mary Margaret Rowlands
Summit County Common Pleas Court

INTERNATIONAL DIRECTOR

Hon. Bernadette D'Souza
Orleans Parish Civil District Court

ABA DELEGATE

Hon. Ann Breen-Greco
Independent Administrative
Judicial Professional

STAFF

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Laurie Hein Denham, CAE

DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

Francie Teer, CFRE

OPERATIONS

Brian Gorg

MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR

Janelle Mihoc

- 2 President's Message
- 3 VP of Publications' Message
- 4 Executive Director's Message
- 5 Boston 2025 Annual Conference
- 7 From Your Lips to God's Ear:
Take Action
- 9 The Dire State of Judicial Security
- 13 Women in the Judiciary:
Where We are Today
- 16 Reflections on my Term as
NAWJ Director
- 19 What Judges Can Do to Preserve
the Rule of Law
- 21 NAWJ Mid-Year Conference:
A Student's Perspective
- 23 In Defense of Our Profession
- 25 Remembering Pope Francis:
A Judicial Reflection from NAWJ
leaders and US-COPAJU members
- 28 2025 Law Day Banquet -
New England Law - Boston
- 31 Board of Directors
- 31 District Directors
- 32 Resource Board
- 33 Landmark Partners &
Contributors Bench
- 33 New Members

COUNTERBALANCE is published by:
National Association of Women Judges

1725 Eye St. NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20006
Phone: 202 393 0222
Fax: 202 393 0125

E-mail: nawj@nawj.org

Web: www.nawj.org



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
of
WOMEN JUDGES

©2024 National Association of Women Judges. All rights reserved.

Views and opinions expressed are solely those of the authors and contributors,
and do not necessarily represent those of the NAWJ.

President's Message



Dear Sisters and Allies:

Greetings! Welcome to the Summer Counterbalance. Our theme is “Preserving the Rule of Law - What we can do as Judges and women.” The caliber of submissions from our remarkable members, who are truly committed to excellence, is inspiring. You are certain to enjoy the read.

I wanted to share some reflections from my time on the trial court bench, particularly concerning two specialty courts I had the honor of overseeing. Specialized courts exemplify the restorative nature of the justice system. They also strongly embody our collective role in preserving the rule of law. It's a vital endeavor that, as judges and particularly as women, we can significantly influence.

“I wanted to share some reflections from my time on the trial court bench, particularly concerning two specialty courts I had the honor of overseeing. Specialized courts exemplify the restorative nature of the justice system. They also strongly embody our collective role in preserving the rule of law.”

The Rule of Law, at its core, demands fairness, predictability, and equitable application of justice. One program that exemplified this was the Swift and Sure Sanctions Probation Program (SSSPP), a high-risk felony court aimed at keeping offenders who were otherwise headed for prison within their communities. Inspired by Hawaii's “HOPE” (Hawaii Opportunity Probation with Enforcement) program, SSSPP focused on clear, transparent communication from day one. At their initial hearing, probationers met with the judge, probation agent, and case manager, where the entire process—expectations, supervision, and sanctions—was laid out openly. This upfront transparency, combined with enhanced support for issues like substance abuse, mental health, and employment, was designed to reduce recidivism. This approach, by ensuring predictable consequences and clear pathways, strengthens public trust in the justice system, a cornerstone of the Rule of Law. The results, as highlighted in a recent 2023 Michigan

Supreme Court annual report, have been truly encouraging.

The second program, Journey Court, was a women's felony drug treatment court. We chose the name “Journey Court” because we recognized that healing from substance use disorder (SUD) is a dynamic, evolving process. Unlike SSSPP, Journey Court was fundamentally treatment-based, rooted in the understanding that SUD is a disease. Our team became trauma-informed and trauma-responsive. This translated to acknowledging the prevalent adverse childhood experiences (ACES) among Journey Court participants (many scored 8, 9, or 10 out of 10, confirming the horrific life stories we often hear in the justice system). This court, specifically designed for women, allowed us to address systemic issues that disproportionately affected them, such as domestic violence, sexual assault, and the impact of early trauma. By recognizing these root causes and providing comprehensive, compassionate support, the Journey Court team and participants worked to heal individuals and rebuild lives, thereby enhancing the very fabric of our society and demonstrating a more nuanced, empathetic application of justice. The team was extensive: prosecutor, defense attorney, probation agent, judge, and crucially, mental health counselors, domestic violence and sexual assault advocates, social services providers, and peer recovery coaches. This comprehensive support created an environment where participants could truly engage in their healing journey. While not every outcome was perfect, I truly believe every litigant experienced meaningful growth.

Looking back at both SSSPP and Journey Court, I'm filled with appreciation for

everyone who was willing to embrace something new—from the brave litigants who stepped outside their comfort zones and trusted the system, to the incredibly dedicated professionals. I often wondered if I could be as brave as those litigants, attempting to extricate themselves from incredibly difficult circumstances. And it's impossible to overstate the commitment of our team members. They consistently went above and beyond, sacrificing personal time for meetings, tirelessly problem-solving, and offering hands-on help with everything from transportation to job interviews. They

saw the humanity in individuals whom others might have written off, and their unwavering dedication was what made these programs possible.

These courts exemplify how, as judges, we are not merely adjudicators of disputes but problem solvers and architects of justice. By embracing innovative, evidence-based, and human-centered approaches like these, we have the power to preserve the rule of law—not just by upholding statutes, but by fostering trust, promoting rehabilitation, and addressing the underlying causes

of crime. For us as women judges, our unique perspectives often bring invaluable empathy and a holistic understanding to the bench, reinforcing that justice must be both fair and humane. Our commitment to exploring such pathways ensures that the Rule of Law remains a living, breathing principle that serves all members of our community, offering both accountability and a genuine opportunity for positive change.

Hon. Michelle Rick
Michigan Court of Appeals
NAWJ President

Vice President of Publications Message



“As judges—and as women leaders in the judiciary—we must remain steadfast in our commitment to uphold and protect the Rule of Law. Our voices matter. Our actions matter. And our silence, in the face of growing threats, can no longer be an option.”

Currently, the Rule of Law in the United States is under attack. Individuals, institutions, and organizations are challenging the judicial branch—a co-equal branch of our democracy—with increasing frequency and intensity. These attacks are not abstract. They threaten the very foundation of our constitutional system and erode public confidence in the impartiality, fairness, and independence of our courts.

As judges—and as women leaders in the judiciary—we must remain steadfast in our commitment to uphold and protect the Rule of Law. Our voices matter. Our actions matter. And our silence, in the face of growing threats, can no longer be an option.

During the NAWJ Mid-Year Meeting in Ann Arbor, Michigan, the Board of Directors agreed on the theme for this Counterbalance edition: “Preserving the Rule of Law—What We Can Do as Judges and Women.” I strongly encourage you to read this edition of Counterbalance, as it will motivate you and provide concrete guidance on what you and your court can and should do to preserve the Rule of Law in our democracy. Please read—and please take action.

This issue features powerful contributions, including From Your Lips to God's Ears—Take Action by Retired Judge Vivian Medinilla, a reflective piece on Pope Francis and justice from NAWJ leaders and US-COPAJU, and an article by Chief Justice Amy Blake of the Massachusetts Court of Appeals titled Law Day Banquet New England Law, which explores the role of the founding fathers and the importance of defending the Rule of Law.

Judge Lisa Walsh offers insights from her term as NAWJ International Director and reports on the IAWJ Biennial Conference in Cape Town, along with a warm welcome to NAWJ's new International Director, Judge Bernadette D'Souza. Judge Victoria Willis outlines practical steps judges can take today in What Judges Can Do to Preserve the Rule of Law, while Retired Judge Doris Pechkurow reminds us what's at stake in In Defense of Our Profession. David Hofstede rounds out the issue with The Dire State of Judicial Security—a sobering but necessary look at the risks judges face in the current climate.

Our collective power as women judges lies not only in our ability to interpret and apply

the law, but also in our willingness to defend it publicly and unapologetically. Let this edition of Counterbalance serve as both a warning and a guidepost. The Rule of Law needs you—your voice, your leadership, and your courage.

I want to give a special thank you to all of our generous contributors to

this Summer issue of Counterbalance, including the exceptional work of Laurie Denham, NAWJ's Executive Director, and her skilled team, who piloted this issue to the finish line. I am honored to edit this Counterbalance issue and make sure it is reflective of the NAWJ's mission and what we do each and every day to inspire our members to continue their

great work.

Hope you enjoy this issue and take action to preserve the Rule of Law.

Heather Welch

Hon. Heather Welch

Retired Judge, Marion Superior Court
JAMS mediator and Arbitrator

Executive Director Message



This is a year of collaboration. We completed the podcast series with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges to address Child Abuse and Neglect. Several joint members of both organizations participated. You may [click here](#) for access to the podcasts. The Informed Voters Project (IVP) of the Judicial Independence Committee launched a social media campaign with the Bolch Judicial Institute at Duke University and ABOTA. These short videos address the importance of a fair and independent judiciary. Here are the links to the videos, [The Judicial Branch Free from Special Interests](#) [Fair and Impartial Judges](#) Please share in your networks!

rule of law. NAWJ will receive the award on behalf of our work with the Afghan judges and the Judicial Independence Committee IVP program. The full press release can be found at this [link](#)

The Alaska Color of Justice program was selected by the National Center for State Courts for the Sandra Day O'Connor Award for the Advancement of Civics Education. This award honors an organization, court, or individual(s) who have promoted, inspired, improved, or led an innovation or accomplishment in civics education related to the justice system.

“As we continue to build these partnerships, we reaffirm our commitment to fostering a justice system that is independent, informed, and inclusive. Together, we are making a lasting difference!”

We joined several other judicial organizations including the National Judicial College and Federal Judges Association, issuing a [statement](#) in Support of Judicial Independence. We also partnered with the American Bar Association on several webinars. Later this year we will partner with the National Association of Women Lawyers. NAWJ and the Alaska Color of Justice program are receiving awards from partner organizations.

NAWJ will receive the Justice and Rule of Law Award at the ABA Annual Meeting in Toronto next month. The Justice and Rule of Law Award was established to recognize an individual or organization who has made a positive national impact on the justice system and preserving the

As you can see, this year has been a powerful testament to the strength of collaboration. By working together with esteemed partners across the legal and judicial community, we have amplified our reach, deepened our impact, and advanced our mission. Our collective efforts have sparked important conversations and elevated public understanding of the judiciary's essential role. As we continue to build these partnerships, we reaffirm our commitment to fostering a justice system that is independent, informed, and inclusive. Together, we are making a lasting difference!

Laurie Denham

Laurie Hein Denham, CAE
Executive Director



BOSTON 2025: Where Women Lead

Join Us for the NAWJ Annual Conference

We invite you to experience an extraordinary gathering in one of America's most iconic cities. The 2025 NAWJ Annual Conference, themed "Boston: Where Women Lead," will take place from October 23-25, 2025, and promises to be an unforgettable celebration of leadership, justice, and community.

Whether you are a longtime member of the judiciary, a newly appointed judge, or an ally of the mission to promote fairness and gender equity in the courts, this year's conference is one you won't want to miss.

A Historic Setting for a Historic Mission

Few cities are more fitting to host this conference than Boston—a city that has long stood at the forefront of legal innovation, civic activism, and women's leadership. As the birthplace of American democracy, Boston is home to many of the country's oldest and most respected institutions of law and higher education. It's also a city where women have consistently broken barriers in the courtroom, in the legislature, and in the streets.

With its cobblestone streets, revolutionary landmarks, and thriving legal community, Boston offers the perfect backdrop for the NAWJ to convene thought leaders and changemakers dedicated to a more equitable judiciary.

Conference Theme: "Where Women Lead"

This year's theme, "Boston: Where Women Lead," celebrates the accomplishments of women judges and the broader movement for gender parity and equal justice. It also reflects NAWJ's commitment to mentorship, innovation, and amplifying underrepresented voices in the legal system.

