



THE JOHN PAUL STEVENS FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

Dear Friends,

I have been inspired by the stories shared during my "listening tour" across the country. These moments have underscored what makes this community so special: a shared, unwavering commitment to public interest law and the legacy of Justice Stevens.

Our Foundation continues to grow as a powerful force for justice. This summer, we will welcome over 150 new Fellows from 38 law schools, bringing our total alumni community to 1,400 nationwide. We are especially proud of our impact - 73% of our alumni fellows continue to work in public service.

In this issue, you will find highlights of our collective work, including alumni spotlights, clerk reflections, and upcoming events. You'll also read a story about Justice Stevens, who often wrote thank you letters to hotel managers for their service. I shared this story with my mom, who insisted that my sisters and I write thank you notes when we were children (a practice I continue today). She smiled and remarked that she was glad that Justice Stevens shared her belief in the importance of gratitude. In that same spirit, I want to express my deepest thanks to our Alumni, the JPS clerk community, and our loyal supporters. Your dedication is the heartbeat of this Foundation, and I look forward to all we will achieve together.

Warmly,
Sara Woods, Executive Director

FAST FACTS

2025 Fellows:

- 158 Fellows from 38 law schools
- 56% first generation graduate students
- 35% served at public defender agencies
- 48% served at nonprofit legal services agencies

Greatest Number of Fellows:

1997-Present

- Legal Aid Society of New York (21!)

This summer the Foundation will host a series of happy hours across the country: New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Additional details coming soon. We hope you will join us in a city near you or consider hosting a happy hour in your city!

The Foundation's Board of Directors will host a gathering in Washington, D.C., on Friday, April 17th. Alumni Fellows and former JPS Clerks are warmly invited to join us for an evening of connection and celebration.

Please RSVP here:
<https://invite.social/2cviule7kfagwnvs>



Are you interested in joining any of the virtual sessions this summer to welcome the 2026 Fellows?
If so, email us at fellows@stevensfoundation.org



Rahwa Gebre-Egziabher
Fellow 2001
Northwestern Law
Attorney Advisor,
Defender Services Office of the
Administrative Office of the U.S.
Courts

Rahwa Gebre-Egziabher’s distinguished public interest legal career began with a formative experience as a Stevens Fellow. In the summer of 2001, the fellowship enabled her to intern at the Legal Aid Society in the Bronx, one of the nation’s busiest public defender offices.

“The Stevens Fellowship showed me that public defense wasn’t just something I cared about—it was a career people believed in and valued enough to support,” Rahwa said.

A graduate of Northwestern Pritzker School of Law, Rahwa was honored to receive the fellowship named for Justice John Paul Stevens, whose portrait she passed each day in the school’s main hallway. That summer experience solidified her commitment to public defense.

After graduating, Rahwa began her career with the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia, after that serving as an Assistant Federal Public Defender in the Western District of North Carolina. Today, she is an Attorney Advisor with the Defender Services Office of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, where she supports defender offices nationwide through assessments, training, operational support, and leadership development.

As a mentor once told her, Rahwa encourages aspiring public interest lawyers to approach their careers as “a marathon, not a sprint.” She explains:

“There are many ways to contribute—whether in the courtroom or behind the scenes. The key is finding a cause you care about and then understanding the different ways you can support and influence that cause while making a lasting impact.”



Bianca Dueñas
Fellow 2014
UC Davis School of Law
Deputy Director,
California Immigration Project

Bianca grew up in California’s Central Valley, in a family deeply connected to farmworker communities. Both sides of her family immigrated from Mexico and worked in the agricultural fields around Lodi, an experience that shaped her understanding of both the sacrifices immigrant families make and the structural barriers they face.

From a young age, she felt a strong sense of responsibility to give back to the communities that shaped her upbringing. As a new mother and law student at UC Davis, she relied on the Stevens Fellowship’s financial support to pursue her summer internships at the UC Davis Immigration Clinic and California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation (CRLAF).

Bianca reflects, “That fellowship summer showed me there was a path to continue doing the work I love, providing legal services to communities like the one I grew up in, while still building a sustainable career and providing for my family.”

The Fellowship led to her first job after graduation at CRLAF. Over the next nine years, she helped grow the organization’s small immigration team into a much larger program serving more immigrant communities in the Sacramento Area.

Bianca now serves as Deputy Director of the California Immigration Project in Sacramento, helping lead a 22-person staff providing direct immigration legal services. Looking back, she credits the Stevens Fellowship with giving her the critical financial support and confidence to thrive in the public interest career she envisioned.

Bianca understands that “public interest law can feel intimidating at first, especially with financial pressures and constantly changing policies. But with the right mentorship and support, it’s absolutely possible to build a meaningful and sustainable career.”

Calling all Alumni Fellows! We want to hear your story- let us know via [this form!](#)



A POWERFUL FORCE FOR JUSTICE:

ISSUE 4: MARCH 2026

A CAREER SHAPED BY JUSTICE STEVENS, JAMES BENJAMIN, CLERK TERM 1994

The law professionals who clerked for Justice Stevens over his 34+ year judicial career have a privileged perspective on his work and legacy. We are proud to share their thoughts and memories with you and we remain grateful for their continued support of our Fellows.



