



LAWYERS MEETING THE MOMENT

LDAD at Mid-Year: Seven Months of Action, Advocacy, and Impact

January through July 2026



Published by Lawyers Defending American Democracy, a 501(c)(3) organization

Throughout 2026, we have faced unrelenting challenges to the rule of law and the constitutional, procedural, and substantive principles that are foundational to it. The administration continued to deny due process at scale, targeting the legal profession, the courts, and civil society institutions, while turning the machinery of federal law enforcement against perceived political opponents. This barrage has continued to undermine public confidence in the core foundational principles of the American system of government that protect American liberty.

Since our founding in 2019, our mission at Lawyers Defending American Democracy ("LDAD") has been to stand up for these principles and to organize and mobilize lawyers and others to do the same.

This mid-year report details the extraordinary work we have undertaken so far in 2026, a period in this country of both accountability and escalation. This year, the California Supreme Court disbarred John Eastman, more than four years after LDAD filed an ethics complaint against Mr. Eastman that was signed by more than 1,300 distinguished members of the bar in nearly every state and the District of Columbia, and that supported and augmented an earlier complaint filed by States United Democracy Center. Even as the removal of a lawyer's right to practice law is never a moment for celebration, it is, however, a moment to take pride in a profession where the fundamental framework for attorney regulation and discipline operates as it should.



Throughout this year, LDAD has filed major new ethics complaints against some of the most senior lawyers in the federal government; filed more than a dozen amicus briefs in cases involving the independence of the legal profession, the civil service, and the right to vote;

and launched several Action Alerts, our new rapid-response tool to mobilize lawyers and the public to respond to unlawful federal actions as they happen.

The following highlights our key accomplishments through the first seven months of this year.

ETHICS COMPLAINTS

LDAD remains a pioneer in the meticulous work of preparing and filing detailed ethics complaints with state bar disciplinary authorities. Our goal is simple: seek to hold accountable attorneys who have violated the rules of professional responsibility in service of efforts to undermine core principles of our Constitution and the rule of law. We take great care to file these complaints with the support and help of renowned ethics practitioners, and we seek accountability *only* where the record, legally and factually, strongly supports the case that an investigation by the state disciplinary authorities is merited.

So far in 2026, our work has focused on lawyers in the federal government, as federal policy, demands from the administration, and government-filed legal actions have increasingly placed lawyers in conflict with their obligations to their oath and the rules of professional conduct.

LDAD Files Ethics Complaint Against Boris Epshteyn (Attorney Grievance Committee, Supreme Court of the State of New York, March 16, 2026). LDAD, Democracy Defenders Fund, and a coalition of distinguished law professors and retired judges [asked the Grievance Committee to investigate](#) whether Boris Epshteyn, a personal lawyer to the President, violated the New York Rules of Professional Conduct while purportedly leading the administration's campaign to intimidate and silence major national law firms through actual and threatened punitive executive orders and memoranda aimed at individual firms, and his apparent role in personally leading settlement negotiations with the firms.

Ethics Complaint Against Drew C. Ensign, Senior DOJ Official (District of Columbia Bar, April 7, 2026). LDAD and a coalition of legal scholars, former judges, and members of the bar [filed an ethics complaint](#) seeking an investigation of Drew C. Ensign, Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the

DOJ Office of Immigration Litigation, for alleged professional misconduct in multiple high-profile federal immigration cases. Drawing on court filings, judicial opinions, and other public records, the complaint alleges that Mr. Ensign made, or oversaw attorneys who made, false or misleading representations to courts, failed to comply with discovery obligations and court orders, and bore supervisory responsibility for misconduct by subordinate attorneys.