Throughout the conference, we will honor the

legacies of trailblazing women jurists while also focusing on the future—exploring how judges can lead on critical issues such as access to justice, judicial independence, and the ethical use of technology in the courts.

Dynamic Programming and Prestigious Speakers

Attendees can expect a robust and diverse program that includes plenary sessions, and dynamic breakout discussions. From timely panels on judicial wellness, managing high profile cases, cutting edge legal issues in nonconsensual dissemination of intimate images and adolescent brain development, to the challenges of AI and safeguarding judicial independence, the conference offers something for everyone.

Confirmed speakers include Professor Anita Hill, Judge Esther Salas, Former Boston Police Commissioner Ed Davis, Dean Erwin Chemerinsky, and Professor Francesca Procaccini. We are particularly proud to feature several Massachusetts-based trailblazers who represent the very best of public service and judicial excellence.

This year's conference will also offer expanded opportunities for dialogue among state, federal, military, administrative, and tribal court judges—reflecting NAWJ's unique position as a unifying platform for women across all areas of the judiciary.

Networking, Community, and Celebration

In addition to its rich educational content, the NAWJ Annual Conference is a powerful space for connection and camaraderie. The Boston event will feature evening receptions, meals with keynote speakers, and small-group gatherings designed to foster community among judges, legal professionals, and partners.

Explore Boston

And of course, you'll have the chance to explore Boston itself—its museums, historic neighborhoods, vibrant arts scene, and world-renowned culinary offerings. Whether you're strolling the Freedom Trail, enjoying a harbor cruise, or attending a cultural event at one of Boston's many theaters and institutions, the city offers endless opportunities for inspiration and enjoyment.

Why You Should Register

The NAWJ Annual Conference is more than an event—it's a movement. In a time of rapid change and growing challenges to the rule of law, coming together with fellow judges and justice advocates is both empowering and essential. You'll leave Boston with new knowledge, fresh perspectives, lifelong connections—and a renewed sense of purpose.



Don't Miss Out Register Today!

Space is limited, and this year's conference is expected to sell out.

To view the full agenda, speaker lineup, hotel accommodations, and registration details, click on this [link](#)

Join us in Boston as we celebrate where women lead — and chart the future of justice, together.

Chief Justice Amy Lyn Blake
Boston 2025 Co-Chair

From Your Lips to God's Ears

TAKE ACTION!

I had the privilege of giving Keynote remarks on May 8th to celebrate the late Honorable Haile L. Alford, who in 1992 became the first African American female judge on the Superior Court in the State of Delaware. I was a second-year law student at that time. Twenty-one years later, I became the first person of Latin descent to sit on the same Court.

This May's event was bittersweet because we celebrated the legacy of an extraordinary woman who left us too early when she died suddenly in her home, one year before her 12-year term ended. Since our judicial terms did not overlap, I regret I did not know her personally. So, to prepare my remarks, I conducted a little research, "Googled" her, and spoke to those who knew her. In my journey, I learned that we had much in common, not only as "firsts" on the bench, but in many other ways. We were both born in the month of July. Neither of us were from Delaware. She grew up in Brooklyn. I grew up

in Philly. As such, I assumed we both shared a proper dislike for a particular Texas-based football team.

I also learned she was practical, direct, honest, and compassionate. When she sentenced a convicted individual, she always ended with "*God bless you.*" For any judge who has had to impose a sentence, most will say it is the hardest part of the job. And if there's ever a moment to call upon a higher power for help, I can attest that is certainly it. Judge Alford's courtroom blessing led me to consider the intersection of law and religion. Not as it relates to the First Amendment's



By Hon. Vivian I. Medinilla (Ret.)



principle of separation of church and state but rather conceptually as it relates to everyday compassion. I suspect she and I shared this quality. She must have embraced some form of religion as I do mine.

For me, the religion of choice is Roman Catholicism. To be fair, I'm what some call a "Catholic-lite," hypocritically selective in my choices of when to "be" Catholic yet also always living Catholic in a chronic state of guilt. Regardless, like many Catholics around the world, I joined in the celebration of the election of Robert Francis Prevost, now Pope Leo XIV. As an American, I am overjoyed that he is the first American to fill the role. As a Latina, his Peruvian roots are muy bueno. Like Villanova alumni, White Sox fans, Chicagoans, Pennsylvanians, Peruvians, or Catholics, in general, I, too, wish to claim a connection to the new leader of the Catholic Church.

Before his election, I noted a common theme as the world watched the College of Cardinals, or other "persons of the cloth" speak about the papal conclave's processes. Most ended their interviews by calling for the Holy Spirit to guide them. Why the Holy Spirit? Why not God or Jesus? I confess (pun intended) that I'm not generally calling upon the Holy Spirit to step in. Albeit improper, when angered, I call out to JC, the Son (and I usually throw in Mary, Joseph, and all the heavenly saints for good measure.) But when I'm asking for help, I call in God to assist with the crisis *de jour*.

So why did the highest spiritual world leaders collectively seek guidance from the Holy Spirit? Like my research of Judge Alford—and since it's been a while since I learned this lesson at St. Donato's

in West Philly—I "Googled" the Holy Spirit. Today, the Oxford English Dictionary defines it as the Third Person of the Trinity, or God as *spiritually active* in the world. So, as the world waited for the papal conclave to reveal Pope Francis's replacement, we relied on spiritual activism to carry the day. And if you ask 1.4 billion Catholics, the Holy Spirit did just that.

Yet one need not believe in the Holy Spirit to appreciate the significance of the papal selection. We can also just chalk it up to putting our faith in the human beings (the Cardinals) who listened and acted collectively to get it right. And if even the word "faith" cooks up too heavy a religious flavor for your taste, let's just say we hoped their actions would result in a good outcome. Hope. Its definition is a belief that somehow things will turn out better than they are currently. So, regardless of whether you believe in the Holy Spirit, what we do know is that in that secret space known as the conclave, these holy men acted to bring us a spiritual leader for today's times. And then this leader took further action.

At his Inaugural Mass on May 19, 2025, Pope Leo XIV called for peace and unity. He urged an end to global conflict as world leaders including Vice President JD Vance and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy looked on. His message clear. Resolve the conflict. God willing, resolve it now. We are facing global crises. Get yourselves together and act toward the common good. Of course, he didn't say it quite like that but that seemed to be the message. And there's a saying: "From your lips to God's ears...." where we wish, hope, pray, (pick your verb) that after the words are uttered, God will act to make the statement come to fruition. Today, the world looks on to see if the

Papal urging resonates with our world leaders to act as they swore to do—to execute their oaths as promised.

When judges take their oaths to serve the public, we swear *"to carry out the responsibilities of our office, to the best of our ability, freely acknowledging that the powers of [the] office flow from the people we are privileged to represent...[further swearing] to always uphold and defend the Constitution of our Country [and our State,] so help me God."* On January 20, 2025, standing across from Chief Justice Roberts who administered the Oath of Office, President Trump made a similar promise and said, "I swear to faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States, **so help me God.**" It struck me that the three words—so help me—connect the Constitution and God, emphasizing the importance of the oath to defend the Constitution and calling upon God for help in keeping that promise.

Recently in Delaware, in defense of the Constitution, attorneys, members of the judiciary, state lawmakers and members of the public joined a midday rally to support the rule of law. It was sponsored by the Delaware State Bar Association (DSBA) and the Delaware Chapter of the American Constitution Society. The theme was simple: the necessity of due process, the importance of a system of fair and equal justice, and the importance of the independence of our courts. What impressed me most about the rally were the speakers. Why were retired judges and leaders of our justice systems stepping forward now? Perhaps because they took an oath to defend the Constitution "so help [them] God." Perhaps spiritual activism moved

them to speak. Perhaps it was just a gut check. Whatever the reason, like Pope Leo XIV, they urged us to act.

The collectiveness and importance of their comments are worth repeating here.¹ Former Vice-Chancellor of the Court of Chancery of Delaware, the Hon. Sam Glasscock, III (Ret.) said:

.... It has become clear that the rule of law—far from receiving careful maintenance at the hands of the government—has increasingly gone untended. Under the current federal administration, the rule of law is under attack. . . .

What is required to enable the rule of law, so essential to the American way of life, in light of these circumstances? Much, but principally, I think, three things.

First, a fearless and independent judiciary that honors its oath to uphold, with impartiality, the rule of law. Even a light thumb on the scale, a hint of craven self-consideration, by the judiciary, and liberty and property rights are put at jeopardy. The judiciary and its independence are increasingly under assault. . . .

For the rule of law to prevail, judges must stand firm against such coercion. When I was a judge, no particular courage was required to do the job; increasingly, sadly, it is. So far, the judges remain true to their oaths.

Second, the Rule of Law requires attorneys and law firms with the courage to represent unpopular clients

*and causes, even under the threat of improper retribution from the government. **Attorneys must take seriously their role as officers of the court and servants of the law,** apart from their business interests. . . . This time, unfortunately, is a time for choosing; a time when what is easy is not congruent with what is right.*

The last, most indispensable of the requirements for the rule of law to prevail is the will of the people themselves, *without which it shall surely fail. It is essential that Americans understand the great value of our system of laws, how it has made us prosperous and kept us free by application of due process, equal protection and impartial application of the law, how the rule of law is always vulnerable, and how it is under assault. Ultimately, in a representative democracy, no system, no matter how beneficial, can endure without citizen support.*

As an American, as a lifelong conservative, here is my own opinion. There is nothing more American than respecting the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and liberty under the rule of law. And conservatism requires conserving that which is crucial to our liberty and our way of life; there is nothing more worth conserving than ordered liberty under the law.

Our Attorney General, the Honorable Kathleen Jennings said:

Lawyers are not spectators to the Constitution; we are its agents. The work that we all do—that crucial,

necessary work of upholding and enforcing the law—can be frustrating. It can often feel thankless or futile. But it has never mattered more. Whether you are a judge, a prosecutor, a public defender, a plaintiff's attorney, a paralegal, a police officer, or simply a patriot, we need you in this moment....”

The rule of law can mean different things to different people. This article is not meant to persuade you that the “rule of law” means this or that. That would be akin to seeking your acceptance of my version of the Holy Spirit. Not only would that be a ludicrous request, but it is also not what this article is about. Just as my religion is mine, so are my values related to...well, everything else.

Instead, this writing is meant to emphasize the importance of responsible human action. When the men in the conclave made their selection, they knew the world was watching. The white smoke revealed not only that a new pontiff had been selected, but that the decision-makers succeeded in making the selection because they were receptive to listening, eventually persuaded by the opinions of others to make way for the process to work. They chose to listen and act. Let's take a moment to learn from that experience. The world is watching.

Whatever our views—political, cultural, religious, social, etc.—let's embrace them responsibly. And act accordingly. I thank Pope Leo XIV for getting right to the point. From his lips to the oath-takers' acts. I hope for our sake that the world leaders listen contemplatively and allow the process to work. From the words of Judge Alford, “God bless” them as they carry out their oaths. I pray that God is so helping.

¹ The excerpts were taken from the May 2025 edition of the Bar Journal of the Delaware State Bar Association. The word limit and theme of this article do not permit me to include all remarks made at the rally.

DIRE The State of

Threats against judges have multiplied; threats against women judges have increased even more rapidly.