L-R: Craig Singer, Justice Stevens, Cory Beckwith, Nellie Pitts, Jim Benjamin and Greg Magarian

For the past 25 years, Jim Benjamin has built a distinguished career as a white-collar defense lawyer at Akin Gump in New York. In his practice, he represents individuals and companies facing grand jury investigations, criminal cases, and regulatory enforcement actions brought by agencies such as the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. Earlier in his career, he served as an Assistant U.S. Attorney in the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, following a formative clerkship with Justice John Paul Stevens. Jim is also a longtime supporter of the John Paul Stevens Foundation.

Throughout his career, one motivation has remained constant: helping people navigate the immense pressure of facing the federal government. "These situations can be extraordinarily stressful and scary," he says. "Unless you or a family member have been through a federal criminal investigation yourself, it's hard to understand just how difficult the experience can be."

CLERKING FOR JUSTICE STEVENS

Jim's path to Justice Stevens' chambers came through an unusual route. After being hired by retired Justice Lewis F. Powell Jr., who maintained chambers at the Court after stepping down from active service, he also became affiliated with Justice Stevens' chambers, joining as a fourth clerk alongside Stevens' three clerks.

"It was a lot of hard work," he recalls with a laugh. At the same time his clerkship began, he and his wife had just welcomed their first child. "I used to joke that I had two 90% jobs."

Justice Powell maintained a demanding docket equivalent to half the workload of a full-time appellate judge on the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, and Jim was Powell's only law clerk. Meanwhile, Justice Stevens' chambers handled every certiorari petition independently.

"Justice Stevens was the only Justice whose chambers didn't participate in the cert pool," he explains. "That meant we read 100 percent of the cert petitions ourselves. He believed it was an important check and balance to take an independent look at every petition." The workload was intense, but the experience left a lasting impression.

Justice Stevens, he says, embodied kindness, intellectual rigor, and independence. Even in oral arguments, his approach reflected those values. Rather than interrupting advocates, Stevens would often begin gently: "Do you mind if I ask a question?" Yet the questions themselves were always precise and penetrating.

Perhaps most striking was Stevens' work ethic. "He never took shortcuts," Jim says. "He did all of the important opinion-writing himself."



L-R: Jim, Jim's daughter Grace and Justice Powell

One memory in particular stands out. Although he had been hired by Justice Powell rather than Stevens directly, Stevens welcomed him fully into chambers.

"He treated me as completely co-equal with my co-clerks," he says. "It showed his tremendous heart and generosity."

FROM PROSECUTOR TO DEFENSE LAWYER

Long before his clerkship, Jim had already developed an interest in criminal law. In middle school, he read *The Defense Never Rests* by famed defense attorney F. Lee Bailey, a book that sparked his fascination with the courtroom.

After law school, he began his career clerking for federal district judge J. Frederick Motz, a former U.S. Attorney who inspired him to pursue government service. That path led him to the U.S. Attorney's Office in Manhattan, where he served under then U.S. Attorney Mary Jo White.

"Working as an Assistant U.S. Attorney was one of the great honors of my life," he says. During his time there, he tried several major cases, including an arson homicide case involving the death of a New York City firefighter and a high-profile insider trading prosecution against the CEO of an investment bank.



Jim alongside his mother and wife receiving a Justice Department award for the prosecution of an international drug trafficking case.

He also worked on a sweeping international drug trafficking case that traced a Colombian cocaine organization from jungle production sites through Caribbean and Mexican trafficking routes to distribution networks across U.S. cities. The experience shaped not only his legal career but also his understanding of justice.

STAYING COMMITTED TO PUBLIC SERVICE

After moving to private practice, Jim has remained deeply engaged in public interest work. At Akin Gump, he has contributed to numerous pro bono initiatives, including a major study of terrorism prosecutions for Human Rights First.

He has also played a significant role in the New York City Bar Association, serving on committees focused on criminal law, national security, and the rule of law. Today, he chairs the Board of Directors of the City Bar Fund, the nonprofit arm of the Association, which supports programs providing pro bono legal services to tens of thousands of New Yorkers each year.

Despite the many ways lawyers contribute to public service, he recognizes that today's students face real challenges.

For young lawyers pursuing public service careers, he sees courage and commitment. **"Pursuing public service has always required a leap of faith,"** he says. **"That's especially true today."**

"There are some voices questioning the very idea of pro bono service," he says. **"And yet the needs have never been greater."**



**Justice Stevens Clerks from the 1994 Term:
L-R Greg Magarian, Jim, Ian Gershengorn, and
Craig Singer**

A LASTING IMPACT

Looking back, his clerkship with Justice Stevens remains one of the most transformative experiences of his life. **"It helped inspire me to pursue a career as a criminal lawyer,"** he says, **"and it demonstrated that the law can be a powerful force for justice."** That belief continues to guide his work and his support for the The John Paul Stevens Foundation.

