

# COUNTERBALANCE

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN JUDGES



**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.

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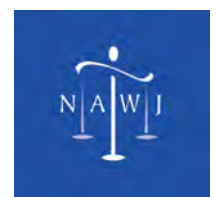
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**ON THE COVER:**

The double bust is Supreme Court Judge Hon. Ruth Bader Ginsberg and Hon. Constance Baker Motley, the first female African American lawyer to argue a case before the Supreme Court, where she laid the legal groundwork for *Brown v. Board of Education*. She later made history again as the first Black woman to be appointed to the federal judiciary, serving as a U.S. District Judge in New York.

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
of  
WOMEN JUDGES

# President's Message



**A**s I am nearing the end of my year as President of the National Association of Women Judges, I find myself reflecting on what an incredible honor it has been to serve this organization and its members.

This year has exceeded every expectation I could have imagined. I have traveled across the country and beyond, met judges at every stage of their careers, and forged friendships I know will last a lifetime. I have listened to stories of perseverance, celebrated remarkable accomplishments, and witnessed extraordinary acts of courage and compassion. Everywhere I have gone, I have been reminded that NAWJ is more than an association. We are a community united by a shared commitment to justice and to one another.

Serving as your President has deepened my appreciation for the role judges play in shaping not only our courts, but our communities and our nation. We are called to lead with wisdom, to serve with humility, and to uphold the rule of law even in the most challenging of times.

This year, as America celebrates its 250th anniversary, I have thought often about our nation's journey and NAWJ's place within it. The story of the United States is one of aspiration and progress—a continual striving toward the ideals of liberty, equality, and justice. Those ideals have not

always been realized equally or easily, but generation after generation has worked to move our nation closer to its promise.

NAWJ has been part of that work.

For more than forty years, our members have broken barriers and opened doors. We have championed equal justice under law, promoted diversity on the bench, mentored future leaders, and stood steadfast in support of judicial independence. We have helped shape a judiciary that is stronger, more inclusive, and more reflective of the communities we serve.

As judges, we understand that history is not simply something we study. It is something we make.

Every opinion we write, every litigant we treat with dignity, every young person we inspire through Color of Justice, and every bridge we build with one another becomes part of our nation's story. The work we do today will influence generations to come.

That is why I am especially excited about what lies ahead.

I invite you to join me this October in New Orleans for our Annual Conference. Together, we will celebrate our achievements, engage in meaningful education, and strengthen the ties that

“*For more than forty years, our members have broken barriers and opened doors. We have championed equal justice under law, promoted diversity on the bench, mentored future leaders, and stood steadfast in support of judicial independence.*”

bind us as colleagues and friends. We will honor our past, embrace our present, and boldly envision our future.

As America marks 250 years, let us recommit ourselves to the enduring

ideals that unite us. Let us continue to build bridges where others see division, strengthen ties where others see differences, and ensure that justice remains not merely an aspiration, but a lived reality for all.

The next chapter of NAWJ's story is

waiting to be written.

I cannot wait to write it with you.

**Hon. Pamela Washington**  
President

## Vice President of Publications Message



“During the formation of our country, individuals sought to pursue a government unlike any other. They pursued an ideal – and in so doing, created a nation that has endured for 250 years. That alone is worthy of recognition.

This year we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the United States of America. Although there are some that have expressed a reluctance to do so in light of current political unrest, we would be remiss if we did not consider our history. During the formation of our country, individuals sought to pursue a government unlike any other. They pursued an ideal – and in so doing, created a nation that has endured for 250 years. That alone is worthy of recognition.

The articles featured in this issue of Counterbalance outline a variety of events designed to celebrate that accomplishment and the role of the judiciary. As judges we should be proud of these events, and of our fellow judges that each day strive to deliver justice and forge a better nation for all. Judge Amy Blake's article exemplifies this best in that it honors the revolutionary legacy while renewing our commitment to justice!

The article by Judge Annette Pitts of the Judicial Independence Committee

highlights the importance of community outreach in efforts to restore public confidence in our courts. California and Washington have a Judges in the Classroom initiative for K-12. The Chief Justice of California has established a Power of Democracy program with a focus on the judiciary role as the third branch of the government. Included in the issue is the statement from the Conference of Chief Justices Chief Justice Cleo E. Powell's words that this is an opportunity for all of us to “strengthen public confidence in our courts and foster meaningful engagement with the communities we serve.”

Featured in this issue is the Inaugural Regional Conference held in Eagan, Minnesota. Thanks to the sponsorship of Thomson Reuters this event was not only well attended but impressively informative.

We are fortunate to have President Retired Judge Washington's message which gives a great overview of the

wonderful Alaska meeting as well activities of NAWJ. Judge Taylor's article Ensuring Racial Equity provides thoughtful insight for all

judges. We are so appreciative of the Military and Veteran Committee article describing the impact rulings have on this segment of our

population. And no issue would be complete without Life After the

**Hon. Victoria A.B. Willis**  
Vice-President Publications

## Executive Director Message



“Much has already been said about our Midyear and Regional Meetings, but what stood out most to me was the energy new members—some fairly new to the bench—brought to the room, and the warmth with which our longtime members welcomed them.”

The first half of the year has passed quickly. I first want to thank our team, Brian Gorg and Janelle Mihoc, who work diligently behind the scenes serving all of us. We welcome Emma Armstrong who is supporting marketing and meeting planning.

Our Districts held four *Color of Justice* programs and one *Women in Prison* program, impacting the lives of over 500 people within the first six months of the year. Several members have also been recognized by local and national organizations for their contributions and leadership within the judiciary, a testament to the caliber of NAWJ.

Much has already been said about our Midyear and Regional Meetings, but what stood out most to me was the energy new members—some fairly new to the bench—brought to the room, and the warmth with which our longtime members welcomed them. Both meetings included dedicated time for social connection. Based on survey responses, this was among the highlights for attendees.

Your Executive Committee and District Directors have been actively reaching out to lapsed members, as non-renewals

this year are running at twice the rate of new memberships. The encouraging news is that most lapses stem from simple oversight, retirement from the legal community, or outdated contact information rather than a loss of interest. On this point, I ask that you please update your profile in the database whenever your email or business address changes; this may be done through the following [link](#). We have also introduced new fields to allow for organization by bench, and I would encourage each of you to review and update your profile accordingly.

Finally, I am pleased to share our current Word Cloud with our most recent membership survey. It reflects what I consistently hear from you about the value of your membership.



I look forward to seeing each of you in New Orleans!

*Laurie Denham*  
**Laurie Hein Denham, CAE**  
Executive Director

NAWJ Judicial  
Independence Committee  
Informed Voters Project (IVP)

# Promoting Judicial Independence



By Annette Pitts,  
Judicial Independence Committee

Constitution Day (celebrated annually the week of September 17) offers critical opportunities for judges and retired judges to engage with the public, improve public understanding of the judicial branch, and explore the value of a fair and impartial judiciary. The NAWJ Judicial Independence

Committee and its Informed Voters Project (IVP), an Emmy-award-winning civic education program, provides abundant resources for local



use in Constitution Day festivities. With declining public confidence in our courts and the judiciary, direct engagement with the community at large makes this Constitution Day more important than ever.

The Committee recently hosted a national webinar to address recent research findings and collaborative resources targeting public perceptions of the judicial branch and trust issues. Research has identified multiple factors contributing to the decline in public trust in the courts and the judiciary. (Patterson, 2024) One significant finding is that many Americans believe that the courts favor the wealthy and that judges' political beliefs influence their rulings. Other issues identified as impacting trust and confidence in judges include judicial behavior, perceptions of partisanship, and judicial bias. However, interactions with judges, experience or knowledge of court processes, and other experiences may counter these outcomes. Recent findings also demonstrate that state courts have higher trust indicators than federal courts.

The Judicial Independence Committee of the National Association of Women Judges is chaired by The Honorable Robin

Hudson (Retired, North Carolina Supreme Court) and Chief Justice Debra Stephens, Washington Supreme Court. Annette Pitts serves as the National Education Chair. The Committee offers a variety of videos, animations, PowerPoint presentations, social media posts, and handouts for use with community outreach and education initiatives. To see a sampling of these resources, see the links below.



<https://www.nawj.org/catalog/community-outreach-programs/informed-voters-fair-judges-project>

While most of the Judicial Independence Committee's resources have focused on adult audiences, many of these materials may also apply to school settings. Several members of the Judicial Independence Committee also participate actively in K-12 school programs. Federal law requires Constitution Day educational programs on or about September 17 annually. Here are the associated articles and requirements.



**Constitution Day and Citizenship Day | U.S. Department of Education**

**[USCODE-2006-title36-subtitle1-partA-chap1-sec108.pdf](#)**

The Judicial Independence Committee offers a variety of ideas and resources for Constitution Day festivities. When considering the types of activities your jurisdiction is interested in employing during Constitution Day, please keep your target audience in mind. Different strategies may be needed for distinct audiences. There is a wealth of civic learning resources for K-12 classrooms. You may also wish to target post-secondary institutions or universities, civic groups and organizations, public libraries, and other adult education programs.

California and Washington use the Judges in the Classroom program for K-12 civics lessons, resources, and school visits. Other states provide their own specific materials. In Florida, the Justice Teaching Program at Florida Southern



College provides materials aligned with the K-12 state standards in civics and government for school partnerships with lawyers and judges. Here are links to several state-level K-12 programs.