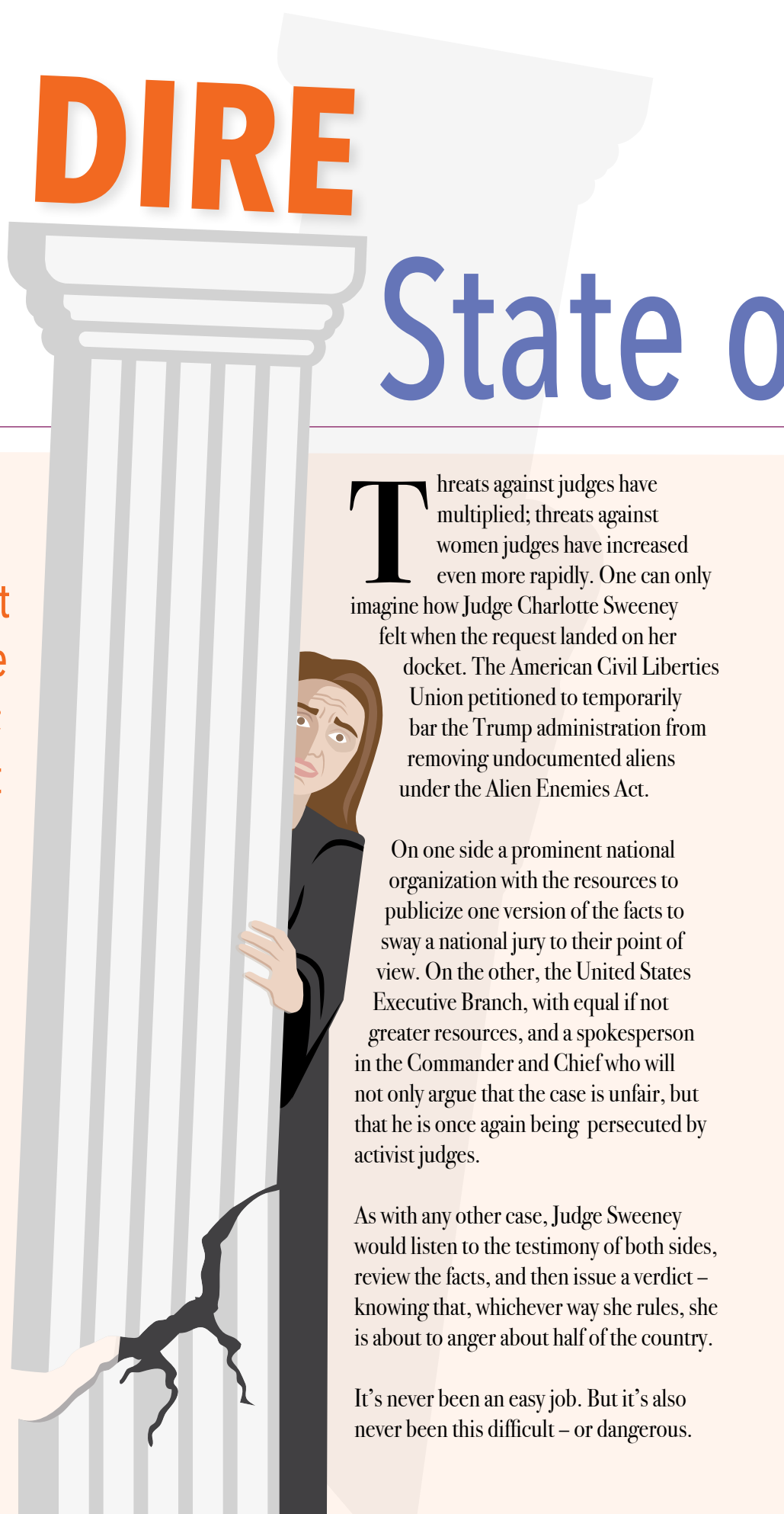
By David Hofstede,
Freelance writer and the Director of
Legislative Outreach for Ironwall by Incogni

Threats against judges have multiplied; threats against women judges have increased even more rapidly. One can only imagine how Judge Charlotte Sweeney felt when the request landed on her docket. The American Civil Liberties Union petitioned to temporarily bar the Trump administration from removing undocumented aliens under the Alien Enemies Act.

On one side a prominent national organization with the resources to publicize one version of the facts to sway a national jury to their point of view. On the other, the United States Executive Branch, with equal if not greater resources, and a spokesperson in the Commander and Chief who will not only argue that the case is unfair, but that he is once again being persecuted by activist judges.

As with any other case, Judge Sweeney would listen to the testimony of both sides, review the facts, and then issue a verdict – knowing that, whichever way she rules, she is about to anger about half of the country.

It's never been an easy job. But it's also never been this difficult – or dangerous.



f Judicial Security

“We’ve seen an increased willingness from public officials and public figures to criticize judges in ways that go beyond the type of informed criticism that Chief Justice John Roberts identified in his 2024 report on the judiciary,” said Judge Paul Grimm, who served 25 years on the federal bench, and is currently the Director of the Bolch Judicial Institute at Duke University.

It seems worse now because it is. The ACLU alone has filed nearly 400 cases against the Trump administration that are likely to be unpopular with his supporters. But growing hostility against the judiciary predates the current officeholder. “What is happening now is not unique to any one political party or political ideology. There have been examples of Democratic leaders

threats, harassment, vandalism, and even violence.

For more than a decade we’ve been living in a hyper-politicized and polarized nation. The inability of Congress to pass legislation on major issues has left a void that Chief Executives going back decades have attempted to fill with executive

orders that are inevitably challenged in court, putting judges at the center of contentious national debates. And when the media covers these cases, it invariably specifies which president appointed the ruling judge, reinforcing the perception that judges act politically rather than independently.

Several disparate factors have all contributed to a heightened hostility against judges, and an increased number of individuals and organizations willing to express their grievances through threats, harassment, vandalism, and even violence.

“What Chief Justice Roberts said was, of course the public has a right to criticize judges, and informed criticism about a decision is within the realm of what is appropriate. But he identified four categories of conduct that cross the line, and that includes criticism or action that’s intended to intimidate, personal threats, claims that courts are not legitimate, and refusals to comply with court orders.”

criticizing judges by name and with very strong threatening terms. Both sides have done it,” Grimm said.

How Did We Get Here?

Several disparate factors have all contributed to a heightened hostility against judges, and an increased number of individuals and organizations willing to express their grievances through

Discussion of controversial cases is amplified by social media, where the tone of such conversations is typically aggressive and threatening. “If I make a threatening comment to an audience of five, it has less impact than if I make it to an audience of five million,” Grimm said. “Somewhere in that five million there is a greater likelihood that someone is going to act rather

than merely voice their anger, and we have seen examples of that in both state courts and federal courts.”

Women Judges Targeted More Frequently

While the reality of the rising threat level is widely acknowledged, what has not been addressed is the disparity between the volume of threats received by women judges. “It is hugely disproportional toward women,” said Ron Zayas, CEO of Ironwall by Incogni, a company that provides online privacy protection to US courts.

“Our numbers also reveal that the situation is even worse for women of color, who are threatened at a rate about 40% higher than a white male judge,” Zayas said. “It’s also clear that the type of threats they receive are more vicious, more compromising, and oftentimes they threaten sexual violence. When courts invest in protection, they don’t seem to acknowledge that, or that women judges are especially in danger”.

The nature and intent of threats directed at judges has also evolved. Direct threats – those sent to a specific judge at the courthouse or at the judge’s home (easy to do given the online accessibility of anyone’s home address) are up as much as 400% according to the US Marshals Service. Someone is angry at a judge over a loved one being sentenced, or being denied child visitation, and expresses that grievance by threatening the judge or his or her family. You hurt me – now I’m going to hurt you.

“Those types of threats still happen every day. But there’s another kind of threat – I liken it to a mafia threat, that is

also increasing,” Zayas said. “These are threats issued not to punish a judge for what they have done, but to stop them from doing something in the future and to change their behavior.”

A recent illustration happened in April, when hundreds of federal judges received pizzas at their home, with those orders attributed to the murdered son of a federal judge. “The mob doesn’t necessarily want to kill you. That’s their last resort. What they want to do is influence your decision-making. So, they send you a message that is designed to let you know that they can get to you,” Zayas said.

When a judge receives an active threat, Ironwall places that judge into its emergency support program. The company now has three times as many judges in receiving this protection than it did last year. “Judges and courts are taking these threats more seriously. There’s a greater sensitivity and a greater acknowledgment that threats turn into violence more than they have before,” Zayas said. “Courts are more aware of it, which is why more courts are paying for protection.”

What Can Be Done?

“I think the first line of defense is increasingly going to fall upon the individual judges themselves, becoming more informed, aware of the threat factors, getting a security assessment and how they can harden their environment,” Judge Grimm believes. “It’s incumbent upon judges to be aware of their personal behaviors as far as information they are sharing online and seek input from security professionals who can teach them the proper ways to protect

themselves and their families.”

As with online protection, alarms and home security systems provide an extra layer of safety that could discourage or repel a potential attacker. However, also as with online protection, don’t just choose a provider and assume the problem is solved. Get more than one estimate and program description and test the response time. If someone is trying to break into your home, and help doesn’t arrive for 30 minutes or more, that will likely not be effective.

Explore federal and state options that cover part or all the cost of home security systems. Inquire with your court, local law enforcement and the US Marshals for direction in how to select and use the system best for you.

Judicial Protection Laws

Twenty states have passed consumer data protection laws that give residents more control over their personally identifiable information, and more are now passing similar laws specific to judges, granting them authority to have their home addresses and other private data removed from anywhere it may be accessed online. At the federal level, the Daniel A. Claitor Judicial Security and Privacy Act (“Daniel’s Law”) generally prohibits federal agencies and private businesses from publicly posting certain personal information (e.g., home addresses) of federal judges and their immediate family members.

If judicial protection legislation is pending in your state, contact your legislators and let them know of your advocacy. If not, contact them to raise awareness over the number of threats

and attacks judges now face, and request that a bill providing protection be introduced in the next session.

But laws are just words on paper unless they are enforced, and that takes resources that must be allocated to do so. “Given the configuration of the House and the Senate as it is at the present and the degree of hostility being directed at judges, I think it would be a welcome surprise if in that environment the appropriations for the state and federal judiciary included sufficient funds and resources to heighten security for judges,” said Grimm.

Statutes do help, even when resources are lacking. They provide guard rails and raise awareness that certain actions are illegal and dangerous. But when awareness that enforcement is lacking becomes prevalent, they are more easily ignored. Let’s face it – everyone in a town knows the roads where it’s safe to drive 50mph when the speed limit is 35, because the police are focused elsewhere.

The passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) offers a prime example of beneficial legislation that was initially ineffective because state attorneys general were swamped with violation reports and could only prosecute one out of every 10,000 cases. “To address the glut, they opened up private enforcement,” Ron Zayas explained, “which allowed people to sue individually and enforcement to be turned over to attorneys and activists being able to move these cases forward. After that the number of lawsuits went up significantly.”

Such private enforcement is now available to courts as well. “That allows

companies like ours to act on their behalf, and we can be much more aggressive in doing so,” Zayas said.

“When properly implemented, online protection removes personal information online, and that has been proven to neutralize threats like the weaponization of pizza delivery. And like most preventative measures, it is cheaper than the cost of hiring armed details for judges, or the cost of a cowered judiciary.”

Judges are People Too

In these contentious times, Judge Paul Grimm believes judges and lawyers must engage more actively with the public, to help them understand that judges are doing their jobs as a necessity, in a Constitutional checks and balance structure that was intended to allow each of the government branches to exercise authority over the others, so that no one branch becomes too powerful.

“We are in a hyperpolarized environment of congressional gridlock, bold action by executives by both parties, willingness on the part of political actors and public figures to personally criticize and attack the motives, the integrity, the impartiality, the legitimacy and patriotism of individual judges. And where is the counter-narrative?”