"The network of Justice Stevens' law clerks is so strong and vibrant," he says. **"Supporting the Foundation is a small way for me to honor Justice Stevens, his integrity, brilliance, kindness, and record of public service."**

And when he looks at the Foundation's Fellows today, he sees reason for optimism.

"I love the breadth and scale of the work they're doing," he says. **"Their enthusiasm for public service gives me hope for the future."**



2025 AT A GLANCE

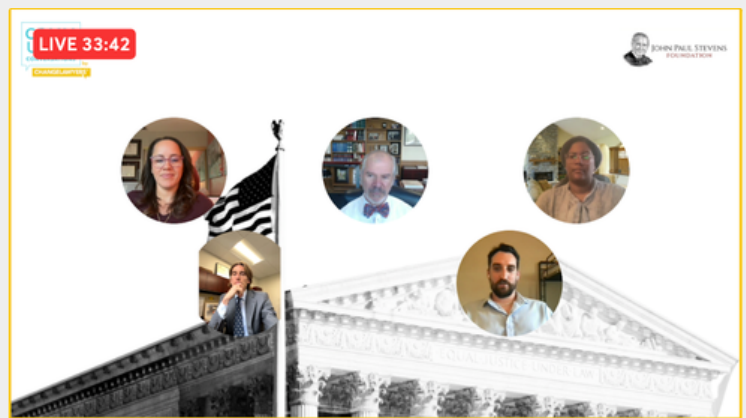
Throughout the summer of 2025, Fellows had the opportunity to connect in person through happy hours, dinners, and even a lively trivia night. The enthusiasm, initiative, and engagement was incredible to see.

Also in 2025, the Foundation hosted a series of virtual sessions that brought together a combination of JPS clerks and Alumni Fellows. The spring started with two informative sessions, one focused on "Building Resilience in the Legal World" (with 2022 Alumni Fellow Christine Evans) and another on "Exploring Post-Graduate Fellowships" (with EJW staff and 2024 Alumni Fellow Tiffany Jackson, 2023 Alumni Fellow Riley Dankovich, and 2020 Fellow, Maya Chaudhuri).

Renowned constitutional law scholar and JPSF Board member, Kate Shaw, had a riveting discussion with 2020 Alumni Fellow, Michael Ortega on "Understanding the Constitution in a Changing America" in the summer.

And in the fall, we continued with a fireside virtual chat with ChangeLawyers highlighting "Pathways to Judicial Clerkships" with three Alumni Fellows: 2021 Fellow Angel Lockhart, 2022 Fellow Jonah Griego-Chadwick and 2020 Fellow Dominique Fenton.

We ended the year with an engaging discussion featuring 2014 & 2015 Fellow Domonique Williams and JPSF Board Member Aaron Zelinsky who reflected on navigating career transitions.



JPSF STAFF ON THE ROAD

(L-R; Sara Woods, Anjuli Arora-Dow, The Honorable Leondra Kruger, Kenneth Manaster and Doug Winthrop)



In December, several of Justice Stevens' former clerks gathered to welcome the Foundation's newest Executive Director, Sara Woods, who has been on a listening tour across the country with the JPSF community.

FELLOWS NETWORKING

2025 was a great year of connection all over the country for our JPSF community. From a small dinner in Philly to larger gatherings in D.C. and Seattle, JPSF Fellows continue to connect over a shared passion for public interest law.



Alumni Fellows from Seattle University School of Law and JPS Clerk Eduardo Penalver



JOHN PAUL STEVENS FOUNDATION

FUN FACT ABOUT JUSTICE STEVENS

Did you know?



When Justice John Paul Stevens was growing up in Chicago, his father managed two of the city's historic landmarks, the LaSalle Hotel and the Stevens Hotel (now known as the Chicago Hilton). Justice Stevens watched closely as his father poured care, precision and pride into every detail of those beautiful properties. He saw firsthand the dignity of the hard work and the quiet joy that came when guests noticed. Years later, throughout his distinguished career, whenever Justice Stevens experienced exceptional hospitality, he would write a personal letter of gratitude to the hotel manager. He remembered how much those notes meant to his father. It was a small gesture but like so much in Justice Stevens' life, it reflected something larger: a deep respect for dedication, a belief in recognizing excellence, and an understanding that gratitude is never insignificant.

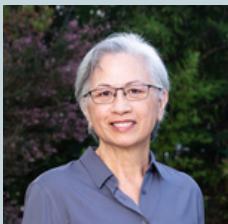
MEET THE STAFF



Sara Woods, Executive Director



Anjuli Arora-Dow, Program Director



Toni Schottenhammer, Program Associate

JOIN OUR ALUMNI COUNCIL!

The Foundation is grateful for the Alumni who have joined our past three alumni council meetings to discuss how we can best support our Alumni Fellows. If you are interested in joining the next meeting, we would love to have you! Tuesday, April 21st, 4pm PT/7pm ET.

Please register using this zoom link.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/joining/register/A06yFVE3SJ4bO37rmWciw>



Sketch by Supreme Court Artist: Art Len

Make a Gift

Support future Fellows and the next generation of public interest advocates!

jpstevensfoundation.org/donate/