### Judges in the Classroom | Power of Democracy



### Washington State Courts - Educational Resources



### For Educators | Massachusetts Judges Conference



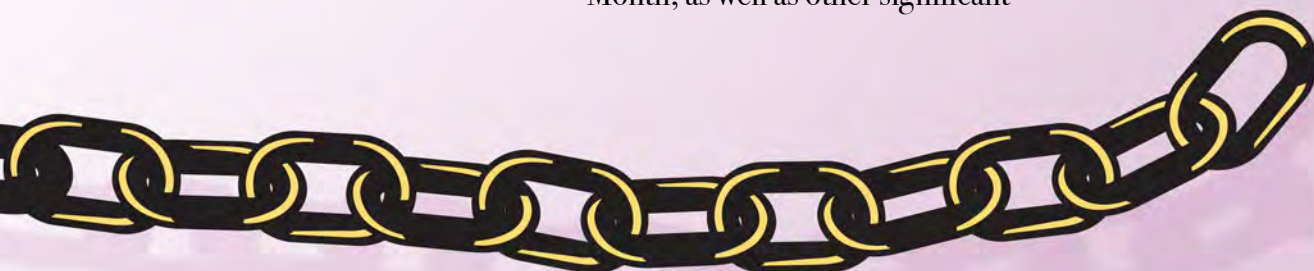
### Justice Teaching Center - Florida Southern College

In California, NAWJ member Justice Judith McConnell reports that the Chief Justice has established the Power of Democracy (POD) civic learning initiative. Part of its mission is to improve understanding of the three branches of government, with a focus on the judicial branch and the importance of a fair and impartial judiciary. The programs include civic learning awards given each year to K-12 schools that offer innovative, replicable programs that aid in teaching about the courts. POD also hosts a court outreach program called Judges in the Classroom that supports judges' presentations to K-12 students with a prepared curriculum vetted by educators. The presentation is selected by the teacher, and the judges use the materials to engage with the students. Some programs are provided in Spanish and Mandarin Chinese. POD also provides materials to help celebrate Constitution Day and Constitution Month, as well as other significant

holidays. State and federal judges participate. POD also hosts regional meetings throughout the state to encourage and support trial and appellate court efforts to engage with youth in their community.

The Justice Teaching Center in Florida incorporates school partnerships with attorneys and judges collaborating with K-12 schools statewide. Volunteers collaborate with teachers to enhance civics, government, and law content with simulations, interactive exercises, and primary source documents.

For additional details or resources, contact Annette Pitts, Director, Justice Teaching Center for Civic Learning, Florida Southern College at [apitts@flsouthern.edu](mailto:apitts@flsouthern.edu).



# The Gift of Time:

## Judicial Service After Retirement



**By Hon. Elaine Andrews**  
Presiding Judge, Anchorage Superior Court, Ret.

Retirement from the bench comes with a treasure — the gift of time — time that is finally ours to allocate. We are no longer dictated by a rigid calendar, motion calls, or emergency hearings. When I first retired, I did what many of you may secretly long to do: I said “no” to everything. For several months, I declined invitations to join boards,

task forces, and committees, both worthy and unworthy. For those of us who are natural problem-solvers, declining to participate is difficult, but I think a bit of respite is a necessary piece of the transition to retirement.

But eventually you realize that retirement is not a retreat; it is a reassignment. It is impossible to

*Life*  After the Bench.

ignore the following question: “What should I do with this gift of time”? My own answer was to turn back toward the institution that had given me a deeply rewarding career, and to use my new freedom to help protect the judiciary and the bright, dedicated judges coming behind me.

## A Career Made Possible by Merit and Independence

I was privileged to serve as a trial court judge in Alaska, a state with a merit-based judicial selection system and retention elections grounded in objective performance evaluations. In 1981, when I applied for the district court, and again in 1991, when I applied for the superior court, my applications were reviewed by our non-partisan Alaska Judicial Council. My name was forwarded to governors who did not know me personally, who had never counted me as a donor or political ally, but who trusted the merit system to supply the most qualified nominees. I was chosen from among many capable candidates, and politics was not a significant part of the process.

My retention elections were uneventful. I was recommended for retention by the same Judicial Council that had a hand in my selection, and the voters retained me. I was privileged to serve in an independent judiciary and I was expected — by the public, the bar, and my colleagues — to judge

fairly. Over my two decades of service, I made several controversial decisions. But when it came to retention time, there was not a rabid political attack against me. At that time, aggressive partisan opposition was not part of the landscape in retention elections.

“How things have changed. Across the country, judges now face politicized campaigns, organized misinformation, and even threats for simply doing their jobs—trends that NAWJ and many other judicial groups have had to confront directly in recent years.”

How things have changed. Across the country, judges now face politicized campaigns, organized misinformation, and even threats for simply doing their jobs—trends that NAWJ and many other judicial groups have had to confront directly in recent years.

## Rediscovering Service After Retirement

As politics crept further into judicial retention, and as misinformation about courts spread more quickly and more widely, it became clear to me that my retirement’s “gift of time” carried with it an obligation.

I chose to invest that “gift” in protecting the system that had allowed me to serve for over 21 years as an independent judge.

I began by chairing the Alaska Bar Association’s Committee on Fair and Impartial Courts, which built a speakers bureau and partnered with the Bar’s Committee on Law and Education to engage civic groups across the state. I learned two lessons:

- First, such civic organizations as Rotary clubs and Chambers of Commerce are not nearly as well-versed in the structure and needs of the judiciary as many of us assume. But they are eager to learn.
- Second, the public wants to hear about the courts from a judge, retired or not. We may leave the bench, but in the public mind we remain judges, and our voices retain credibility.

Because this work took place in a state with a mandatory bar, our advocacy had to be carefully calibrated to stay within permissible non-partisan limits.

## Building Institutions that Defend the Courts

Recognizing that the threats to judicial independence were becoming more organized and partisan, a retired Chief Justice of the Alaska Supreme Court, Bud Carpeneti, led the creation of Justice

Not Politics Alaska, a group focused on defending our merit selection and retention system against legislative attacks. Because the organization was formed outside the Bar Association, the organization could lobby and testify against bills that would have weakened the constitutional framework protecting our courts. I contributed testimony and written submissions to support that mission.

When partisan attacks intensified—particularly against judges who had been recommended for retention based on objective performance evaluations but targeted for a single unpopular decision—it became obvious that we needed an even more focused response. That is how Alaskans for Fair Courts was born,

Retired judges can also serve in quieter but still powerful ways: signing on to amicus briefs, lending their names and experience to public statements, mentoring new judges, and joining organizations that speak clearly about the role of courts in our democracy.

an effort I agreed to co-chair. Its work both in civic education and in retention campaigns has helped blunt unfair attacks and explain to

voters why judicial independence matters in their daily lives. Although I have stepped down as co-chair, I continue this outreach on my own, recognizing that retirement did not end my privilege: it expanded my responsibility.

Retired judges can also serve in quieter but still powerful ways: signing on to amicus briefs, lending their names and experience to public statements, mentoring new judges, and joining organizations that speak clearly about the role of courts in our democracy. These contributions may not make headlines, but they shape the narrative around courts in profound ways.

### NAWJ and The Continuing Call to Serve

The National Association of Women Judges has long been a national voice for an independent judiciary and for public education about the rule of law. Recently, NAWJ hosted a wonderful panel at its Alaska mid-year cruise conference, focused on supporting and protecting judicial independence. This meaningful conversation, led by Judge Maria Salas Mendoza and Judge Selena Solis, squarely addressed the politicization of judicial selection, the erosion of public trust, and the concrete steps judges—including retired judges—can take to push back. The discussion echoed a theme I have seen throughout my own post-retirement service: our

stature as judges, even in retirement, is one of the most effective tools we have to explain why courts must remain impartial and insulated from partisan retaliation.

Panels like NAWJ's, along with NAWJ's broader educational work and joint statements in defense of judicial independence, provide retired judges with a ready-made platform and community in which to continue their service. NAWJ provides language, resources, and strategies that individual judges can take back to their own states, whether by speaking to civic groups, responding to misinformation, or supporting institutional reforms that preserve fair selection and retention systems.

In these fraught times, retirement is not a retreat; it is a reassignment. We, who were privileged to serve in independent courts, now have the time, freedom, and experience that our sitting colleagues often do not. The question for each of us is how we will use that gift—whether by joining efforts like NAWJ's, signing on to amicus briefs, speaking in our communities, or helping to build organizations that defend the judiciary, all in an effort to ensure that the judges who come after us can serve with the same independence and support that we were privileged to enjoy.

*Retired Superior Court Judge Elaine Andrews served as trial judge in Alaska from 1981 to 2002. She served as Presiding Judge from 1996-2002.*

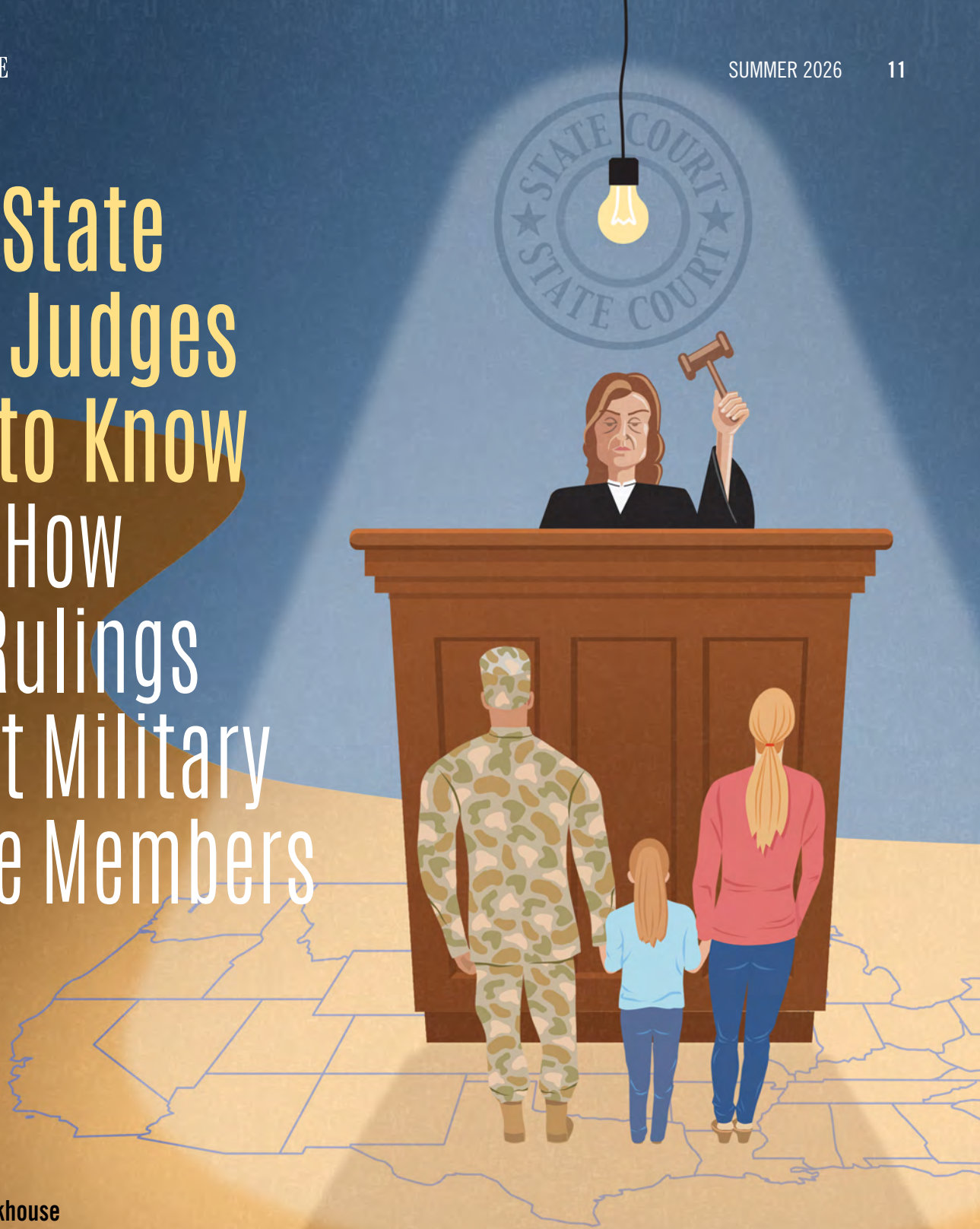
# What State Court Judges Need to Know About How Their Rulings Impact Military Service Members