Ethics Complaint Against Former Attorney General Pamela Bondi (The Florida Bar, May 27, 2026). [A comprehensive complaint](#) filed by LDAD Board member Peggy A. Quince, retired Chief Justice of the Florida Supreme Court, and joined by LDAD, Democracy Defenders Fund, Lawyers for the Rule of Law, and over 100 scholars and retired judges, documents Ms. Bondi's longstanding pattern of misconduct as Attorney General. The complaint describes how Ms. Bondi created an environment in which DOJ lawyers were induced to violate their ethical obligations under threat of suspension or termination, repeatedly sought to bring charges against defendants without probable cause, violated her statutory obligations under the Epstein Files Transparency Act, and permitted and incentivized violations of court orders in dozens of cases.

Ethics Complaint Against Then Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche (Attorney Grievance Committee, Supreme Court of the State of New York, June 22, 2026, followed by a Request for Reconsideration July 24, 2026). LDAD, in partnership with Democracy Defenders Fund, [filed a sixty-nine-page complaint](#), signed by a bipartisan group of more than 100 former federal and state judges, asking the Grievance Committee to investigate then Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche for violations of the New York Rules of

Professional Conduct. The complaint details an extraordinary pattern of behavior, including Mr. Blanche's attempt to assist his former client and current boss, President Trump, in skirting legal limits to end a tax audit and achieve a global release of claims; his personal involvement in the failed and conflict-burdened release of the Epstein files; and his misuse of prosecutorial powers to harass and punish the personal and political enemies of his former client.

In response to a subsequent letter from the Chief Counsel declining to investigate Mr. Blanche, LDAD and DDF filed [a request for reconsideration](#), urging the New York Attorney Grievance Committee to reverse its refusal. The request argues that the Chief Counsel's suggestion that the complaint be filed with the DOJ's own Office of Professional Responsibility is misguided in light of the fact that Todd Blanche oversees and supervises all DOJ officials who would conduct the investigation. In addition, LDAD and DDF further contend that the refusal to investigate at this time ignores a recent judicial referral regarding Mr. Blanche's conduct to the NY disciplinary authorities.



Ethics Complaint Against Jeanine Pirro, United States Attorney for the District of Columbia (Attorney Grievance Committee, Supreme Court of the State of New York, July 21, 2026). [LDAD filed an ethics complaint](#) seeking an investigation of Jeanine Pirro for alleged professional misconduct in seven high-profile criminal matters. The complaint alleges that Ms. Pirro violated the special ethical responsibilities of prosecutors by pursuing or supervising politically motivated and unsupported investigations and prosecutions, making improper public statements about criminal investigations, defendants, and judges, and failing to fulfill her

managerial and supervisory responsibilities under the New York Rules of Professional Conduct.

AMICUS BRIEFS

LDAD files amicus briefs in cases where core principles of democracy and the rule of law are implicated. Through the end of July 2026, we have filed more than a dozen briefs, addressing such critical issues as the independence of the legal profession, the protection of career civil service, the privacy of personal data, the right to vote, and due process in immigration enforcement. Examples from 2026 include:

Maurene Comey v. United States (U.S. District Court, February 2, 2026). [LDAD filed an amicus brief](#) in support of former federal prosecutor Maurene Comey, a career prosecutor with an exemplary record who was terminated without notice, urging the court to reject the government's attempt to block judicial review of her termination. The government argued that Ms. Comey must seek relief from the Merit Systems Protection Board, even while contending that the statute creating that Board is unconstitutional. LDAD's brief, drawing on the legislative history of the Civil Service Reform Act, demonstrates that constitutional challenges of this magnitude belong in federal court. The court ruled in Ms. Comey's favor, and LDAD has now filed an amicus brief on the merits.

Protecting Civil Service Protections for Senior FBI Officials (Driscoll et al. v. Patel, et al., U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, February 16, 2026). [LDAD filed an amicus brief](#) urging the court to uphold longstanding civil service protections for three highly respected Senior Executive Service FBI officials, each protected by federal statutes requiring for-cause removal. Two were terminated due to their involvement in the investigation of the January 6 attack on the Capitol; the third was dismissed for his role in administering the FBI's COVID-19 protocols. The brief traces a consistent bipartisan commitment to apolitical enforcement of the law and warns that allowing civil service protections to be set aside would place the independence of federal law enforcement fundamentally at risk.