“It tends to be a letter to the editor that few people see, or a statement by a bar association. And that has a limited audience that is already more familiar with the situation. We have an American public that is largely, civically illiterate about the judiciary, which is the only branch of government that is designed to protect their rights, privileges, and benefits,” Grimm said. “Courts and

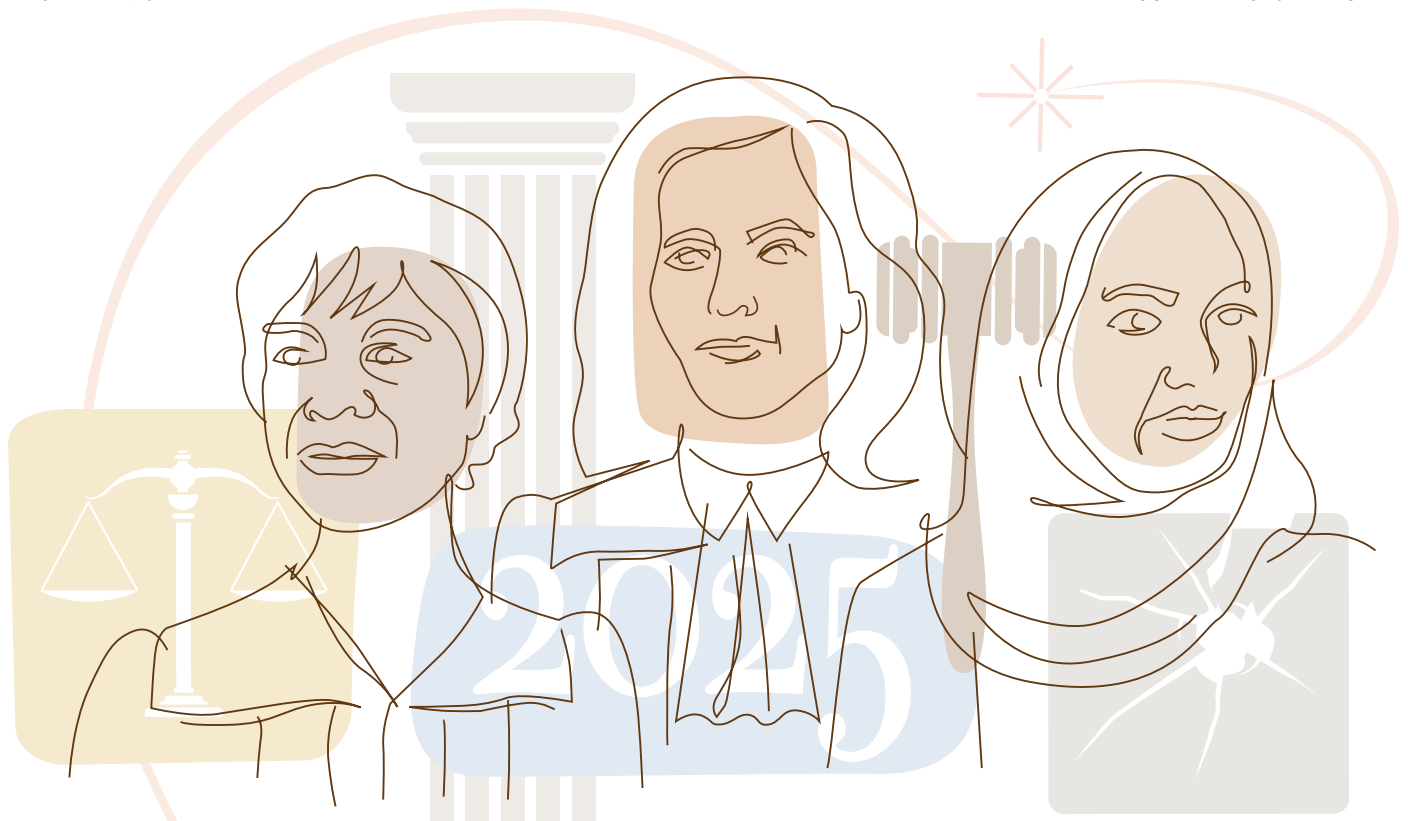
judges are not telling their own stories; their stories are being told by other individuals, many of whom may not care whether they get it right.”

Because of this, Ron Zayas believes the situation is likely to get worse.

“Courts have a historically low level of public confidence, and that situation is being exploited for a purpose. When the President says they’re corrupt and that judges are bad people, he is giving his supporters tangible reasons to not just dislike the courts, but to believe that the courts are making their lives worse.

“We’re already at the point where judges are asking for permission from their ethics committees to talk out about this stuff because they’re not allowed to do it. But will it get to the point where we still have time to fix it? I don’t know. But it is incumbent upon judges to protect themselves,” Zayas stressed. “They should have the court do it. They should have the government do it. But at the end of the day, they must take responsibility and say, ‘This is not going to happen to my family.’”

Through his work with the Bolch Institute, Judge Grimm is already speaking out in defense of judicial security and independence through civics and education programs. “We have to engage with the public because we didn’t get in this position overnight. We must help them understand how our system works, and why the courts are vital to protecting the rule of law, which is essential to protecting their freedoms. And we must figure out a way to get that message out beyond the legal community so we’re not just talking to ourselves. If we can do these things, then we have some hope.”



Women in the Judiciary



By Ivan Caetano, Afia Appiah,
and Laura Ciacciofera¹

As the world celebrated international women's day in March, the 69th Session of the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women convened in New York, and the NGO CSW, a platform for the voices and leadership of global feminist and women's rights organizations held their annual official parallel programming events across the street at the Church Center for the United Nations. The International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ) was a proud sponsor of this year's Women in the Judiciary program which reflected on women judges in society and shared information about the paths these women have taken within their respective judiciary systems around the world to thrive in their roles. Additional sponsors of this award-winning, multi-year event included the following

partner organizations – the National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ), the Federal Bar Association (FBA), the American Bar Association (ABA), and many other groups, including Fordham University School of Law, and highlighted presentations by the following speakers: Hon. Karoline Mehalchick, FBA President-Elect, Hon. Bernadette D'Souza, representing the International Association of Women Judges, North America Regional Directors, Presiding Judge Camille Vinet, Secretary General, Association of European Administrative Judges, Hon. Beth Bloom, Immediate Past Chair, FBA Judiciary Division, Hon. Florence Hermite-Fageur, representing the IAWJ, Hon. Michelle Rick, President, NAWJ, Hon. Delissa Ridgway, Court of International Trade, and Hon. Col. Linda Strite Murnane

(Ret.), Associate Justice (Pro Tem), High Court, Republic of the Marshall Islands.

This year's program explored the role that women play in the judiciary and how gender equality strengthens accountability across and within governmental bodies. The panelists explored how a justice system that maintains gender-balance in decision-making roles encourages greater participation by women in government at all levels, as well as in judiciaries and other public institutions. As the panelists discussed, from law school through clerkship positions, access to higher-level opportunities remains a challenge, largely due to the historical

Although women occupied at least 30% of judicial positions in all OECD countries overall, there were wide variations from country to country – ranging from 81% in Latvia to 31% in the United Kingdom.³ The countries with the greatest gender balance were predominantly civil law systems where women are recruited directly from law schools before they face possible career disruptions.⁴ On the other hand, in common law systems, women often face a statutory requirement of at least five or seven years post-qualification experience before they are legally qualified for posts in the judiciary.⁵ However, recent data about international tribunals shows that, for instance, out of the 15 judges serving at

the International Court of Justice (ICJ) only four (27%) are women, though the Vice Presidency is held by a female judge⁶. At the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, 6 out of 21 judges are women (29%), and its Vice President is also female⁷. Nonetheless, the International Criminal Court (ICC) presents a more favorable picture, with 11 female judges out of 18⁸ (61%), excluding those in holdover status completing cases. The President and second Vice President are women.⁹ One study in the United States reflects that women now make up 34% of the judiciary nationwide – well below the percentage of women in the population.¹⁰ Despite this progress, the presence of women

Where We are Today

dominance of men in judicial roles. While women are increasingly finding their place within the judiciary, they still grapple with balancing family responsibilities and the demands of the bench. Despite these obstacles, when appointed and confirmed to senior positions, they become leaders within their courts and role models for those coming up through the ranks.

To put this in perspective, recent reporting from 2020 demonstrates that women play a prominent role in most Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member country judiciaries, averaging 57.2% in all countries within the organization excluding data within the United States. This reflects a slight increase of 3.9 percentage points compared to 2014 data.²

International women's day in March, the 69th Session of the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women convened in New York, women attending.



in high-level courts continues to be comparatively smaller, with significant differences at the supreme court level. In 2020, women occupied only 40% of the positions in supreme courts in OECD member countries.¹¹ That study reflects that greater inclusion of women in the judiciary results in more equitable decision-making at all levels of the court system – which is fundamental to true justice.¹²

As Judge Michelle Rick reflected in her remarks at the program, while the statistics reveal that the number of women in the judiciary has not reached parity, there has been a noteworthy increase in the number of women judges and it's clear that their presence has played a role in guaranteeing access to justice and justice for all, as well as protecting the rights of individuals under the umbrella of the rule of law. Judge Delissa Ridgway explained that the role of women judges is not to feminize the court but to humanize the court.

With wisdom, integrity and courage, the momentum toward breaking the glass ceiling and inspiring women all over the world is now. Perhaps Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, said it best when confirmed as the first African-American female justice on the U.S. Supreme Court. In a note shared

widely in the U.S., and abroad, as well as in International Courts, “I know it has not always been easy as I have tried to navigate the challenges of juggling my career and motherhood, and I fully admit that I did not always get the balance right. But I hope that

you have seen that with hard work, determination, and love, it can be done.”¹³ This message resonated with the sentiments expressed by the speakers at this program, and echoes the struggle and challenges in the profession.

Judge Mimi Tsankov, Chair of the Conference of Administrative Law Judges of the American Bar Association.



Judge Michelle Rick, NAWJ President giving remarks at the 69th Session of the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women.

1 The authors are students in the LL.M. in International Law and Justice Program at Fordham School of Law, in New York. Supporting research was provided by Nathaniel Bartholomew, B.A. in Economics, Bocconi University, Milan, Italy.

2 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *THE PURSUIT OF GENDER EQUALITY, AN UPHILL BATTLE*, (2017).

3 *Id.*

4 *Id.*

5 *Id.* In 2021, in Latin America the percentage of female ministers in the highest Court of Justice or Supreme Court is 30.4%. In India, of the 788 judges in all High Courts, only 107 (13%) are women, and, as of 2023 none of the 24 High Courts in India have a woman Chief Justice. In contrast, from 2012 to 2022, in Europe, the percentage of female judges has increased from 54% to 60%, whereas in supreme courts the percentage has gone from 33% to 43% suggesting the gender gap between different hierarchical levels is reducing but hasn't achieved parity. In Africa, across the continent the scenario is slowly changing with regard to parity in the judiciary.

6 Members of the Bench of International Court of Justice-ICJ, <https://www.icj-cij.org/current-members> (last visited Apr. 8, 2025).

7 Members of the Bench of International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea-ITLOS, <https://www.itlos.org/en/main/the-tribunal/members/> (last visited April 2, 2025).

8 Members of the Bench of International Criminal Court-ICC <https://www.icc-cpi.int/judges/judges-who-s-who> (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

9 Presidency, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/about/presidency> (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

10 Susan Chehardy, *Breaking the Gavel Ceiling: How Gender Inclusion Improves the Judicial System*, ABA Article (Apr. 8, 2025, 12:21 PM),

https://www.americanbar.org/groups/law_practice/resources/law-practice-today/2023-november/breaking-the-gavel-ceiling-how-gender-inclusion-improves-the-judicial-system/

11 OECD Study, *supra* note 2.

12 Susan Chehardy, *supra* note 10.vv

13 Letter from Justice Ketanji Jackson, Institute for Africa Women in Law (Apr. 16, 2023), https://www.africanwomeninlaw.com/_files/ugd/c889be_4fdc6c60795f4f5bb6a9cf55c8a99204.pdf (last visited Apr. 8, 2025).



On April 9-12, 2025, the membership of IAWJ celebrated its 17th Biennial Conference in Capetown, South Africa. Themed “*Resilience: Women in Leadership to End Gender-Based Violence & Femicide*,” the conference featured three days of plenary sessions, banquets, and a gala exploring topics on this theme. The conference opened with a keynote speech by President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa. IAWJ Vice-

“putting your oxygen mask on first,” a lesson in self-care, something we often neglect in favor of our jobs.