**By Hon. Renee Stackhouse**  
San Diego Superior Court



**By Hon. Linda Murnane**  
United States Air Force, Ret.



**T**he modern judiciary increasingly encounters cases involving active-duty service members as well as members who serve in the National Guard or the Reserve of the military. While state courts routinely adjudicate family law disputes, criminal cases,

small claims, and probate matters, these cases often have unique implications for military personnel.

Service members are simultaneously subject to State and Federal Codes, including the provisions found in 10 United States Code,

better known as the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). This simultaneous application of various code provisions often has an impact on state court orders of which some may be unaware. The lack of awareness about these considerations can unintentionally compromise service members' legal rights and military duties, or both, as well as have unintended consequences for family members, including those for whom the court order is intended to benefit or protect. This article aims to provide state court judges with practical guidance on the intersection of state court rulings and military law obligations.

## Family Law Considerations

Family law cases—divorce, child custody, visitation, and spousal support—are some of the most common ways service members appear before state courts. Military status introduces several layers of complexity.

## Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA)

The SCRA (50 U.S.C. §§ 3901–4043) provides protections for active-duty members, including:

**Stay of proceedings:** Service members may request a delay in civil or family law proceedings if military duties materially affect their ability to appear.

**Modification of orders:** Judges may need to adjust custody, support, or visitation orders to accommodate deployment or relocation.

**Protection against default judgments:** Courts should ensure a service member is adequately represented before entering default judgments in divorce, custody, or debt cases.

Military statutes can be checked through the SCRA website, found here:

<https://scra.dmdc.osd.mil/scra/#/home>

Consider whether this may constitute an ex parte input to the proceedings when assessing use of the website.

### PRACTICAL TIP:

Always ask whether a party is on active duty, and if so, whether SCRA protections apply. Consider granting stays or temporary modifications when deployment or military duties interfere with compliance.

## Domestic Violence Restraining Orders

A Domestic Violence Restraining Order can bar a service member from certain duty stations, deployments, impact promotion eligibility, and cause the loss of security clearance.

### PRACTICAL TIP:

Military commands can also issue Military Protective Orders. The Court should ask whether any are in place.

## Custody and Visitation

Military service often requires frequent relocations, deployments, or extended absences. State courts must balance the best interests of the child with a service member's obligations. Flexibility is key.

Courts may need to allow electronic visitation (video calls) when physical presence is impossible. Deployment alone should not automatically diminish custody rights. Courts can craft orders that account for temporary absences without penalizing the service member.

If the Court intends for both parents to continue to make meaningful contribution to the decisions made for the benefit of the couple's minor children, the custody and visitation orders should be carefully crafted considering that a military parent will very likely be required to serve outside the state in which the decree is issued. Overseas visitation can be a particularly challenging issue for military couples, as there may be concerns about a failure to return the children from a period of visitation.

outside the U.S., as well as costs associated with travel for the minor children. Parenting plans, if those are part of the court practice, should account for these considerations, and if court mediation is required prior to issuance of a court order granting the termination of the marriage, the mediators involved in the case should be certain these issues are addressed. Where the mediators are restricted from addressing costs of visitation or guarantees related to return of the children from visitations, the Court should consider whether they need to address these on the record at any hearing related to visitation.

**Spousal Support and Military Pay**  
Spousal support orders must account for the unique nature of military compensation, which includes base pay, allowances (housing (BAH), subsistence (BAS)), and potential tax implications. Keep in mind that BAH and BAS is non-taxable income.

### Practical Tip:

The military can issue their own support orders (child and spousal). Make sure to ask if there is an already existing order in place. The military command may also be able to assist in enforcing a support order where non-compliance is reported.

### Practical Tip:

Service members can easily access their Leave and Earnings Statement (LES) which is the document that details their wages on the internet, or on their telephone. If unable to do so, military pay information by military grade and length of time in service is available online at

<https://www.dfas.mil/MilitaryMembers/payentitlements/Pay-Tables/>

Information found on the pay tables does not necessarily reflect the specific pay of the military member appearing in your proceeding, as many military families use direct withdrawals from the service member's military pay to cover living expenses such as car payments, insurance payments or house or rental payments. A military member whose family resides in military housing may or may not be receiving the full BAH or full BAS listed on the Pay Tables website.

There are also military members who may retire from active duty, and be further employed as Department of War/Defense/Service Branch (Army, Navy, Air Force, Space Force, Marine Corps) employees. These individuals' pay will be a matter that needs to be sorted in discovery as they may have deferred military retirement pay to allow it to accrue against a civil service retirement pay opportunity.

### Practical Tip:

Garnishment or income withholding rules may differ from civilian wages. Make sure any garnishments are compliant with federal law before issuance.

## Medical Care

The issue of who provides medical insurance for military family members is one that needs careful consideration in crafting a decree ending the marriage where one or both spouses are military members. A non-military spouse may become ineligible for health care under their military spouse's health program once the decree is final. The children of military members will, ordinarily, remain eligible for health care through the military health care system. However, some military spouses become eligible for some medical benefits, if the marriage meets length of time requirements.

## Post High School Education

Military members may now allow their children to benefit from unused education benefits that are available under the Veterans Administration GI Bill benefit program. If there are minor children involved in the issuance of a decree ending a marriage, the obligation to preserve unused GI Bill benefits for the couple's children may be a matter that should be addressed in any decree. This

becomes an issue long after the decree has been issued, in many cases, and often arises when the military member remarries and has step-children with their new spouse, or has children born of a subsequent marriage.

## Division of Military Retirement Benefits

Unless you are yourself an expert on military retirement benefits this may be an area in which you would benefit from appointing a Court Appointed Neutral or a Mediator to investigate the appropriate provisions before issuing a decree. The military retirement benefits of a particular party before you may differ based on a number of factors, including length of marriage, length of time married during military service, and which of several retirement plans the service member may be under (Final Pay, Top 3, Blended Retirement). There may be a mandatory contribution being made into a Thrift Savings Plan (TSP – a 401(k) equivalent) or an existing Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) as well as eligibility for Servicemen's Group Life Insurance or Veterans Group Life Insurance that should be considered. If you aren't an expert, getting an expert to inform the Court will save time and money in the long-term.

## Criminal Law Considerations

State criminal proceedings intersect with military law in nuanced ways.



Active-duty members are subject to state and federal criminal statutes, including both 18 U.S.C. and 10 U.S.C.

where the UCMJ is found. These multiple code provisions create potential duplicative consequences.

## Concurrent Jurisdiction

Service members can be prosecuted by both the state and the military for the same offense at the same time.

For example:

- An assault committed off-base may trigger both state assault charges and UCMJ Article 128 (10 U.S.C. 928) prosecution.
- Drug offenses or DUIs may result in parallel proceedings in both courts (10 U.S.C. 912, 10 U.S.C. 912a). Additionally if there is a death associated with a driving offense, the military member may face other criminal or administrative sanctions found in other provisions of the UCMJ.
- Military members involved with the use of marijuana in states in which recreational marijuana is legal are still subject to criminal sanction for use and possession in any amount under 10 U.S.C. 912(a).

### Practical Tip:

State court judges should be aware that military administrative or disciplinary actions (such as non-judicial punishment or Article 15 (found at 10 U.S.C. 815) proceedings) can occur regardless of the state court outcome. A state court plea is tantamount to a conviction in the military, regardless of diversionary, mitigating, or downgrading actions by the Court. Expungements do not matter to the military.

### Practical Tip:

Some charges may require mandatory administrative processing in the military (non-judicial punishment, often referred to as Article 15). These include sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, violent misconduct, drug abuse/possession of drug paraphernalia, supremacist or extremist conduct, Family Advocacy Program failure, alcohol rehabilitation failure, Physical Fitness Assessment failure, and nonconsensual distribution of an intimate image.

## Miranda and Article 31 Warnings

Service members have rights under both **Miranda (state/federal)** and **UCMJ Article 31**. State court

proceedings must respect these rights, especially if statements were obtained while the individual was in military custody or questioned under military authority. Under UCMJ Article 31 (10 U.S.C. 831), a military member is entitled to military counsel at no charge, regardless of income level.

## Impact of Deployment or Orders

Active-duty obligations may interfere with court appearances.

Courts should:

- Consider stays or continuances if military duties materially affect a service member's ability to appear.
- Avoid issuing warrants that could conflict with military duties unless coordination with the commanding officer ensures compliance.

Oftentimes, military service members will be accompanied to court by a Staff Non-Commissioned Officer or Officer who may be able to ensure compliance.

## Probation and Military Service

State-imposed probation must account for service requirements. Probation conditions that interfere with deployment, relocation, or military duties may be unenforceable or require modification. Placing a military member on mandatory reporting probation may result in action by the military to separate the member as it may render them ineligible for deployment.

Separation from the military impacts ability to pay fines, fees, restitution and other portions of an order issued by the court. It may also result in less than an honorable discharge, which may also impact future employability of the service member.

### Practical Tip:

The Court may want to ask routinely if the individual appearing before them is in the National Guard, State Guard or Reserve before deciding on an order. Not all military members, including active duty, Guard or Reserve members, volunteer their military status upon arrest, apprehension or in civil matters.