Defending Taxpayer Privacy (Center for Taxpayer Rights, et al v. Internal Revenue Service, et al, D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals, March 25, 2026). LDAD [filed an amicus brief](#) urging

the Court of Appeals to uphold a preliminary injunction blocking a massive data-sharing agreement under which the IRS would disclose to ICE the last-known addresses of approximately 1.28 million non-citizens who have filed tax returns. The brief analyzes the legislative history of taxpayer confidentiality and argues that using the IRS as a surveillance tool for another agency violates federal law and breaks a fundamental promise made to the American public.

Victor Buenrostro-Mendez v. Pamela Bondi, et al. (U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, March 30, 2026). At the request of the ACLU, [LDAD filed an amicus brief](#) challenging the administration's abrupt reversal of three decades of settled interpretation of federal immigration law that has staggering ramifications on individuals and families seeking due process. Under the new interpretation, noncitizens already in the United States who entered unlawfully may be detained without the possibility of bond for the entire pendency of their proceedings, a change that could subject millions of people to prolonged detention. LDAD argued that the major questions doctrine requires a clear indication that Congress intended to authorize executive action of this magnitude.

Challenging the National Voter "Data Bank" (League of Women Voters et al. v. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, March 30, 2026). [LDAD filed an amicus brief](#) challenging the administration's effort to compile a database of all persons in the United States and to link that national data bank to Social Security Administration records in an effort to encourage states to use the data to determine voter eligibility and purge voter rolls. The brief argues this is precisely the type of interagency national data bank the Privacy Act was written to prohibit.



Opposing Executive Orders Targeting Law Firms (Perkins Coie, LLP c. United States Department of Justice, D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals, April 15, 2026). In this consolidated appeal, [LDAD filed an amicus brief](#) supporting the invalidation of the executive orders targeting four major law firms, after all four lower courts ruled the orders unlawful. The brief argues that the executive orders are a profound departure from constitutional norms governing the separation of powers and the independence of the legal profession. If the President can punish lawyers for their work, the legal system can no longer hold the government accountable, and every lawyer is at risk for accepting a case or client disfavored by the administration.

Harris v. Bessent, et al. (Supreme Court of the United States, April 22, 2026). LDAD, joined by Law Professors Nick Bednar and Victoria Nourse, [filed an amicus brief](#) supporting the petition for certiorari filed by Merit Systems Protection Board Chair Cathy Harris, who was summarily terminated by the President despite a federal statute providing that MSPB members may be removed only for inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance in office. The brief provides important history about the creation of multi-member adjudicatory bodies to ensure impartial decision-making, dating back to before the ratification of the Constitution.

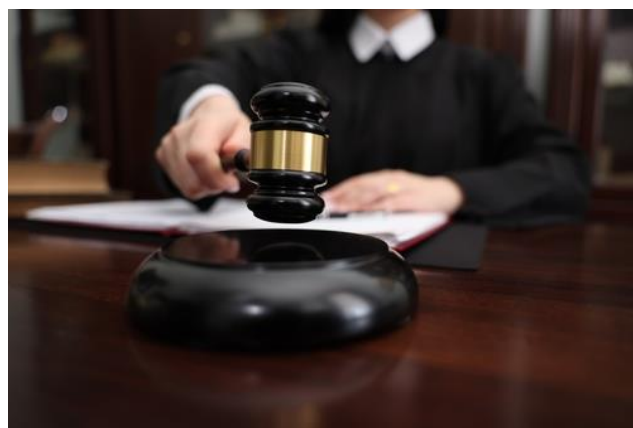
Baraka v. Habba, et al. (U.S. District Court for the District of New Jersey, June 26, 2026). [LDAD filed an amicus brief](#) supporting Newark Mayor Ras Baraka's challenge to his alleged false arrest and malicious prosecution arising from his efforts to join New Jersey's Congressional delegation in the inspection of an ICE detention facility. The brief contends that the allegations reflect a broader pattern of using prosecutorial power to target political opponents while protecting political allies, threatening law enforcement impartiality, the rule of law, and core democratic principles.