One of the striking elements of the Biennial is observing women judges from each country and region represent their cultures and traditions. Women wore their chapter’s bespoke cloth fashioned into unique gowns and dresses. Some wore iconic jewelry and hairstyles. Each

Reflections on my Term as NAWJ Director, the IAWJ Biennial Conference in Capetown, and Welcoming NAWJ’s New International Director, Judge Bernadette D’Souza



By Hon. Judge Lisa Walsh
Circuit court judge, 11th judicial circuit of Miami-Dade County, Florida,
Currently serving as
the Administrative Judge of the appellate division.

President and Chief Justice of the South African Supreme Court Mandisa Muriel Lindelwa Maya also greeted our guests. 749 women judges from 49 countries were in attendance. Out of that number, 47 NAWJ members traveled the long distance to attend the conference. One program that stood out was a wellness program where NAWJ member Nancy Joseph, a Federal Magistrate Judge from Wisconsin, spoke on the wisdom of

country’s member wore her country’s fashion hallmarks with pride. NAWJ members displayed our national colors, wore matching USA flag scarves, and waved the US flag.

Some of our members were lucky enough to begin or end our trip with a safari or game reserve visit. I arrived in Capetown a few days early to attend the IAWJ board meetings, as this was my



17th IAWJ

International Association of Women Judges

Biennial Conference
Cape Town, South Africa

last year on the Board. Serendipitously, Judge Miriam Perry was on my flight, and we decided to join each other on our separately planned excursions. Because of Judge Perry, I was able to go wine touring in Stellenbosch, and Judge Perry joined me on an all-day excursion to the Cape of Good Hope.

The Biennial marked the end of my four-year term on the IAWJ Board. I served during some unusual times. In May 2021, because of the pandemic, I was elected and sworn in remotely from home while the conference was held in Auckland, New Zealand.

Shortly after the Biennial Conference, I joined the Afghan Women Judges Support Committee, a group of IAWJ members interested in supporting the Afghan Chapter of IAWJ. In May 2021, our small group remotely attended the Afghan women judges' conference in Kabul. Instead of a planned program to discuss the chapter's organizational development, the women judges reported their fear of the impending US troop withdrawal and the Taliban approach to Kabul. Within months, the Taliban regained control over the country, and the Afghan women judges — a chapter of IAWJ, just like NAWJ — were in hiding. Death threats were common. Their homes were ransacked. Many reported that they left their homes and possessions with little notice, never to return. Officials from the Taliban and former prisoners began to hunt the women judges.

Some of the members of the IAWJ support committee, including Judges Vanessa Ruiz and Patricia Whalen, began to assist these brave women in their perilous attempt to leave Afghanistan. This story has been shared at our conferences, articles, and NAWJ

webinars, like “*Escape from Kabul – and Those left Behind.*”

Dozens of these women arrived in the US. I worked to organize NAWJ members into mentor leaders and teams to form friendships and circles of support for these women. DLA Piper's Perimeter Group worked with other firms and agencies to ensure that those women judges who needed legal assistance could be matched with appropriate resources. NAWJ boasts some terrific leaders who have given selflessly of their time. Literally dozens of NAWJ members either have a mentee or lead a mentor team. Of note are the leaders of the California and the District 4 regions that have the largest number of Afghan women judges, Judges Bev Cutler, Nadia Keilani, Doreen Boxer, Selena Epley, and Nahal Iravani-Sani. Judge Linda Murnane has represented NAWJ on a pilot project for the ABA which gives scholarship stipends to Afghan legal professionals who are trying to reaccredit in the US. There are so many leaders and mentors around the US who have selflessly given of their time

and energy to assist these brave women in adjusting.

I am so grateful for the experiences I have had as IAWJ Director for North America and NAWJ International Director. None of this was in the job description. But the friendships I have formed, the things I have learned, and the work I have done for both NAWJ and IAWJ have enriched my life and made me a better judge and hopefully a better person.

Now, I welcome our newly elected IAWJ Director and NAWJ International Director, Judge Bernadette D'Souza, to the post. Judge D'Souza is a Past-President of NAWJ and served as the chair of the international judges committee for the 2013 annual conference in New Orleans. She will not only be our representative on the NAWJ and IAWJ Boards but has agreed to chair NAWJ's 2026 annual conference in New Orleans as well. In addition to her duties, Judge D'Souza will also chair NAWJ's International Judges Committee.



She will face unexpected challenges. As NAWJ members have come to expect, we host judges at our conferences from around the world. Our international judges program features an ethics component and visits to state and federal courts. Our international visitors are immersed in the American judicial system. This program was founded by the late Judge Judy Chirlin in 2001, has grown in popularity, and has been successful ever since. During the last three conferences, we have had to cap the number of attendees, because our program was so popular and successful.

The US State Department International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Division (INL) has supported our efforts for more than 10 years. We have been so fortunate to have the support and assistance of Senior Officers Shibani Malhotra and Oretha Gilbert and their staff working with our local judges at each conference to arrange a robust program. INL officers have commented that simply by exposing judges to the American system and our court programs, education, and training, NAWJ imparts superior ethics and anticorruption programming. NAWJ and IAWJ have realized an unexpected side benefit from our

programming as well. Nine different regions or countries have formed associations after their judges attended a NAWJ conference. The formation of women judge associations around the world provides a platform for educational programs and trainings. Because of the camaraderie inherent in forming an association, lessons are more likely to be generally accepted and easier to implement, and program goals are better realized.

Moreover, the networking opportunity has not been one-sided. Many of our NAWJ members have formed close friendships with judges around the world. Since working with INL, I have attended inaugural conferences in Chile and Montenegro as a keynote speaker. Judge D'Souza has trained judges both abroad and in her court from Armenia, Trinidad and Tobago, and South Korea. She was the Keynote Speaker at conferences held in

Trinidad and Tobago and South Korea. Now, while State Department funding is on hold, we are unsure of our program's future. Judge D'Souza will explore ways to ensure that Judge Chirlin's vision remains a robust part of NAWJ's repertoire of international judge programming. I am sure you will all join me in welcoming and supporting Judge D'Souza in her new role.

It has been a privilege of a lifetime to serve as NAWJ's International Director. I hope that in two years, when IAWJ hosts its 18th Biennial Conference in Quebec City, I will join hundreds of NAWJ members in attendance.



What Judges Can Do to Preserve the Rule of Law

In today's environment despite your political leanings, the rule of law is under siege. Few judges have the opportunity to make decisions that would impact an entire state or the country but regardless all of us can take a part to uphold the rule of law. Depending upon your jurisdiction, you may have restrictions on political activities, or your election may prevent you from supporting a plan that is tied to the opposing side. Appreciating the variety of limitations, there are things that we as judges can do daily to preserve the rule of law.

Obviously, we are required to follow the law and in so doing to uphold the rule of law, but what can we do to prevent the attack on the rule of law daily. Since becoming a judge over a decade ago, I have observed a gradual decline in professionalism. One such example is the increase in lawyers not being prepared for court.



By Victoria A.B. Willis
Chief Judge, 15th Judicial Circuit Virginia



Oftentimes evidenced in their arguments or worse with a request for a continuance stating that they are not prepared. Other examples include lapses in addressing the court while seated or engaging in an argument with opposing counsel. So, what you may wonder does this have to do with preserving the rule of law?

The law is about rules, boundaries, limits – it sets expectations in order to permit an orderly society. Adjacent to this concept is that lawyers, as professionals, should conduct themselves in accord with those rules, boundaries and limits. As the profession becomes more lax on expectations and allows greater deviation from standards, there is a loss associated with this approach and a decline in the rule of law.

Now having said all of this, there are changes that have been made that were necessary as they were rooted in racism or bigotry – those changes do not and have not impacted the rule of law negatively. But – allowing lawyers or others to address the court rudely, to shout in response, to display a negative attitude toward the judge or staff – all are examples of behavior that nibbles at the foundation of our rule of law.

When I am with friends who ask if I have watched one of the many judge shows or seen the videos of judges behaving badly – I calmly reply that I may have and that

it is sad if they believe that is how court is always conducted. I gently explain that it is my expectation that people will speak respectfully to the court, to witnesses and to staff as I speak respectfully to them. Though it won't make great television, what it does do is preserve the dignity of the court and preserves the rule of law.



The court that I sit is the highest trial court and an appellate court for two lower courts which are not courts of record – general district and juvenile/domestic relations court. That means that we often have self-represented persons that are not familiar with court procedures. When emotions start to boil – I gently explain the rules and encourage people if they need an emotional break to ask for one. When delivering my ruling, I strive to be polite to both sides, explaining my reasoning by reviewing their side and why or why not the law does not support their position.



On one occasion, a Commonwealth Attorney had become quite heated during his final argument slamming his hand on the table. I listened quietly and when it was time for me to deliver my ruling I commented “sometimes the role of the judge is to provide an opportunity for litigants to vent their frustration and, in this instance, that was definitely accomplished.” The Commonwealth Attorney smiled and later thanked me for my patience apologizing for his outburst. Had I reprimanded him or interrupted him – it may not have ended as well. As the highest trial court, we have jury

cases involving felony and civil matters that range from adverse possession to zoning and require counsel for most filings. One would expect the level of preparedness and written materials to match the issue being litigated. Sadly, the art of clear writing, solid dependable research is fading. Gone are the days when you could rely on the citations in a brief – to set the standard – you must review each one. This is something I never assign to a law clerk. I review those cases, and on the day of argument, I ask questions about the cited cases, but I do so in a respectful manner. I do not accuse or be argumentative – I will ask – “Counsel, as I was reading the case you cited, I wondered about the point of law you quoted as it appeared to be dicta that did not support the outcome of the case?”



With the advent of AI, these issues are prevalent. While we as judges are required to pledge not to use AI in the drafting of opinion letters, and the Virginia State Bar has requested lawyers to refrain from reliance on AI, this latest invention is finding its way into briefs and can be deceiving. As a Judge, if AI is used by a self-represented litigant, there is no recourse, but with attorneys, letting them know that you are prepared and reviewing their cited cases is a proactive method of preventing its use.

On occasion, when tempers appear to be taking over, my voice becomes quieter. I will sometimes raise my hand to get the litigants attention. I remind them that I treat them with respect and expect that they would do the same for the court. If I become frustrated, I will take a recess

Continued on page 22

A Student's Perspective

As an undergraduate student working as a judicial extern for Judge Michelle Rick, I had the opportunity to attend the 2025 Mid-year conference of the NAWJ in Ann Arbor at the University of Michigan Law school. The theme of the conference was "Injustice Anywhere is a Threat to Justice Everywhere", and that theme remained a clear focus throughout the programming that took place. Events ranged from a presentation on the rights of incarcerated women within the prison system to a discussion with Chief Justice Clement and Justice Zahra about bridging the access to justice gap that exists within Michigan.

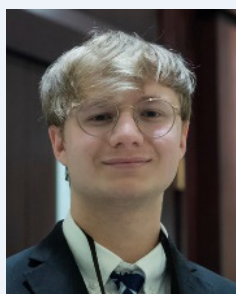
When first arriving at the conference, I had the opportunity to participate in a law student mentorship program, "planting the seed". The membership of the NAWJ sat down to answer questions that we as students

had. In what was reminiscent of speed friending activities, both law students and the few undergraduate attendees had the chance to have honest discussions with Judges in various positions of both state and the federal judiciaries. The Judges provided insight into the legal profession as a whole and just more generally advice and lessons learned from their own experiences.

Following the mentorship program of the first day, the next day of the conference was full of keynote speakers and presentations, all surrounding the overarching theme of Injustice Anywhere is a Threat to Justice Everywhere. After a welcome from American Bar Association President Bill Bay, several members of the University of Michigan law school faculty came in to speak about the second-hand

trauma of working within the legal profession. A topic I myself covered as a part of the Michigan Government Semester Program at Michigan State, which originally led me to apply for a position with Judge Rick. It was not only impactful to hear the stories of many of the Judges, but personally it was a time for me to reflect on the work I've done in my capacity as an undergraduate extern.