## Small Claims and Civil Proceedings

While small claims may seem low-stakes, they can have disproportionate effects on service members:

### SCRA Protections

- The SCRA applies to civil judgments, including:
- Evictions or property disputes
- Debt collection
- Contract enforcement

Judges must verify whether the service member's military obligations materially affect their ability to participate in the proceeding. If so, a stay or adjustment of deadlines is required. Military status can be checked through the SCRA website, found here:

<https://scra.dmdc.osd.mil/scra/#/home>

Consider whether this may constitute an ex parte input to the proceedings when assessing use of the website.

**Example:** A landlord seeking eviction must obtain military status information to ensure the action does not violate SCRA protections. Courts often need to delay or modify proceedings until the service member can respond or appointed an SCRA voluntary attorney if their local bar association has such volunteers available.

## Garnishment and Wage Withholding

Garnishment of military pay is limited to 25% of disposable earnings for commercial debts like small claims. Priority is given to child support and alimony garnishments. If these already exceed 25% of the member's pay, the commercial allotment may be rejected or delayed.

It may, however, be of benefit to see if compliance can be obtained for court ordered support through a phone call to the command of the service member before the last resort to garnishment. Additionally, requiring payment of alimony, family or child support through military allotment may also alleviate future litigation resulting in garnishment orders.

## Probate and Estate Matters

Probate cases involving service members raise special considerations due to:

## Survivor Benefits

Military retirement pay, Survivor Benefit Plans (SBP), and life insurance may be governed by federal law, which can override state probate distributions. Judges must distinguish between probate assets under state law and federally protected military benefits.

## Thrift Savings Plan Benefits

Military members have been required to enroll in the Department of War/Defense Thrift Savings Plan – a 401(k) equivalent – since January 1, 2018.

## SGLI/VGLI

Military members who die while serving on active duty will, ordinarily, have a Servicemembers Group Life Insurance policy in some amount. Additionally, upon separation, and in particular for those military members who have been determined eligible for disability benefits through the Veterans Administration due to service-connected injuries or illnesses, may have a Veterans Group Life Insurance policy. These are often overlooked particularly with older veterans, when dealing with the estate of a service member.

## Guardianship and Power of Attorney

Active-duty service members often grant powers of attorney for financial or medical decisions. Courts should ensure these documents comply with military and federal requirements and

are respected in probate or guardianship proceedings. Deployment or absence may require temporary guardianship arrangements.

## Debt and Estate Claims

Creditors cannot enforce certain claims against a service member's estate without considering SCRA protections and federal priority rules. State court orders reducing or collecting against military benefits may be unenforceable.

## Best Practices for State Court Judges

State court judges can adopt several strategies to minimize conflicts and protect service members' rights:

### 1. Identify Military Status Early

- Always ask parties whether any litigant is on active duty.
- Require proof of military service (military ID, orders) when necessary.
- Check the SCRA website to verify whether a party is entitled to SCRA protections.  
<https://scra.dmdc.osd.mil/scra/#/home>
- Consider whether this may constitute an ex parte input to the proceedings when assessing use of the website.

### 2. Consider Stays and Continuances

Under SCRA and general equity principles, courts should stay

proceedings when military duties materially affect a party's ability to participate.

### 3. Understand Federal Overrides

- Federal law may preempt state authority regarding certain benefits, pay, or administrative actions.
- Be cautious when issuing judgments that could interfere with military compensation, retirement, or survivor benefits.

### 4. Draft Orders Flexibly

- In family law, include provisions for electronic visitation, temporary modifications, or deployment contingencies.
- In civil or probate cases, consider how enforcement can accommodate military obligations.



## Conclusion

By integrating awareness of military status and obligations into judicial processes, state courts can uphold justice while respecting the unique legal context of military service. This approach not only protects service members but also enhances the legitimacy and fairness of state court proceedings.

Ultimately, a collaborative mindset—coordinating with military authorities, applying flexible procedural options, and drafting thoughtful, context-sensitive orders—ensures that state court judgments serve justice without unintended consequences for those serving our nation.

# Alaska Midyear 2026:

## Building Bridges, Strengthening

**S**ome journeys change your perspective. Others deepen your relationships. And then there are those rare experiences that do both.



**Hon. Pamela Washington**  
President

Our 2026 NAWJ Midyear Conference aboard Holland America's Nieuw Amsterdam through Alaska's breathtaking Inside Passage was that kind of journey.

Seventy-two NAWJ members and their guests embarked on an unforgettable voyage together. We represented nearly every NAWJ district across the country, bringing together judges from every stage of their careers and from every corner of the judiciary. Our

largest delegation hailed from Texas, whose judges brought their trademark warmth, energy, and enthusiasm to every activity. Remarkably, nine of NAWJ's Past Presidents were also on board, representing decades of leadership, wisdom, and institutional memory.

The sight of those leaders gathered together was powerful. They are the women who built NAWJ into the thriving organization it is today. Their presence reminded us that our organization is strengthened not only by new ideas and emerging leaders, but also by honoring those who came before us.

Past, present, and future sailed together.

This was more than a conference.

It was a reunion, a retreat, and a reminder of why NAWJ matters.





# Ties

Our adventure began in Vancouver, British Columbia, where excitement buzzed through the hotel lobby and cruise terminal as old friends reunited and first-time attendees quickly became part of the family. As the Nieuw Amsterdam departed, many of us gathered on deck, bundled against the cool evening air, watching the city skyline fade into the distance. Conversations flowed easily. New friendships began. Anticipation filled the air.

None of us yet knew just how special this week would become.

The Inside Passage is one of the world's most spectacular waterways. Every morning seemed to reveal a new masterpiece. Jagged peaks

emerged from the mist. Bald eagles perched atop towering spruce trees. Sea otters floated lazily in kelp beds while humpback whales surfaced unexpectedly beside the ship. Alaska has a way of making you feel small in the best possible sense. Its vastness inspires humility. Its beauty invites reflection. And perhaps that is why it proved to be the perfect backdrop for our presidential theme:

Building Bridges, Strengthening Ties.

Our first educational session, ThriveHero for the Judiciary:

Reconnecting to Purpose, Strengthening Community, and Leading with Integrity, invited us to



engage in honest reflection.

Michelle Silverthorn asked us two deceptively simple questions:

What do you think others perceive about you?

And,

What do you want people to perceive about you?

The room grew quiet.

Judges spend their careers assessing others, but rarely do we pause to consider how we ourselves are seen.

Then came a moment of courage and vulnerability.

The Honorable Jaclanel McFarland (Ret.) of the 133rd Judicial District Court of Texas stood and made a bold request. She turned to the younger Texas judges in the room—many of whom had appeared before her as attorneys—and asked:

“Tell me honestly. What did you think of me when you appeared in my courtroom?”

The room erupted with responses.

She was respected.

She was fair.

She was a trailblazer.

She set a standard.

She opened doors and created pathways for others to follow.

Then Judge Tanya Garrison of the 157th Judicial District Court of Texas spoke words that seemed to capture the sentiment of the entire room.

Judge McFarland, she said, was tough, but kind and approachable—even when she ruled against you.

What greater compliment could there be for a judge?

That exchange reminded all of us that our legacy is not built in grand moments alone.

It is built every day—in how we treat people, how we carry ourselves, and how we make others feel in our courtrooms and in our communities.

And reconnect we did.

Whether gathered over coffee on deck, sharing stories over dinner, or standing shoulder to shoulder watching glaciers drift by, friendships

deepened and new connections were forged.

Having spouses, family members, and friends join us added a special dimension to the experience. It was a joy getting to know the people who support our members behind the scenes. They quickly became part of the NAWJ family, joining excursions, sharing meals, and adding laughter and warmth to every gathering.

Our traveling companions contributed greatly to the fun, fellowship, and sense of community that made this voyage so memorable.

Our first port of call was Ketchikan, often called Alaska’s “First City.”

Nestled between mountains and the Tongass National Forest, Ketchikan greeted us with colorful buildings perched along the waterfront and an unmistakable maritime charm. Members wandered historic Creek Street, explored Native Alaskan art and totem poles, shopped for local treasures, and sampled fresh seafood.

The pace was relaxed. Conversations continued. Judges who had only recently met exchanged stories as if



they had known one another for years.

From Ketchikan we sailed north to Juneau, Alaska's capital city and one of the few state capitals inaccessible by road.

Rainfall met us in Juneau, but it didn't matter.

We bundled up, pulled on our rain jackets, and splashed about Alaska's capital city with the enthusiasm of children on a field trip. The misty skies only added to the charm. Mountains disappeared and reappeared through the clouds, and the harbor shimmered under the soft rain.

While many members ventured out on planned excursions—whale watching, glacier tours, and hiking adventures—a small group of us took an unexpected detour to the Juneau Courthouse.

There, we were graciously welcomed by Justice Jude Pate of the Alaska Supreme Court.

Justice Pate hosted us in his chambers, where a wall-length window framed breathtaking views of the mountains and harbor below. The scene was postcard perfect.

Yet one of my favorite memories from

that visit was much simpler: Justice Pate proudly sharing the colorful cherry tomatoes he was growing along the window ledge.

There was something wonderfully human and grounding about a Supreme Court Justice tending a small garden high above the city.

It was one of those moments you cannot schedule and never forget.

We are deeply grateful to Judge Marianna Carpeneti, the Juneau

Association of Women Lawyers, and the Juneau Bar Association for hosting a warm and welcoming networking reception. The evening was filled with laughter, conversation, and camaraderie—a perfect reflection of the hospitality for which Alaska is known.

Our discussions aboard ship continued with Building Bridges; Forging Pathways; Effective Leadership During Challenging Times.

The distinguished panel —



Amy Blake, Judge Marcella Holland, Judge Miriam Perry, Judge Karen Sage, Judge Vanessa Ruiz, and moderator Judge Lisa Walsh—offered wisdom earned through decades of leadership.

Their message was clear:

Leadership is not defined by title alone.

It requires resilience.

It requires adaptability.

It requires mentorship.

And it requires the courage to move forward even in uncertain times.

Their stories reminded us that the bridges we build today create pathways for the leaders who will follow tomorrow.

The ship then sailed to Skagway, the historic gateway to the Klondike Gold Rush.