United States v. Hamilton P. Fox III et al. (U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, July 20, 2026). On behalf of 76 legal ethics scholars and experts, LDAD and Democracy Defenders Fund [urged the court](#) to reject the Department of Justice's effort to prevent the D.C. Court of Appeals from disciplining former DOJ attorney Jeffrey Clark. The brief explains that DOJ attorneys, like all lawyers, are subject to regulation by the highest court in the jurisdiction where they are licensed to practice. It

concludes that exempting DOJ attorneys from independent state ethics enforcement would undermine attorney accountability and the rule of law.



President and Fellows of Harvard College v. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services et al. (U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit, July 21, 2026); American Association of University Professors - Harvard Faculty Chapter, et al v. U.S. Department of Justice, et al (First Circuit Court of Appeals, July 28, 2026). In these related cases, LDAD [filed amicus briefs](#) supporting Harvard's and its AAUP chapter's challenges to the federal government's suspension and termination of approximately \$2.2 billion in research grants. The brief argues that the funding cuts are part of a broader campaign to weaken independent institutions that serve as checks on executive power and reflect a pattern of "autocratic legalism," reinforcing the district court's conclusion that the actions were pretextual and arbitrary and capricious.



Jackler v. Merit Systems Protection Board (U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, July 27, 2026). [LDAD filed an amicus brief](#) supporting former Immigration Judge Megan Jackler's challenge

of her removal without cause and urging the court to preserve civil service protections based on merit rather than political loyalty. The brief argues that the Merit Systems Protection Board's decision could significantly expand the President's authority to summarily remove career federal employees, reviving the patronage-based "spoils system" and undermining government expertise, public confidence, and an independent civil service.

John O. Brennan v. Todd W. Blanche, et al. (U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, July 31, 2026). [LDAD filed an amicus brief](#) supporting former CIA Director John Brennan's motion for a preliminary injunction requiring the Department of Justice to preserve records and communications relating to any investigation or potential prosecution of him. The brief argues that the extraordinary misconduct documented in Mr. Brennan's brief, including DOJ's alleged misuse of its prosecutorial powers and failure to follow court orders, as well as the pattern of misconduct by DOJ in several other cases, supports his concern that, absent an injunction, the government may fail to preserve relevant records and communications that Mr. Brennan needs to protect his rights.

ACTION ALERTS AND CALLS-TO-ACTION

In 2026, LDAD launched Action Alerts as a rapid-response tool to support our Meeting the Moment initiative and our broader community of volunteers in responding to specific government threats to the rule of law. Each Action Alert pairs a clear explanation of an unlawful government action with detailed background information and the tools needed to respond, including by submitting formal comments in rulemaking proceedings, writing opinion articles and letters to the editor, and otherwise engaging the public.

To date in 2026, we issued the following Action Alerts and Calls to Action:

[“LDAD Calls on Lawyers to Defend the Constitution”](#) (Statement and Call to Action, January 26, 2026). Following the killing of two American citizens at the hands of federal agents, LDAD called on lawyers, law firms, and legal institutions to speak out against a sustained campaign of federal lawlessness, documenting systematic violations of the First, Second, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Eighth Amendments in immigration enforcement operations. The statement is unequivocal: silence now



is complicity, and there are not "two sides" to the question of whether our rights under the Constitution are real.

“Stop DOJ from Shielding Its Lawyers” (March 6, 2026). [LDAD mobilized comments](#) opposing a proposed DOJ rule that would require state bar disciplinary authorities to suspend investigations of DOJ attorneys pending the Department’s own review. As the Action Alert explains, the regulation of lawyers has been left exclusively to the states since the founding of the Republic, the proposal violates the federal law, and a department whose leadership has repeatedly pressured its lawyers to violate their ethical obligations cannot credibly investigate itself.