The conference brought many opportunities not just to seek advice from those within the profession, but invaluable knowledge about the inequities which exist within our legal system. A presentation regarding women's incarceration in Michigan gave me a new insight into the disparities which exist between women and men who have been incarcerated. Many of the issues facing women who have been incarcerated are commonly overlooked when considering prison reform, in



By Andrew Palmer
Michigan State University
Judicial Extern for Judge Michelle Rick



favor of the problems facing the men's population, which makes up 93% of the entire incarcerated population. Later in the day, we were honored to be joined by Chief Justice Clement and Justice Zahra of the Michigan Supreme Court. The Justice's discussed the justice gap which exists within Michigan when it comes to accessing support for civil legal matters. Though, through the Justice for All commission, Michigan has made great strides in bridging the gap with the addition of legal self-help centers, we still have a lot of work ahead of us. Justice Zahra especially has been a champion for addressing the justice gap and stressed during the discussion that this was simply not an issue of a lack of attorneys, but a lack of para-professionals within the legal field. A better regulation of these professionals would lessen the burden currently placed on public interest attorneys working for legal aid organizations and hopefully bring about a change in how individuals go about seeking consultation for their civil legal matters.

The Mid-year conference of the NAWJ was a unique experience and insight into the legal profession through the eyes of not only the judiciary, but former and current attorneys, educators, and supporters of the organization. As an undergraduate student, it has only reaffirmed my resolve to pursue the law following the completion of my degree. I also believe I left the conference looking at the practice of the law far differently than preceding it, perceiving the practice of law as a more holistic, person-based, practice, rather than only simple application.

What Judges Can Do to Preserve the Rule of Law

Continued from Page 20

to refocus myself. Being in control, being fair, listening to the parties is essential and sends the right message that the court will follow the rule of law and not be swayed by passion or prejudice. When rendering a decision or a sentence, I refrain from emotional statements because while they may be justified, I do not want to give the appearance that my ruling was based on anything other than the law.



Litigants in our courthouse must dress appropriately. When people are well dressed and not in pajamas or sweatpants, their behavior changes. Some may say this is burdensome, but we do not require tiaras and tuxes – but we also do not allow t-shirts with vulgar sayings or revealing clothing.

When witnesses are testifying, and their use of vernacular is questionable – I will politely ask that they refrain from such colorful language. I do this with a soft tone and a pleasant smile – to date they have apologized and complied. I have even had one ask me “Judge – I want to tell you what he said but the language is bad.”



If you have read this far you are probably wondering – how does this preserve the rule of law? I believe that as judges we set the standard for behavior and proper conduct and in so doing we are a live

example of what the rule of law seeks – assurance of equal treatment, order and respect for others. You need only to watch the news to observe the failure of public figures in following the rule of law. Engaging in conduct that utilizes fear, intimidation, threats, and yelling designed to force their view on others.

When we were raising our children, my husband would often say “we can disagree without being disagreeable.” It would be senseless to believe that when the founders framed the Constitution, they did so without a cross word, but it would be equally senseless to believe they conducted themselves in the manner currently displayed by elected officials. In undertaking the task of setting up a new country they recognized the need to have rules that would serve the people and assure the citizens of orderly society governed by the law.

For a frame of reference, at my ten-year mark – I had sat on over 25,000 cases, managed more than 400 juries and had a reversal rate of approximately .001 percent. In my entire career – I have only used my gavel one time to quite a courtroom down. I provide this information to assure the reader, that my dockets were busy, my days oftentimes felt endless and yet I always kept in mind that for that litigant, that defendant, that mother, father, self-represented person, this was their only day to seek justice.

To conclude, in my little corner of the world, where I deal with all the horrors of society, I steadfastly maintain my adherence to proper behavior and adhere to the rule of law. In so doing, I strive to preserve the rule of law and if each of us do the same, we can – like a pebble in a pond – make a difference.

“The judiciary has been under serious attack this year, raising concerns about the ability of judges to function independently, as well as safely.”

LISTEN UP
SPEAK UP
STAND UP

IN DEFENSE OF OUR PROFESSION

By Retired Judge Doris Pechkurow, Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas

The judiciary has been under serious attack this year, raising concerns about the ability of judges to function independently as well as safely. In March, Chief Justice John Roberts made an unusual public statement, advising those persons calling for impeachment of a judge with whose decision they disagreed, that filing an appeal is the appropriate course of action, not calling for impeachment.

Since codes of judicial conduct preclude public statements on pending court matters and/or participation in political activity, the National Association of Women Judges would be constrained from responding to criticism of the judiciary in its publications. Such constraints do not apply to retired judges, however, such that I was

free to publicly defend a judge who was criticized in the press in a situation far removed from the current controversies.

It was during a bar association program that I discovered that legislation had been introduced to amend the Pennsylvania child custody code, prompted by the horrific parental homicide of an eight-year-old child during a period of court-ordered custody. The legislation was quite disconcerting, full of unreasonable and problematic provisions purportedly designed to prevent such an incident in the future. Significantly, the trial judge was criticized and condemned in the press and in social media such that security was needed to protect his family.

Having rendered thousands of child custody decisions, and not knowing the judge personally, I felt compelled to research the facts of the case. After obtaining and reviewing the transcripts



and evidence, I was convinced the trial judge made no error in his decision which, significantly, was not even appealed. But it had become a political opportunity for the state senator, whose resources for drafting the legislation were certainly not family law practitioners. Hence, I felt a call to action.

I wrote to every state senator detailing the problems with the proposed legislation and explaining that the trial judge had not erred in his decision, coordinating with the lobbying efforts of the state bar association where feasible.

I also wrote to the local county newspaper, which printed my opinion, although it was followed by some nasty remarks that I was just trying to protect another judge.

The state bar association, the American Civil Liberties Union and state domestic violence organizations all opposed the proposed legislation. Fortunately, the concerted lobbying effort of all the interested parties succeeded in scuttling the legislation. Two years later, a less onerous custody modification bill was passed.

During this endeavor, however, I discovered a website entitled, ironically, the Center for Judicial Excellence, of which NAWJ members who do family court work should be aware. The website tabulates incidents of parental homicide in the United States dating back to 2008 and has as its primary objective “to expose the systemic failures in U.S. family courts that are harming countless children.” Really?!

A close reading of the small print on the website revealed that of the 936 reported child homicides, only 136

(15%) had any court involvement. And among the enumerated Pennsylvania homicides, only 5 of the 32 cases had court involvement. Moreover, a review of the published information showed they were unforeseen, horrific incidents wholly unrelated to the custody orders.

I wrote to the executive Director of the organization complaining about the biased, misleading criticism of the judiciary but received no response. Nonetheless, I felt she had been put on notice that the website was subject to criticism.

One other unique – and positive opportunity for judicial advocacy – arose in February 2022, when the Honorable Ketanji Brown Jackson was nominated for the Supreme Court.

I learned that one of our Pennsylvania Senators was not supporting her because of his political affiliation. I felt, however, that my experience as a judge and former public defender provided me with insight to expound on how Justice Jackson’s background made her uniquely qualified to sit on the highest court of our land.

I wrote an op-ed, which the Philadelphia Inquirer published in a Sunday edition, reaching the widest possible range of readers. While my op-ed did not dissuade the Senator from his “no” vote, I was glad for the opportunity to educate readers about Justice Jackson’s unique qualifications and was delighted, of course, that many other U.S. Senators supported her confirmation.

Upon becoming a judge, it was an adjustment to refrain from advocacy and political activities, after having been active in the women’s rights movement for decades. By quirk of chance,

however, it was my participation in the women’s rights movement that led to my career on the bench.

I became motivated to go to law school after learning about the impediments to the advancement of women, which was particularly problematic in the early seventies. I began my legal career at the Defender Association of Philadelphia and as municipal elections were heating up one year, including elections for judges (judges are elected, not appointed, in Pennsylvania), it occurred to me that the majority of our city’s judges were men who had previously been prosecutors. Thus began my quest for the bench, which succeeded several years later.

I presided in the family division of the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas for more than seventeen years, joined the National Association of Women Judges and actively participated in NAWJ conferences as well as bar association programs and activities. After retiring in December, 2019, I maintained my NAWJ membership and remained active with the bar association.

Membership in the NAWJ, as well as the IAWJ, has provided opportunities to discover and exchange ideas and information with many talented women in the U.S. as well as in other countries. Retirement has provided the additional opportunity to share such valuable information with the public as the need arises. Thus, I was happy for the opportunity to use my background and experience to speak on behalf of the judiciary when the need arose, so the public could learn the facts from the judiciary’s point of view, since sitting judges are precluded from making such pronouncements.

REMEMBERING POPE FRANCIS

A Judicial Reflection from NAWJ leaders and US-COPAJU members



In the wake of his passing, members of the judiciary across the Americas are pausing to reflect on the moral courage and deep humanity that defined Pope Francis' papacy. Among them are a host of NAWJ members who have had the great honor of serving with Pope Francis as members of the U.S. Chapter of the Committee of Pan American Judges for Social Justice (US-COPAJU).

In 2019, Pope Francis called for the formation of a Pan American Permanent Committee of Judges to overcome isolation in the judiciary and renew the mission of justice with service to the poor at its core. That vision became reality in 2023 when he granted COPAJU formal recognition as a Private Association of the Faithful with international juridical status.

He also endorsed the creation of the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Institute to advance judicial research and collaboration. This past March, US-COPAJU gathered at the Vatican with other Pan American judges and academics at the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences for the workshop on Artificial Intelligence, Justice, and Democracy. Pope Francis wanted us to address the celebration and the caution



of Artificial Intelligence. He recognized that A.I. could expand democratic processes, advance scientific research, and give “demanding and arduous work to machines.” Yet, he cautioned:

*[AI] could bring with it a greater injustice between advanced and developing nations or between dominant and oppressed social classes, raising the dangerous possibility that a “throwaway culture” be preferred to a “culture of encounter.”*¹

Pope Francis’ health prevented him from joining us at this year’s workshop but it was an honor to be on assignment at the Vatican affirming the significant role the judiciary plays in ensuring justice is accessible to all, even to the least of us. The workshop agenda included an opportunity to participate in Ash Wednesday with the Pope’s close confidant Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson. The Honorable Judge Joy Lobrano, US-COPAJU Executive Director and past NAWJ Secretary, District 6 Director, and Co-Chair of NAWJ’s Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Committee, and the Honorable Judge Pamela Washington, US-COPAJU Board Member and NAWJ President Elect, appreciated the opportunity to represent the U.S. judiciary on the global stage, participate in judicial summits at the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences at the Vatican, and experience the legacy and papacy of Pope Francis.

Judge Lobrano had the distinct honor of meeting Pope Francis three times and staying twice at Domus Sanctae Marthae, the Pope’s residence, during her visits. These experiences were more than symbolic; they were deeply formative. “Pope Francis reminded us that justice must respond to the realities of human

life,” said Judge Lobrano. “He called us to ensure our courts become instruments of trust and restoration. That message affirmed my conviction that justice must be close to the people it serves. That understanding has led me to develop community initiatives that treat justice

not as a distant institution, but as a living presence in communities, through a community model that integrates early intervention, trauma-based restorative care, and respect for the rule of law.”

In its April 22, 2025 statement, US-



April 2023 - COPAJU Vatican Meeting NAWJ members Judges Linda Murnane, Pam Washington, D'Souza, Ipema, and Nadia Keilani



June 2019 - Formation of COPAJU (left,) NAWJ members Joy Cossich Lobrano and Judges Bernadette D'Souza

COPAJU honored the late pontiff as a moral beacon who consistently reminded judges that justice must be grounded in the common good. The statement recalled his warning that *“there is no democracy with hunger, no development with poverty”* affirming the need for the judiciary that defends human dignity and strengthens the rule of law where it matters most - at the point where people feel its absence. In doing so, Pope Francis affirmed a vision of justice that is not only fair in principle, but present in the everyday lives of those too often overlooked.