Walking Skagway is like stepping back in time. Its wooden boardwalks and preserved storefronts tell the story of

dreamers and adventurers who braved unimaginable hardships in search of opportunity.

Many members rode the historic White Pass & Yukon Route Railroad, climbing high into the mountains while taking in breathtaking views of waterfalls, gorges, and snow-covered peaks.

Back on the ship, we heard the excited rumblings of how the train suddenly was having brake problems on the way down.

“We inched our way down the mountain!”

“It took forever!”

“I thought we might spend the night on the ridge!”

The details may grow more dramatic with each retelling—and perhaps that’s exactly as it should be.

Every great adventure deserves a good story, and this one is already becoming NAWJ folklore.

Our exploration of the future continued with Research Data and Legal Developments in Artificial Intelligence, presented by NAWJ member David Horrigan.

David’s thoughtful and engaging presentation examined research on AI’s expanding role in the judiciary.

As judges, we are increasingly asked to navigate emerging technologies while safeguarding fairness, accuracy, and public confidence.

David challenged us to think critically about how AI is shaping our courts and our profession. We understand AI is here to stay and we need to be equipped to lead responsibly in a rapidly evolving landscape.

The Alaska Midyear Conference also looked beyond active judicial service to future opportunities.

In Bench to the Mediation Table: Practical Strategies for Effective Dispute Resolution, retired judges Elaine Andrews and Dana Fabe, joined by Merrill Hirsh, shared their expertise



on mediation and court-appointed neutral work.

Their interactive presentation demonstrated that judicial service does not end at retirement; rather, it evolves.

Later in the week, we celebrated the birthday of Judge Selena Solis, whose warmth and infectious spirit brought joy to our gathering.

Like so many moments aboard the Nieuw Amsterdam, it was a simple celebration that became a treasured memory—a reminder that behind the robes and titles are friendships that sustain us.

Judge Selena Solis later joined Chief Justice Maria Salas Mendoza in leading one of the week's most timely and important sessions:

Judicial Independence: What Does It Mean? Why Is It Important? How Can We Protect It?

The discussion was lively, candid, and deeply meaningful.

Perhaps most importantly, it became a safe space.

Judges spoke freely about the challenges they face in their districts—the pressures, the public scrutiny, the threats to judicial independence, and the delicate balance of remaining impartial while serving increasingly polarized communities.

There was honesty.

There was vulnerability.

And there was solidarity.

The session reminded us that judicial independence is not an abstract principle reserved for constitutional scholars. It is lived every day in courtrooms across America by judges who faithfully uphold the rule of law, often under difficult circumstances.

As I listened to my colleagues share their experiences, I was reminded once again why NAWJ matters.

We are not alone.



We are stronger together.

And the bridges we build with one another become lifelines when the work of judging feels especially heavy.

Our final educational session brought us full circle.

In From Lifeline to Legacy: Stewardship, Mentorship, and Growing the NAWJ Community, Michelle Silverthorn challenged members to think differently about legacy.

Legacy is not what we leave behind.

Legacy is what we are building.

I had the privilege of adding to the discussion and it quickly became one of the most meaningful moments of the week.

Members began sharing whose legacy they are a part of.

Some spoke of mentors who opened doors.

Others honored judges who modeled courage and integrity.

Many reflected on the women who fought for opportunities that did not exist when they began their careers.

Then something happened that I did not expect.

Justice Robin K. Sheares of the New York State Supreme Court stood and shared that she considers herself part of my legacy.

She spoke generously of my leadership and credited me with inspiring her to remain active in NAWJ. She said my leadership has been “upfront and personal”—grounded in authentic relationships, accessibility, and a sincere commitment to the women who make this organization extraordinary.

I was humbled beyond words.

Fifteen years ago, NAWJ embarked on its first Alaska cruise.

At the helm was then-NAWJ President, Chief Justice Dana Fabe of Alaska.

It seems only fitting that fifteen years later, I—NAWJ’s second President from Alaska—would have the honor of bringing our members back to the Last Frontier for another unforgettable adventure.

I am Dana Fabe’s legacy.

Justice Robin K. Sheares considers herself part of mine.

And together, we are building NAWJ’s legacy.

We are all legacy builders.

And what a privilege it is to build it together.

Our journey concluded in Anchorage with an extraordinary closing reception hosted by Retired Chief Justice Dana Fabe, the Anchorage Association of Women Lawyers, and Stoel Rives.

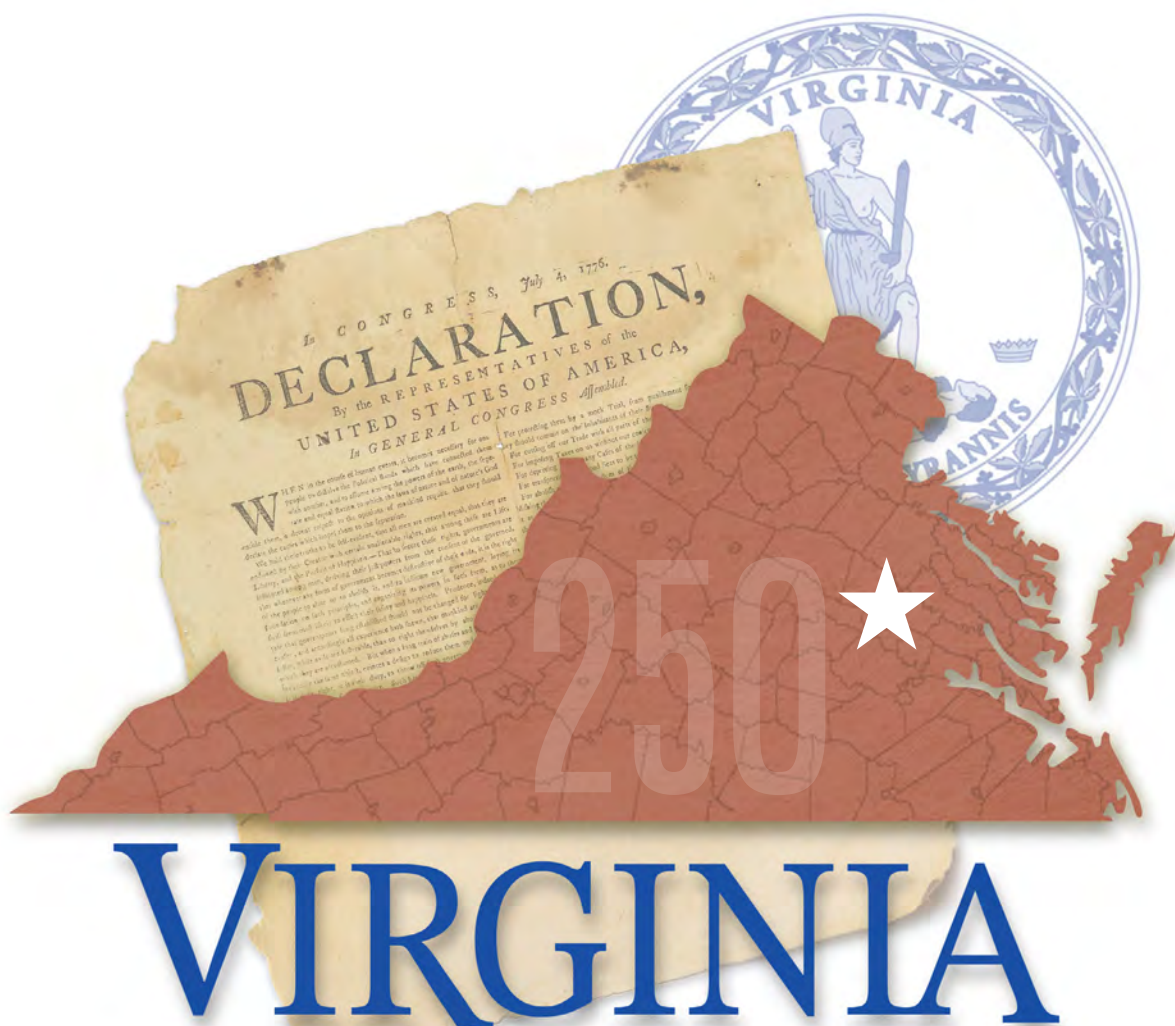
Surrounded by friends old and new, we laughed, reflected, and gave thanks for a week that had strengthened our organization in ways both profound and lasting.

Throughout the week, we laughed together, learned together, explored together, and strengthened relationships old and new.

We built bridges, traveled across some, and strengthened our core.

And I cannot wait to see where our next journey takes us.





## Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrator commemorate the 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence

The Conferences encourage state and territorial courts to mark this historic occasion through initiatives that promote civic education, expand public engagement, and foster partnerships with schools, colleges and universities, libraries, museums, bar associations, and civic organizations.

As the United States commemorates the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators join in recognizing the enduring principles of liberty, equality, self-government,

and the rule of law that have shaped our Nation since 1776.

For 250 years, state courts have played a central role in giving life to those principles by resolving disputes peacefully, protecting individual rights, ensuring equal justice under law, and serving

as an independent and impartial branch of government. Every day, courts demonstrate that the rule of law depends not only on the laws themselves, but on institutions that apply them fairly, impartially, and independently.

This anniversary also reminds

us that public confidence in the judiciary depends upon public understanding of its role. Courts strengthen trust not only through the fair administration of justice, but also through transparency, accessibility, civic education, and meaningful engagement with the communities they serve.

The semiquincentennial presents an extraordinary opportunity for courts across the country to celebrate our constitutional heritage while helping the public better understand the vital role of the judicial branch in preserving the rule of law and ensuring equal justice for all.

The Conferences encourage state

and territorial courts to mark this historic occasion through initiatives that promote civic education, expand public engagement, and foster partnerships with schools, colleges and universities, libraries, museums, bar associations, and civic organizations. They also encourage courts to share educational resources, innovative outreach strategies, and promising practices that strengthen public trust and confidence in the judiciary.

The Conferences further support the work of the CCJ/COSCA Public Engagement, Trust, and Confidence Committee, with assistance from the National Center for State Courts, to identify, collect, and

share exemplary court-based civic education and public engagement efforts developed in connection with the Nation's 250th anniversary.

The 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence is more than a commemoration of our past. It is an opportunity to reaffirm our shared commitment to the principles that have guided our Nation for two and a half centuries and to strengthen public understanding of the judiciary's essential role in preserving those principles for generations to come.

**Chief Justice Cleo E. Powell**  
Supreme Court of Virginia  
Richmond, VA



*Dear Judicial Branch Colleagues,*

*As our nation commemorates the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, we are presented with a unique opportunity to reflect on the enduring principles that have guided our democracy while strengthening public understanding of the vital role our courts play in preserving those principles.*

*I encourage you to read the attached Joint Statement issued by the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators commemorating this historic milestone. The statement reminds us that America's semiquincentennial is not simply an opportunity to remember our history, but also to deepen civic understanding, strengthen public confidence in our courts, and foster meaningful engagement with the communities we serve. These goals closely align with the work*

*already underway throughout Virginia's judicial branch.*

*Over the past year, we have begun laying the foundation for a long-term commitment to enhanced civic education through our In Open Court initiative. Supported by the State Justice Institute, this project is developing engaging educational resources for students, educators, and adult learners that will help Virginians better understand our judicial system, the administration of justice, and the responsibilities we all share in preserving our constitutional form of government. These resources are intended not simply as educational materials, but as invitations for meaningful conversations between our courts and the communities we serve.*

*This fall, we will build upon those efforts by launching Virginia Judicial Civics Week during the first full week of November. Throughout the Commonwealth, courts will be encouraged to engage in opportunities to partner with schools, libraries, museums, bar associations, civic organizations, and community groups to showcase the work of the judiciary through courthouse tours, educational presentations, mock trials, historical exhibits, classroom visits, and other community events. We invite every court to find a way to participate in a manner that reflects the unique character of its community.*

*Judicial Civics Week is only the beginning.*

*In the months and years ahead, we will continue expanding In Open Court with new curriculum modules, podcasts, videos, graphic novels, children's resources, adult learning opportunities, and additional partnerships designed to make civic learning more accessible to Virginians of all ages. It is our hope that these efforts will help establish civic education and public engagement as an enduring part of how Virginia's judiciary serves the Commonwealth.*

*Every day, through your professionalism, fairness, impartial administration of justice, and dedication to public service, you strengthen confidence in our courts. By opening our courthouse doors, sharing our knowledge, and transparently engaging with our communities, we have an opportunity to further strengthen that confidence by helping Virginians better understand the work of the judicial branch and its essential role in our constitutional system of government.*

*Thank you for your continued service to the people of Virginia and for your willingness to help inspire a greater understanding of our courts during this historic anniversary year and in years to come. I look forward to sharing additional opportunities for participation in the months ahead.*

*Sincerely,*

**Chief Justice Cleo E. Powell**  
*Supreme Court of Virginia*





# America 250:

## Courts Connecting Communities Through Civic Education and Public Engagement

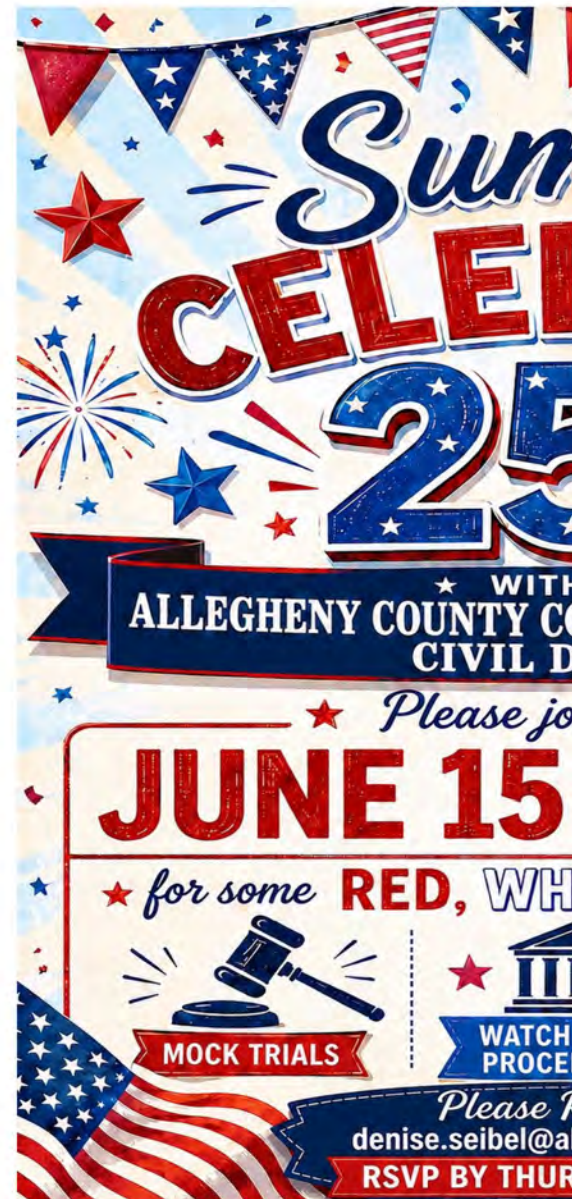


In 2026, communities across the nation are commemorating a historic milestone: the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the birth of the United States. Commonly referred to as the Semiquincentennial, or “America 250,” this anniversary provides an opportunity not only to celebrate our nation’s history, but also to reflect upon the institutions that have sustained constitutional democracy for two and a half centuries.



**By Judge Nicola Henry Taylor**  
Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County,  
Fifth Judicial District of Pennsylvania

Among those institutions, the judiciary occupies a unique and indispensable role. Courts safeguard the rule of law, protect individual rights, provide peaceful resolution of disputes, and ensure that constitutional principles



remain meaningful for each generation. As courts throughout the country participate in America 250 initiatives, judges, lawyers, educators, and civic leaders are finding innovative ways to engage the public in conversations about the importance of an independent





programs, historical exhibits, and community engagement initiatives. Federal and state courts alike have embraced the anniversary as a chance to connect the founding ideals of 1776 with the continued evolution of the American legal system.

### **Pennsylvania's Judicial Community Embraces America 250**

Pennsylvania's connection to the nation's founding makes the Commonwealth uniquely positioned to participate in America 250 commemorations. From Philadelphia, where the Declaration of Independence was adopted, to communities throughout the Commonwealth, courts and legal organizations have developed programs designed to educate citizens about the history and role of the judiciary.

One notable example comes from Franklin County, where local officials incorporated the judiciary into community wide America250PA celebrations. President Judge Shawn D. Meyers and members of the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas participated in public events, including the EPIC Franklin County America250PA Parade. The judiciary's visible participation underscored an important message: courts are not isolated institutions, but an integral part of the communities they serve.

Pennsylvania courts have also invested heavily in civic education. Through initiatives sponsored by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania Historical Commission, students across the Commonwealth have been invited to participate in essay and coloring contests exploring the role of courts in American democracy. These programs encourage young people to engage with concepts such as constitutional governance, judicial independence, and the rule of law while fostering a greater understanding of how courts affect their daily lives.

Philadelphia has likewise become a focal point for judicial and constitutional reflection during the Semiquincentennial. Programs such as Constitution and the Courts at the 250th, hosted by the National Constitution Center, have brought together scholars, judges, and legal professionals to examine the development of the American judiciary and the continuing relevance of constitutional principles in contemporary society.

### **Allegheny County's Celebration of America 250**

In Western Pennsylvania, the Fifth Judicial District, where I serve, and the Allegheny County Bar Association have embraced America 250 as an opportunity to connect the public with

judiciary and informed citizenship.

The National Center for State Courts (NCSC) has encouraged courts nationwide to use the Semiquincentennial as an opportunity to strengthen public trust through courthouse tours, civic education



the courts and the legal profession.

The Allegheny County Bar Association (ACBA) has hosted numerous programs focused on constitutional history, judicial independence, and civic engagement. Among the most significant was a Continuing Legal Education program examining the lasting impact of Pennsylvania's 1776 Constitution. The distinguished panel included Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justices Christine L. Donohue and David N. Wecht, Chief Justice Emeritus Thomas G. Saylor, ACBA President, Amy Coco and University of Pittsburgh School of Law Dean Jerry Dickinson. The discussion explored the constitutional foundations that continue to shape Pennsylvania law and government.

Under the leadership of ACBA

President Amy J. Coco, the ACBA has also emphasized the role of lawyers in preserving democratic institutions and maintaining public confidence in the legal system. These efforts reflect a broader understanding that the anniversary is not simply a historical observance; it is an invitation to consider how legal professionals continue to advance the principles embodied in our founding documents.

The ACBA's Law Day Committee has similarly expanded opportunities for civic education. Local high school students have been invited to the courthouse to learn about the Constitution, observe court proceedings, and participate in interactive educational programming designed to bring the justice system to life. Such programs provide valuable opportunities for young people to see firsthand how courts function and how the rule of law operates in practice.

The ACBA has also convened committees dedicated to judicial

independence and the rule of law, reinforcing the legal community's commitment to protecting institutions that are essential to constitutional governance. As a member of the Rule of Law Committee, I have had the privilege of participating in ongoing discussions about civic education, public trust, and the judiciary's role in maintaining democratic principles.

## Opening the Courthouse Doors

Perhaps one of the most meaningful aspects of Allegheny County's America 250 celebration has been the effort to make the courthouse more accessible to the public.

The Civil Division of the Court of Common Pleas, in collaboration with the ACBA Civil Litigation Section, recently hosted a "Summer Celebrate 250" event designed to welcome families, students, and community members into the courthouse. Visitors were invited to observe court proceedings, participate in a mock trial presentation, and learn about the



history of the courthouse and the judicial process.

The program culminated with a public reading of the Declaration of Independence in the historic Pennsylvania Supreme Court courtroom located within Pittsburgh's City County Building. Participants also had the opportunity to learn about the history of the courtroom, its artwork, and the significance of the judiciary within our constitutional framework. Events such as these remind us that courts belong to the public. For many citizens, entering a courthouse can be intimidating or unfamiliar.

By creating opportunities for community members to engage with judges, observe proceedings, and learn about the judicial system in an informal setting, courts help demystify the legal process and build public understanding.

These efforts are particularly important at a time when civic literacy cannot be taken for granted. Understanding how courts function, why judicial independence matters, and how constitutional rights are protected are essential components of an informed citizenry.

## The Role of Women Judges in Civic Engagement

As members of the judiciary, women

judges across the country play an important role in fostering public understanding of the courts and promoting confidence in the administration of justice. America 250 provides an opportunity not only to reflect on our nation's history, but also to engage future generations in conversations about constitutional governance, civic responsibility, and the enduring importance of an independent judiciary.