Judge Washington reflected on the scriptural advice given to her by her pastor when she was appointed to the bench in 2010; the scripture will always remind her of Pope Francis because as a follower of Jesus Christ, he reflected it *“To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with [our] God.”*² For Judge Washington, who spent her last day in Rome visiting the Papal Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, the very place where he would be laid to rest, Pope Francis’ message resonated deeply: *“As women judges, we carry more than robes into the courtroom—we carry compassion, complexity, and the lived reality of the communities we serve. Pope Francis understood that. He reminded us that justice without empathy is incomplete. He gave us a language to talk about justice that included tenderness, proximity, and shared responsibility.”*

In his honor, the US-COPAJU will continue its mission “to facilitate cooperative systemic changes that enhance the efficacy and fairness of

legal systems worldwide, focusing on vulnerable, marginalized, and peripheral communities through education, dialogue, and the practical and fair application of social justice principles.” US-COPAJU’s work aligns closely with the values long held by NAWJ: promoting equal access to justice and supporting vulnerable populations. Through the leadership of Judges Lobrano and Washington, the voice of women judges from the United States will continue to shape an international movement rooted in dignity, fairness, and care.

As NAWJ prepares to welcome Judge Washington into her new

role as President later this year, and as Judge Lobrano continues to advance international judicial collaboration, Pope Francis’s legacy remains a touchstone—a reminder that justice must always be guided by the heart as well as the law.



Judge Pamela Washington



Judge Lobrano meeting Pope Francis in June 2019 at the COPAJU Summit on Social Justice and the Franciscan Doctrine; December 2019 at the Summit of African Women Judges and Prosecutors on Human and Organ Trafficking and Organized Crime; and the 2020 Global Education Compact at the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, Vatican City

1 Micah 6:8 NIV

2 Address of His Holiness Pope Francis, the G7 Session on Artificial Intelligence Borgo Egnazia (Puglia), Friday, 14 June 2024

2025 Law Day Banquet

New England Law | Boston

NEW
ENGLAND
LAW
BOSTON



The Law Day Banquet brings together New England Law alumni, faculty, staff, students, and a distinguished group of Massachusetts legal and civic leaders to celebrate the rule of law.

“The annual Law Day Banquet is a unique opportunity for our entire community...to gather as one and reflect upon our shared responsibilities under the Constitution. This year we have the honor of welcoming Chief Justice Amy Blake, who is not only one of the region’s most accomplished jurists, but also a New England Law alum and former adjunct faculty member, making this a truly special and proud moment for our institution” said James H. Kennedy III, CEO and Dean of New England Law.

We are proud to share Chief Justice Amy Blake’s keynote address.

Good Evening! As a proud graduate of New England Law | Boston, a former adjunct faculty member, and as the first woman to serve as Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Appeals Court, I am delighted to be here tonight in celebration of Law Day. In preparing my remarks tonight, I am reminded that New England Law was founded in 1908 as Portia Law School, with a mission to provide legal education exclusively to women at a time when most other schools did not. New England Law recognized the invaluable contribution of women to the rule of law – something I am proud to emphasize every day in my new role.



Hon. Amy Lyn Blake
Chief Justice, Massachusetts Appeals Court

The annual tradition of observing Law Day – officially designated as May 1st – began in 1958 when President Dwight D. Eisenhower proclaimed that, “the people of this Nation should remember with pride, and vigilantly guard, the great heritage of liberty, justice, and equality under law which our forefathers bequeathed to us.” In his related statement, President Eisenhower remarked that on Law Day, “we honor not only the principle of the rule of law, but also those judges, legislators, lawyers, and law-abiding citizens who actively work to preserve our liberties under law.” It is an opportunity to highlight not only the importance of the rule of law in a free society, but also the ways in which our legal system strives to achieve fair treatment and justice for all people. The observation of Law Day enables us to explore our duties to one another under the Constitution and to recommit to its democratic norms.

“On a more personal note, it is indeed a special occasion when I have the honor of returning to my alma mater to speak about the legal profession’s important role in fostering community, mutual respect, and collective responsibility. There can be no doubt that, in these increasingly challenging and fraught times, they remain hallmarks of a strong democracy.”

On a more personal note, it is indeed a special occasion when I have the honor of returning to my alma mater to speak about the legal profession’s important role in fostering community, mutual respect, and collective responsibility. There can be no doubt that, in these increasingly challenging and fraught times, they remain hallmarks of a strong democracy.

It seems like just yesterday that I was attending this banquet as an evening division student, reflecting on how the legal path that stretched before me might unfold. Admittedly, it was a time filled with both tremendous excitement and more than a little trepidation. Looking back, I would have to say that it all turned out pretty well.

I would like to extend my warmest thanks to Dean James Kennedy, III, especially as he embarks on a journey to bring this outstanding and historic law school into a new era; to the Board of Trustees, led by Chairman Albert Balboni, and the Officers of New England Law | Boston; to the students, faculty, staff, and alumni of this wonderful institution; and to the many distinguished guests, colleagues, and friends who have gathered tonight to reflect upon this year’s theme of Law Day, *E Pluribus Unum*, “Out of Many, One.” Let me turn to some more history. Before the Continental Congress adjourned on July 4, 1776, it passed a resolution

creating a committee composed of John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson, whose task was to create a seal for the newly independent United States of America. These patriots and revolutionaries needed an emblem to visually symbolize a sovereign nation and a free people with lofty aspirations and boundless hopes for their future. The creation of the Great Seal of the United States was a daunting task, one that took six years and the combined efforts of fourteen men to finally bring it to fruition on June 20, 1782. I do wonder whether the task would have been completed more expeditiously had it been undertaken by the talented women of the time, including Abigail Adams, but that’s a conversation for another day.

Significantly, four features that initially were recommended by Adams, Franklin, and Jefferson were included on the final version of the seal. The Eye of Providence, symbolizing God watching over humanity, and the year 1776, representing the date of this nation’s independence, appear on the reverse side of the seal. A shield, depicting the national coat of arms, and the phrase, *E Pluribus Unum*, appear on the front side of the seal. At the time of the American Revolution, this Latin expression was a familiar sight on the title page of *Gentleman’s Magazine*, a monthly periodical that was published in London

from 1732 until 1922 and was widely read in the American colonies. Scholars have surmised that it likely served as an inspiration for the committee charged with creating the seal. The phrase *E Pluribus Unum*, which is comprised of 13 letters, is emblazoned across a scroll that is clenched in an eagle’s beak. Its meaning and inclusion on the seal expressed the formative idea that from the union of the 13 original states arose a single new nation. That is to say, “Out of Many, One.”

Our Founding Fathers aspired to create a strong national government that would be more united, cohesive, and effective than the one initially defined by the Articles of Confederation. The Articles had established a weak central government that exercised limited powers, primarily focused on defense and foreign affairs, and preserved the autonomy of the original 13 states. For the young country, this form of government was untenable and ultimately led to the Constitutional Convention in 1787. Five years after the adoption of the seal, the Framers of the Constitution boldly asserted in its Preamble that they — as representatives of “We the People of the United States” — ordained and established the Constitution “in Order to form a more perfect Union.” Fundamentally, this seminal document enshrined a collective responsibility to one another within a Federal framework

that would evolve to serve our nation and its people. However, I am compelled to observe that our earliest nation did not truly serve all of its people. It excluded, among others, people of color, women, and the poor. But our future leaders and an informed electorate, looking at our nation through the lens of the Rule of Law, fought and died to end slavery, established, among other things, civil rights and everyone's right to vote, transforming our nation into a more perfect union. But I would argue, there is more work to be done.

E Pluribus Unum was our country's de facto motto for nearly 175 years, until Congress adopted "In God We Trust," as our official motto in 1956. Notwithstanding this change, many historians agree that E Pluribus Unum remains a lasting legacy of this nation. Simply put, it is an embodiment of the belief that the United States is, first and foremost, a rich tapestry of races, ethnicities, and cultures coming together to form one society, interconnected and interdependent, where equal rights are conferred on all citizens. By reminding ourselves of our collective rights and obligations, we can endeavor to minimize substantive differences that hinder our ability to be our best selves and to thrive as one diverse community. E Pluribus Unum is a profound statement of shared humanity and immense hope, one that goes back to the earliest days of this country.

At the same time, there can be no debate that the ideal expressed by E Pluribus Unum has been challenged in myriad ways since the union of the 13 original states. As former New Orleans Mayor, Mitch Landrieu, the Founder of the E Pluribus Unum Fund, has observed: "Throughout our history, we have often fallen short of this ideal, allowing fear,

division, and mistrust to undermine our collective potential. These fractures carry a deep cost — not just to individuals, but to the promise of America itself." He continued: "The path to a brighter future for everyone begins with . . . seeing the power in our collective identity that grows from the richness of our individual stories and experiences. From this foundation, we can build opportunity, foster belonging, and work toward a vision of the common good." And that is my challenge to all of you.

With all that is happening in our country, I certainly do not view the ideal of E Pluribus Unum through rose colored glasses. Our disconnection from each other is palpable. It can feel both disconcerting and overwhelming. It is easy to lose sight of the "more perfect Union" that our Founding Fathers endeavored so mightily to establish. We often struggle to find those common ties that bridge our differences and join us together. And yet, we cannot allow ourselves to become swallowed by pessimism. Now, more than ever, we must focus on our core principles, our shared values, and our collective national experiences, so that we can reinvigorate our sense of common purpose and direction. In the face of forces that may be working to separate us, it is essential to remember that we are stronger together, more resilient together, and more successful together, than when we are apart. A rich tapestry is woven together by countless different threads, the combination of which creates a masterpiece. "Out of Many, One."

The legal community is well positioned to uphold the ideal of E Pluribus Unum by supporting and advancing a system that ensures fairness, equity, and justice for all people, regardless of their background, identity, or circumstances.

Lawyers can, and do, lead by example in fostering community, mutual respect, and collective responsibility. You will not be surprised to hear me say that access to justice is critical. The invaluable and tireless work performed by legal services organizations, pro bono advocates, and public defenders exemplifies how the legal profession strives to ensure that everyone, irrespective of their seemingly disparate circumstances, is afforded the rights and protections to which they are entitled. The resolution of conflicts, whether through the judicial system or by alternative dispute resolution, contributes to social harmony by finding common ground, by fostering mutual respect and understanding, and by ensuring that opposing perspectives are reconciled honestly and impartially. In addition, by working to dismantle systemic inequalities and promote legal reforms, thereby ensuring that marginalized or oppressed groups are treated fairly, the legal profession plays a key role in honoring the spirit of E Pluribus Unum by building bridges that unite diverse communities.

Whether you are a student, a new attorney, or one who has been in practice for decades, your commitment to nurture and advance this ideal is critically important. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, and it is my profound hope that you will, is to reflect deeply on how you can foster the ideal of E Pluribus Unum in your own life, in your practice, and in your community. Then, take action to build and shape that "more perfect Union." It can seem like an overwhelming challenge, but the value in its pursuit is its own reward. As a grateful New England Law | Boston graduate, I can tell you that we are well prepared to successfully accomplish this mission. Thank you for having me and enjoy the evening!