Through outreach, education, and community engagement, courts can help ensure that the principles that have guided our nation for 250 years remain vibrant for the next 250 years. Programs that invite citizens into courthouses, encourage student participation in civics education, and highlight the judiciary's role in protecting the rule of law are investments in the future of our democracy.

## Looking Forward

The America 250 celebration is ultimately about more than commemorating the past. It is an opportunity to examine how our institutions have evolved, to educate future generations, and to reaffirm our collective commitment to the rule of law.

For judges, lawyers, and court professionals, the Semiquincentennial offers a unique platform to engage with our communities, strengthen public

trust, and encourage meaningful civic participation. Whether through student contests, courthouse tours, educational programs, historical exhibits, or public discussions, courts across Pennsylvania are helping citizens better understand the judicial branch and its indispensable role in our constitutional system.

As we celebrate 250 years of American independence, we are reminded that the strength of our democracy depends not only upon the institutions established by our founders, but also upon the willingness of each generation to learn about, support, and participate in those institutions.

The courts of Pennsylvania, and particularly those of the Fifth Judicial District, are proud to be part of that effort.

The next 250 years will depend, in large part, on how effectively we continue to educate, engage, and inspire the citizens we serve.

## Author's Note

*Judge Nicola Henry Taylor serves on the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, and is a member of the National Association of Women Judges. She also serves on the Allegheny County Bar Association Rule of Law Committee and remains committed to civic education, judicial independence, and strengthening public trust in the courts.*



# Massachusetts at 250:



As the United States commemorates the 250th anniversary of its founding, Massachusetts stands at the center of the national celebration. As the birthplace of the American Revolution, the Commonwealth is uniquely positioned to reflect on the events that transformed thirteen colonies into a nation founded on the ideals of liberty, representative government, and the rule of law.



**Hon. Amy Blake**  
Chief Justice Amy Lyn Blake  
Massachusetts Appeals Court  
Vice-President Districts

Massachusetts 250 (MA250) commemorates this historic milestone through educational programs, community events, historical reenactments, exhibitions, and civic engagement activities that invite all to explore the Commonwealth's remarkable role in shaping our nation's history. MA250 encourages thoughtful reflection on the enduring

# MA 250



principles that continue to guide our democracy and the institutions entrusted with preserving it.

For members of the judiciary, these commemorations have special significance. Although courts are not the focus of the Revolutionary story, the ideals that emerged from that era—justice, equality before the law, an independent judiciary, and public confidence in governmental institutions—remain central to the work performed every day in Massachusetts courthouses.

The theme of the Commonwealth's commemoration, "Our First 250 Was Revolutionary. Come See What's Next," recognizes that history is not simply something to be remembered; it is something that continues to shape our present and future. That message resonates strongly with the judicial branch, whose mission is grounded in the Constitution and the rule of law established during the nation's earliest years.

MA250 embraces a statewide approach. Communities across Massachusetts have developed programs that celebrate their own contributions to the American Revolution and the nation's development. Historic sites in Lexington, Concord, Boston, Salem, Plymouth, New Bedford, Springfield, and countless other communities have welcomed visitors through

lectures, exhibitions, walking tours, reenactments, performances, and educational programming.

Boston's own Boston 250 initiative complements these efforts by highlighting the city's revolutionary heritage while also recognizing the people and movements that have shaped Boston over the past two and a half centuries. New historical markers, public art, and community programs broaden the traditional narrative by recognizing the contributions of women, Black Americans, Indigenous peoples, immigrants, and civic leaders whose stories deserve greater public recognition.

That expanded historical perspective is especially meaningful. The story of America's founding is richer and more complete when it includes the voices of those whose contributions were long overlooked. Women's leadership during the Revolutionary era—whether through political advocacy, economic sacrifice, management of households and businesses, or support of the Patriot cause—helped sustain the movement for independence even though many women would wait generations before enjoying the full rights of citizenship.

Today, women serve throughout every level of the Massachusetts judiciary, bringing diverse experiences and perspectives to

the administration of justice. Their service reflects the continuing evolution of the ideals first articulated 250 years ago and reminds us that the promise of equal justice has expanded steadily over time through constitutional development, legislation, and judicial interpretation.

For judges, civic education has long been an important component of public service. Courthouse tours, Law Day programs, student visits, community outreach, and educational partnerships all help strengthen public understanding of the judicial system. Although these activities occur throughout the year, the nation's 250th anniversary provides an opportunity to reaffirm the importance of an informed citizenry and an independent judiciary.

Massachusetts has also used the semiquincentennial to invest

**"Our First 250  
Was Revolutionary.  
Come See  
What's Next"**

in historical preservation and heritage tourism. Through grants,

partnerships, and statewide promotion, communities have restored historic sites, expanded exhibits, and developed new opportunities for visitors to engage with the Commonwealth's revolutionary history. These investments not only preserve significant landmarks but also strengthen local economies and encourage future generations to appreciate the Commonwealth's extraordinary historical legacy.

One of the most anticipated events of the commemoration is Sail Boston 2026, when tall ships from around the world will gather in Boston Harbor to celebrate America's 250th anniversary. Combined with Independence Day festivities and numerous local celebrations across the Commonwealth, these events underscore Massachusetts' enduring place in the national story.

Importantly, MA250 has sought to balance celebration with reflection. Organizers have encouraged conversations about both the achievements and the complexities of the nation's founding. Programs acknowledge that while the Declaration of Independence proclaimed universal ideals, many Americans—including women, enslaved people, Indigenous communities, and others—were excluded from the full promise of liberty at the nation's birth. Recognizing those realities

enriches, rather than diminishes, our understanding of American history.

For women judges, this perspective is particularly meaningful. The history of women in the legal profession and on the bench illustrates the nation's continuing progress toward greater inclusion and equal opportunity. Generations of women lawyers, advocates, and judges have expanded access to justice and strengthened public confidence in our courts through their leadership, scholarship, and service.

The Commonwealth's sesquicentennial reminds us that the rule of law is not self-executing. It depends upon institutions that are independent, fair, and trusted by the public, as well as individuals committed to preserving constitutional principles. Every day, judges across Massachusetts work to resolve disputes impartially, safeguard individual rights, and ensure equal access to justice. In doing so, they help sustain the democratic system envisioned by the nation's founders and refined by succeeding generations.

As Massachusetts commemorates America's 250th anniversary, we are reminded that our history is not confined to museums or monuments. It lives in our civic institutions, our communities, and our continued commitment to justice

under law. The Commonwealth's celebration invites all of us to reflect on where we have been, appreciate how far we have come, and consider our collective responsibility for the future.

For members of the judiciary—and particularly for the women who have helped transform the legal profession through generations of dedicated service—the nation's sesquicentennial offers both an occasion for celebration and an opportunity for renewal. It reminds us that the pursuit of justice is an ongoing endeavor, one that requires integrity, independence, courage, and an unwavering commitment to the constitutional principles that have guided our nation for 250 years.

As we honor Massachusetts' extraordinary contributions to the founding of the United States, we also celebrate the continuing work of those who uphold the rule of law today. In that sense, the Commonwealth's 250th anniversary is not simply a remembrance of the past; it is a reaffirmation of our shared responsibility to preserve justice, strengthen public trust, and ensure that the promise of equal justice under law continues for generations to come.

# NAWJ Holds Inaugural Regional Conference



## Strengthening Your Judicial Core



With a beautiful Minnesota summer serving as background, NAWJ held its inaugural regional conference at the Thomson Reuters campus. Located in Eagan, MN, near the Twin Cities, Thomson Reuters opened its doors to host NAWJ's first regional conference on June 5-6, 2026.

### District 10

(Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota) coordinated the conference and invited all NAWJ members to attend, with specific emphasis placed on surrounding NAWJ districts, District 7 (Michigan, Ohio, West Virginia), District 8 (Illinois,

Indiana, Kentucky), and District 9 (Iowa, Missouri, Wisconsin). We are excited to share that Districts 7-10 were all represented at the conference.

The conference's theme was "Strengthening Your Judicial Core," which closely aligned with the program's educational focus on enhancing judges' essential skill sets. Through engaging speakers and presentations, the program was designed to share ideas about success in a judge's central or "core" duties. Those of us traveling out of town

stayed at the convenient Omni Viking Lakes Hotel, which offered a relaxing, spa-like setting. Situated next to the Minnesota Vikings Training Facility and less than a mile from the Thomson Reuters campus, the hotel provided shuttle service to and from the conference.

## Thursday, June 4th

A speakers' dinner was held the evening before the conference began. The dinner was designed to thank presenters for their time and travel to the Twin Cities. It also provided an opportunity for participants to become acquainted with one another before the conference presentations. NAWJ President Hon. Pam Washington welcomed everyone to the dinner and thanked them for participating in the inaugural NAWJ regional conference and for their commitment to NAWJ. That evening's sponsor, Nicole Revenaugh of Irigonegaray and Revenaugh, also welcomed the speakers and praised

NAWJ's ongoing support for the judiciary.

After dinner, we received a pleasant surprise: a tour of the nearby Minnesota Vikings Training facility. One of the Friday luncheon speakers, Lara Juras, Minnesota Vikings EVP, Chief People & Culture Officer, graciously invited us to explore the Vikings athletic complex. Tour highlights included team practice fields, the press room, and portraits of Minnesota Vikings football legends. The over 90-minute visit left all who participated inspired. It offered an intimate look at the many ways that a sports team builds camaraderie and fellowship both on and off the field.

## Friday, June 5th

On Friday morning we gathered at the Thomson Reuters campus for breakfast before beginning a full day of events, which included a luncheon roundtable discussion and an evening Welcome reception. Both Hon. Pam

Washington and Bob Smits of Thomson Reuters warmly welcomed all to the conference. Here is a summary of the Friday and Saturday events:

### *Friday morning sessions*

The conference began with an outstanding presentation, U.S. Supreme Court 2025 Midterm Review, by Ian Gershengorn. A former Acting Solicitor General and legal authority, Mr. Gershengorn shared insights on decisions from the current, U.S. Supreme Court term. Mr. Gershengorn highlighted noteworthy opinions, discussed the term's important developments, including the emergency docket, and previewed several high-profile cases still pending before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Next was a memorable panel presentation, A Modern Take on the Media and the Court. Joining our own NAWJ President-elect Hon. Heather Welch, was Tom Hauser (moderator), chief political reporter for KSTP-TV in



the Twin Cities, Hon Peter Cahill, who presided over the Derek Chauvin murder trial, and Prof. David Schultz, distinguished scholar at Hamline University. The participants shared well-informed perspectives on media coverage of the courts. We all learned from their experiences of either presiding over or covering high-profile cases. Importantly, the presentations illustrated ways to navigate media coverage of intense cases while simultaneously upholding the integrity of our justice system.

### *Friday luncheon focused on leadership*

The Friday lunch roundtable discussion, Shared Leadership Skills in the Courts and in Sports, featured Minnesota Supreme Court Chief Justice Natalie Hudson, Chief Judge Sarah Warner of Kansas Court of Appeals, and Lara Juras, Minnesota Vikings EVP & Chief People & Culture Officer. Moderated by Laurel Klein Searles, the panel explored

essential leadership skills, different management and leadership styles, and lessons each panelist learned from their various leadership positions.

A memorable moment came when Klein Searles asked each panelist to name their favorite sports coach or trailblazer. Chief Justice Hudson spoke fondly of the leadership lessons she had learned from her father, a college football coach. Chief Judge Warner spoke about Kansas City Chiefs Coach Andy Reid and the pivotal role he has played in the transformation of the Chiefs. Finally, EVP & Chief People & Culture Office Juras gave an answer that moved the audience. She recalled how inspiring it was to work with the inimitable Hank Aaron when he was an official in the Atlanta Braves front office.

### *Friday afternoon sessions*

We began Friday afternoon with a lively, interactive presentation, Writing Like the Best Judges and

Attorneys, by the well-known author, founder and CEO of BriefCatch, Ross Guberman. Mr. Guberman discussed different ways to write with confidence. We reviewed judicial writing excerpts - including those from sitting U.S. Supreme Court justices - for examples of clear and concise judicial writing. Mr. Guberman also lead us through small group discussions on differing writing styles and techniques.

AI as Applied in Today's Judicial Landscape was one of the timeliest presentations. Sharing their expertise in this area were Madeline Bowie, Thomson Reuters Director, Product Marketing and Kaitlyn Frank, Senior Product Marketing. They reviewed how artificial intelligence is being explored and used by judges, lawyers, pro se litigants, and courts in general. We also learned about ongoing efforts to reduce AI-generated hallucinations. The audience was also given live demonstration by Hon. Jennifer Mabey, who showed us how she uses AI tools to



assist in drafting judicial orders.

Friday afternoon's last program was From Bar to Bench: Sharing Unique Perspectives. NAWJ has a strong commitment to mentorship, including assisting attorneys who have an interest in becoming judges. To serve as better mentors, the conference presented a program that allowed judges to hear from those who are involved with the judicial selection or elections process. The panelists were Nicole Revenaugh, who has advised numerous attorneys interested in judicial positions; Erin Sindberg Porter, the chairperson for the Minnesota Commission of Judicial Selection; and Justin

Whitten, general counsel to Kansas Governor Laura Kelly. Rounding out the panel and serving as moderator was Hon. Kellie Hogan, who spoke about judicial elections. Given differences and changes in judicial selection across states, this was an excellent overview of candidate selection processes, variation in state judicial commissions, and different types of judicial elections.

### *Welcome Reception*

Friday ended with a Welcome Reception hosted by Thomson Reuters. The reception was a great chance to connect with one another, meet new members and first-time NAWJ attendees, and greet old

friends. In fact, one attorney remarked how welcomed she felt attending our conference – just one example of the collegiality that has long been a hallmark of NAWJ events.

### *Saturday, June 6th*

Saturday morning began with breakfast at the Thomson Reuters campus, which allowed discussion among NAWJ colleagues and attendees. The first presentation, Ethics in the Courtroom, was a talk I gave with suggestions provided by Hon. Miriam Perry. (I greatly appreciate her thoughts and additions in preparing this presentation.) With a lively audience, we discussed ten standard courtroom



proceedings, e.g., voir dire, and how each of the proceedings are fraught with ethical hurdles. We ended with a discussion of various ways to maintain a calm judicial demeanor.

The mid-morning presentation, Emerging Trends of State Constitutional Challenges, was an engrossing discussion with Hon. Karl Procaccini, Minnesota Supreme Court, Hon. Elizabeth Bentley, Minnesota Court of Appeals, and Hon. Angela Coble, Kansas Court of Appeals (moderator). The three judges looked at examples of state constitutional challenges and the effects that they are having on the legal landscape. This panel was a great way to learn firsthand about this emerging body of law and the many nuances associated with state constitutional challenges.

We ended the Saturday programs with Advancements in E-Discovery. The panel consisted of two practitioners, Jeannine Kenney and Laura Matson, joined by moderator, Hon. Lori Dougherty-Bichsel. This panel offered a comprehensive overview of the topic. The engaging speakers reviewed the many advancements in e-discovery, including recent cases and proposed rule changes related to AI e-discovery.

NAWJ Events and Projects  
Throughout the meeting, information was shared about

upcoming NAWJ conferences and projects. Judge Julie A. Gafkay gave a preview of her NAWJ 250 Anniversary Presentation. On Saturday, Judge Karen Gage discussed NAWJ's new committee geared towards supporting and educating new judges. Finally, Judge Jennifer Mabey invited all to join her and her fellow District 12 judges at the upcoming 2027 annual conference in Salt Lake City.

### *Saturday Excursions*

Many choose to attend the Minnesota Twin Saturday afternoon game against the Kansas City Royals. Attendees were welcomed at the Thomson Reuters suite at Target Field and they enjoyed a Twins win! Others enjoyed visiting Minneapolis's Mall of Americas or attending the Prince Celebration 2026's Saturday downtown block party, which was part of the festival commemorating Prince. Again, these were all great ways for attendees to get to know one another and to continue to discuss the many insights shared at the regional meeting.



**Hon. Rachel Pickering,**  
Kansas Court of Appeals  
Dist. 10 chair, Regional  
conference chair

### *Thank you*

A special thank you is extended to Thomson Reuters, particularly Tom Leighton, Robert Smits, and Rachel Baumer. They were instrumental in the planning and coordinating of this inaugural conference. To say that we greatly appreciate all that they did to make this inaugural regional conference a success is an understatement.

### *Takeaways*

Overall, there are two key takeaways from the inaugural regional meeting. The first is that participants clearly enjoyed and benefited from strong programming. The regional meeting provided the same high caliber training that NAWJ always provides, in a more relaxed and (as always) collegial setting. Second, it quickly became apparent that a regional conference has a lot to offer to NAWJ members, with one of the many benefits being an accessible location. Many participants were, for example, able to drive to the conference.

*All in all, the regional meeting was clearly beneficial to many and a great way to refresh and update essential skills. We hope that attendees departed feeling both invigorated and recharged!*

*See everyone in New Orleans!*

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## NAWJ NEW MEMBERS SINCE JANUARY 1, 2026

We welcome the following new members of NAWJ:

**Shekera Algarin**, Civil Court Of The City  
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**Alexis Alyssa Arteaga**, O'Hagan Meyer  
 LLP, Whittier, CA

**Katherine T. Barkowski**, Somerville  
 District Court/Trial Court Of  
 Massachusetts, Somerville, MA

**RuthAnne Beach**, Alaska Court Of  
 Appeals, Anchorage, AK

**Karin M. Bell**, Massachusetts Trial  
 Court, Acton, MA

**Manisha H. Bhatt**, Commonwealth Of  
 Massachusetts Probate and Family  
 Court, Lowell, MA

**Simquita R. Bridges**, Court Of  
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**Colleen M. Brierley**, Norfolk Probate  
 and Family Court, Canton, MA

**Regina D. Cannon**, United States  
 Courts/ Northern District Of Georgia,  
 Atlanta, GA

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 Mercy School of Law, Southgate, MI

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 Bronx, NY

**Frances Butcher Dallmeyer**,  
 Massachusetts Trial Court District  
 Court Division, Chelmsford, MA

**Teri Lynn Dennings**, Macomb County  
 Circuit Court, Mt. Clemens, MI

**Hon. Kimberly Donoghue**, Travis  
 County District Courts, Austin, TX

**Elle Elliott**, Homer Court, Anchor Point, AK

**Mary M. Ferriter**, Massachusetts  
 Probate and Family Court Department,  
 Boston, MA

**Ailett Garcia Cayetano**, Poder Judicial  
 Del Estado De Veracruz, Xalapa-  
 Enríquez, Mexico

**Pamela Gauvin-Fernandes**,  
 Massachusetts Trial Court, Freetown, MA

**Caroline Gentry**, U.S. District Court For  
 The Southern District Of Ohio, Dayton, OH

**Valerie Gotch Garrett**, 15th Judicial  
 District Court, Division B, Lafayette, LA

**Veldore Young Graham**, Lauderdale  
 County Court, Meridian, MS

**Lavonda Graham-Williams**, Portsmouth  
 Circuit Court, Portsmouth, VA

**Tanya A. Grillo**, 16th Circuit Court, Mt  
 Clemens, MI

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**Jillian Jones**, Detroit Mercy School of Law, Farmington, MI

**Ardak Kokeman**, Specialized Interdistrict Economic Court of Kostanay Region, Kostanay, Kazakhstan

**Terri F. Lamarre**, Massachusetts Trial Court, Dartmouth, MA

**Sandra A. Lanni**, Rhode Island Family Court, Providence, RI

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**Catherine H. McQueen**, Circuit Court For Montgomery County, Rockville, MD

**Sarah Moore**, 512th Judicial District Court, Georgetown, TX

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**Michael Jude Pate**, Alaska Supreme Court, Juneau, AK

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With funding from the State Justice Institute, NAWJ developed a course to enhance judges' and other court staff's awareness of the issues affecting rural civil courts and the Americans seeking justice within them. This online, self-paced course is 14 chapters and [available here](#). Each chapter takes approximately 5-10 minutes on average. Enrollment is enabled through self-service and requires signing up with a login.

# Join us in New Orleans for the NAWJ 2026 Annual Conference

Register *here*



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NAWJ 2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
OCTOBER 15-17

## SAVE THESE DATES

### 2027 Regional Meeting

San Diego, CA  
March 19-20

### 2027 Annual Conference

JUSTICE AT THE SUMMIT, *Rise Stand Reach*  
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