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



PRESIDENT
Hon. Michelle M. Rick
Michigan Court of Appeals



PRESIDENT-ELECT
Hon. Pamela Washington
Anchorage District Court



IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT
Hon. Karen Sage
299th District Court of Texas



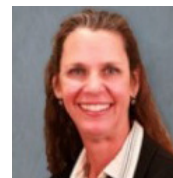
ACTING VICE-PRESIDENT DISTRICTS
Hon. Pamela Washington
Anchorage District Court



VICE-PRESIDENT PUBLICATIONS
Hon. Heather Welch
Marion Superior Court



SECRETARY
Hon. Mary Margaret Rowlands
Summit County Common Pleas Court

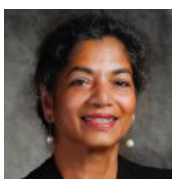


TREASURER
Hon. Victoria Willis
15th Judicial Circuit

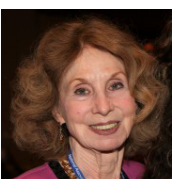


FINANCE COMMITTEE CHAIR
Hon. Leslie A. Stroth
Bronx County Hall of Justice

STATUS DIRECTORS



INTERNATIONAL DIRECTOR
Hon. Bernadette D'Souza
Orleans Parish Civil District Court



ABA DELEGATE
Hon. Ann Breen-Greco
Independent Administrative
Judicial Professional

DISTRICT DIRECTORS



DISTRICT DIRECTOR, 1
(ME, MA, NH, PR, RI)
Hon. Amy Blake
Massachusetts Appeals Court



DISTRICT DIRECTOR, 2
(CT, NY, VT)
Hon. Bianka Perez
Supreme Court,
Bronx County Civil Term



DISTRICT DIRECTOR, 3
(DE, NJ, PA, VI)
Hon. Lisa James-Beavers
New Jersey Superior Court



DISTRICT DIRECTOR, 4
(DC, MD, VA)
Hon. Francine Applewhite
United States Department of Labor,
Office of Administrative Judges



DISTRICT DIRECTOR, 5
(FL, GA, NC, SC)
Hon. Jennifer Fleet
North Carolina 26th Judicial District



DISTRICT DIRECTOR, 6
(AL, LA, MS, TN)
Hon. Sandra C. Jenkins
Louisiana Court of Appeal,
Fourth Circuit, New Orleans



DISTRICT CO-DIRECTOR, 7
(MI, OH, WV)
Hon. Miriam Perry
15th District Court, Michigan

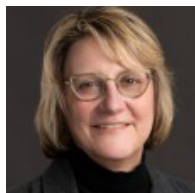


DISTRICT CO-DIRECTOR, 7
(MI, OH, WV)
Hon. Linda Murnane
United States Air Force, Retired

DISTRICT DIRECTORS (Cont.)



DISTRICT CO-DIRECTOR, 8
(IL, IN, KY)
Hon. Patrice Ball-Reed
Circuit Court of Cook County



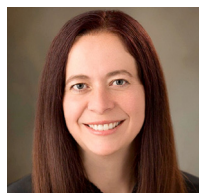
DISTRICT CO-DIRECTOR, 8
(IL, IN, KY)
Hon. Julie Verheye
St. Joseph Superior Court



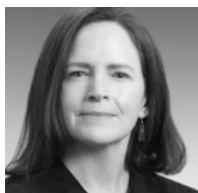
DISTRICT DIRECTOR, 10
(KS, MN, NE, ND, SD)
Hon. Rachel Pickering
Kansas Court of Appeals



DISTRICT, 11
(AR, OK, TX)
Hon. Andrea Plumlee
Dallas County District Court



DISTRICT DIRECTOR, 12
(AZ, CO, NM, UT, WY)
Hon. Jennifer Mabey
Utah District Court



DISTRICT DIRECTOR, 13
(AK, AS, GU, HI, ID, MT, OR, WA)
Hon. Bride Seifert
Homer Superior Court



CO-DIRECTOR DISTRICT, 14
(CA, NV)
Hon. Victoria Kolakowski
Alameda County Superior Court



CO-DIRECTOR DISTRICT, 14
(CA, NV)
Hon. Renee Stackhouse
Superior Court of California,
County of San Diego

DISTRICT 9 (IA, MO, WI) Director in transition

RESOURCE BOARD

Nicole Erb, Esq. (Co-Chair), White & Case
Sarah London, Esq. (Co-Chair), Lief Cabraser Heimann & Bernstein
Rachel Baumer, Thomson Reuters
Hon. Mary Becnel, Retired
Bridget DiRico, Ironwall by Incogni
David Horrigan, Esq., Relativity
Ericka Lehman, LexisNexis

Thomas Leighton, Thomson Reuters
Richard Levenstein, Cummins-Levenstein Charitable Foundation, Inc.
Kelly McNabb, Lief Cabraser Heimann & Bernstein
Elaine Metlin, Esq., Retired
Renee Spertzel, JAMS
Cathy Winter-Palmer, Retired
Ron Zayas, Ironwall by Incogni

Dear Members and Friends,

I may not sit on the bench, but I have a fundamental understanding of the importance of upholding the Rule of Law in civil society. My role allows me to support NAWT's mission by helping secure the resources that strengthen judicial education, ethics, and leadership.



Francie Teer
Francie Teer, CFRE
Director of Development

Being an ally in the legal community means using my skills to bring others together to champion fairness, inclusion, and access to justice—not just in words, but through sustained investment in the people and programs that make a difference.

*Our Resource Board and Landmark Partners continue to be great allies. I'm grateful to David Hofstede, a freelance writer and the Director of Legislative Outreach for Ironwall by Incogni who contributed *The (Dire) State of Judicial Security* for this issue. I hope it provides actionable tools and information that you can use.*

Let's keep making a difference,

Francie

NAWJ LANDMARK SPONSORS



**Lieff
Cabraser
Heimann &
Bernstein**
Attorneys at Law



the answer company™
THOMSON REUTERS®

Relativity®

**Cummins-Levenstein
Charitable Foundation, Inc.**



**The Honorable
Mary Becnel**

WHITE & CASE

ironwall

LexisNexis®

LANDMARK SPONSORS

The Honorable Mary Becnel
Cummins-Levenstein Family
Foundation

Ironwall by Incogni
JAMS
LexisNexis

Lieff, Cabraser, Heimann & Bernstein, LLP
Relativity
Thomson Reuters
White & Case LLP

CONTRIBUTING BENCH

Helen Adams
Cynthia Baldwin
Nancy Becker
Anna Blackburne-Rigsby
Bobbe Bridge
Toni Clarke
Eryn DeFontes
Laurie Denham
Susan De Witt
Victoria Ghartey
Sherri Hale

Tamara Hall
Anna Barbara Hantz Marconi
Donna Heller
Mary Henry
Tanya Jones Bosier
Jeralynn Manor
Lisa Martin
Morgan Meador
Linda Murnane
Shalini Nangia
Michelle Rick

Melissa Rossow
Karen Sage
Maria Salas-Mendoza
Kitty Schild
Bride Seifert
Bea Ann Smith
Renee Stackhouse
Leslie Stroth
Lisa Walsh
Pamela Washington
Jennifer Wells
Elizabeth White

NAWJ NEW MEMBERS SINCE JANUARY 1, 2025

We welcome the following new members of NAWJ:

Hon. Yvonna Abraham, Wayne County Third Circuit Court, Dearborn Heights, MI

Hon. Jennifer M. Allen, Probate and Family Court, Canton, MA

Hon. Michelle J. Ambrozaitis, 55th Circuit Court, Harrison, MI

Hon. Brittany Arvie, Shreveport City Court, Shreveport, LA

Hon. Lisa L. Babcock, 54B District Court, East Lansing, MI

Hon. Jennifer A. Bingham, Massachusetts Probate and Family Court, Sherborn, MA

Hon. Magdalena Reyes Bordeaux, U.S. Bankruptcy Court, Riverside, CA

Ms. Anita Botti, IAWJ, Vineyard Haven, MA
Hon. Tracy Brandeis-Roman, Court of Common Pleas of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

Ms. Cupcake Brown, Dependency Legal Services Of San Diego, San Diego, CA

Hon. Amanda L. Browning, Alaska Court System, Sitka, AK

Hon. Jacqueline M. Burchill, Ma Trial Court/ Norfolk Probate & Family Court, Cohasset, MA

Hon. Marianna C. Carpeneti, Alaska Court System, Juneau, AK

Hon. Colleen Carroll, Probate & Family Court, Boston, MA

Hon. Susan Christensen, Iowa Supreme Court, Des Moines, IA

Hon. Tricia Dare, Oakland County Circuit Court, Pontiac, MI

Hon. Eryn DeFontes, NYC Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings, Brooklyn, NY

Ms. Margie Delao, National Women's Law Center, Washington, DC

Ms. Gina L. DeRossi, Massachusetts Appeals Court, Boston, MA

Hon. Monica Diaz, State Of Utah, West Jordan, UT

Ms. Chanell Rea Dudley, Charlotte, NC

Ms. Anessa J. Feero, New England Law Boston, Brookline, MA

Hon. Katherine A. Field, Massachusetts Trial Court, Foxborough, MA

Hon. Dana M. Gershengorn, MA Juvenile Court, Sharon, MA

Ms. Alison Gill, National Women's Law Center, Washington, DC

Hon. Keren E. Goldenberg, Massachusetts Superior Court, Boston, MA

Hon. Julie E. Green, Superior Court Of The Commonwealth Of Massachusetts, Boston, MA

Hon. Sherri Lynn Hale, Will County 12th Judicial Circuit Court, Joliet, IL

Hon. Meghan Heesch, San Diego Immigration Court, San Diego, CA

Hon. Jennifer S. Henderson, Alaska Supreme Court, Anchorage, AK

Hon. Jassette Ann-Marie Henry, State Of Connecticut Judicial Branch, Hebron, CT

Mrs. Elizabeth L. Henslee, LexisNexis, Deland, FL

Hon. Heather Hocter, Los Angeles Superior Court, Los Angeles, CA

Hon. Emily W. Jipp, 48th Circuit, Allegan County Courts, SAUGATUCK, MI

Hon. Jennifer Liberty Johnsen, 17th Circuit Court (Kent County), Grand Rapids, MI

Hon. Althea Stewart Jones, Circuit Court For Prince George's County, Maryland, Bowie, MD

Hon. Anna Katselas, Interior Board Of Land Appeals, Washington, DC

Hon. Sarah Kennedy, District Court Department, Newton, MA

Hon. Sarah G. Kim, Massachusetts Superior Court, Boston, MA

Hon. Cara L. Krysil, District Court, Chelmsford, MA

Hon. Mandy Larsen, Utah State Court, Richfield, UT

Hon. Jacqueline Frances Maloney, 24th Judicial District Court - Division D, Gretna, LA

Hon. Jeralynn C. Manor, 80th District Court, Houston, TX

Hon. Philip P. Mariani, Michigan Court Of Appeals, Lansing, MI

Hon. Juana Marine-Lombard, Orleans Parish Criminal Court, New Orleans, LA

Hon. Krista Marks, First District MN, South Saint Paul, MN

Hon. Caryn R. Mitchell-Munevar, MA Probate and Family Court, Salem, MA

Hon. Rebecca A. Niburg, Hyattsville Immigration Court, Laurel, MD

Hon. Cindy Panuco, Los Angeles Superior Court, Los Angeles, CA

Hon. Mary (Polly) B. Phillips, Massachusetts Trial Court, Concord, MA

Hon. Laura Polizzi, 52-3 District Court, Rochester Hills, MI

Hon. Stephanie Porter, Maryland Judiciary/Howard County Circuit Court, Columbia, MD

Hon. Rachel D. Robinson, Loudoun Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, Leesburg, VA

Hon. Kirsten Samantha Ronholt, Departmental Cases & Hearings Division, Salt Lake City, UT

Hon. Stacey E. Sorensen Green, Minnesota Judicial Branch, Hastings, MN

Hon. Stacey L. Truesdell, Antrim County Probate Court, Bellaire, MI

Hon. Sarah A. Turano-Flores, Massachusetts Land Court, Boston, MA

Hon. Rachel Vincent, Kings County Housing Court, Oceanside, NY


Mrs. Nicole Virga Bautista, California Judges Association, Sacramento, CA

NAWJ 2026 Midyear Meeting

May 16 - 24, 2026



The 2026 Midyear Meeting kicks off with a Welcome reception and gathering in beautiful Vancouver, B.C. on May 16, 2026, before the cruise.

The Holland America  Amsterdam departs on May 17 for a 7 day excursion along the scenic Alaskan coastline, stopping at multiple ports of call along the way.

For meeting and accommodation information go to [meeting info](#)

Learn more about the Holland America Alaska Glacier Discovery cruise [here](#)

Bon voyage!



2025 NAWJ
47th Annual Conference
October 23-25, 2025



Space is limited - Register Today!