“The Department of Justice Grift Store” (May 18, 2026). [Building on an article](#) by LDAD’s Executive Director in *The Contrarian*, [this Alert documents](#) the DOJ’s conflicts of interest, pardons, and taxpayer-funded payouts to the politically connected, and provides the factual background and suggested messaging for public advocacy.

“Stop the Office of Personnel Management from Silencing Federal Employees” (June 4, 2026). [LDAD mobilized opposition](#) to a proposed Office of Personnel Management rule that could require all federal employees to sign a nondisclosure agreement remaining in effect for five years after leaving federal service. The proposal is an unlawful infringement on free speech that serves no legitimate governmental interest and would suppress factual reporting of this administration’s actions that the public has a right to know.

“Speak Out Against the Illegal ‘Triumphal Arch’” (June 12, 2026). [LDAD provided comment materials](#) in response to a Federal Register notice, to assist the public in speaking out in opposition to the administration’s rush to build a massive structure dominating the historic vista between the Lincoln Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery, while ignoring the legal requirements that apply to a project of this nature.

“Stop USPS From Interfering with Mail-In Voting” (June 19, 2026). [LDAD mobilized comments](#) opposing a proposed United States Postal Service rule that would shift control over mail-in voting from the states to a federal agency under the President’s control and would condition ballot access on state compliance with federally imposed requirements. If implemented, the rule risks

disenfranchising millions of registered voters and would wreak havoc on the system of mail-in voting.



“Oppose Political Interference in Federal Research Funding” (July 9, 2026). [LDAD mobilized comments](#) opposing a proposed Office of Management and Budget rule under which political appointees, rather than merit-based review, would control which researchers and institutions receive federal funding for science, mathematics, and engineering research. As the briefing materials detail, the proposal violates federal law and the Constitution, including the First Amendment rights of research institutions and researchers.



“Stop the Federal Trade Commission from Undermining State AI Protections” (July 28, 2026). [LDAD mobilized comments](#) to oppose a proposed Federal Trade Commission policy statement that would effectively undermine the right of every state to regulate AI in a way that minimizes biased results in key areas.

RESOURCES AND EDUCATION

Our [Meeting the Moment](#) initiative continues to grow across the country as we expand our activities and work with State Leads to welcome and engage volunteers in helping their communities understand what is at stake and speak out in defense of democracy and the rule of law.

[How State Bars Can Defend Democracy](#)

(updated April 28, 2026). LDAD updated its detailed analysis providing lawyers with the research and rationale to support the position that existing case law does not prohibit bar associations, in particular mandatory state bars, from speaking out in defense of the rule of law, democracy, the Constitution, and free and fair elections. The analysis demonstrates that under *Keller v. State Bar of California*, mandatory bars may speak out and lobby on issues germane to regulating the legal profession and improving the quality of legal services, and that ethics investigations of lawyers who violate their oaths sit at the heart of what state bars can and should do.

Webinar: Lessons from Hungary - Dismantling the Autocratic Playbook (May 19, 2026). [LDAD presented a webinar](#) featuring Scott Cummings, the Robert Henigson Professor of Legal Ethics at UCLA School of Law, examining how autocracy took hold in Hungary and what its playbook, and the resistance to it, can teach American lawyers about defending democratic institutions here.

THE WORK AHEAD

The pattern so far in 2026 is unmistakable. The government is taking steps to remove entire categories of government lawyers and officials from accountability, to convert neutral systems of government (the mail, the tax rolls, federal grants, personnel rules, the IRS) into instruments of political control, and to silence the professionals who would object. LDAD's answer is the same as it has been since its inception in 2019: document the record, name the conduct, and seek accountability.

We will continue this work throughout the remainder of 2026 and beyond. Our "[Meeting the Moment 250](#)" essay series recently launched in The Fulcrum and running through Constitution Day in September, demonstrates the deep dedication of our volunteers to the fundamental values of our country and is emblematic of the intention we all have to restore a functioning democracy.

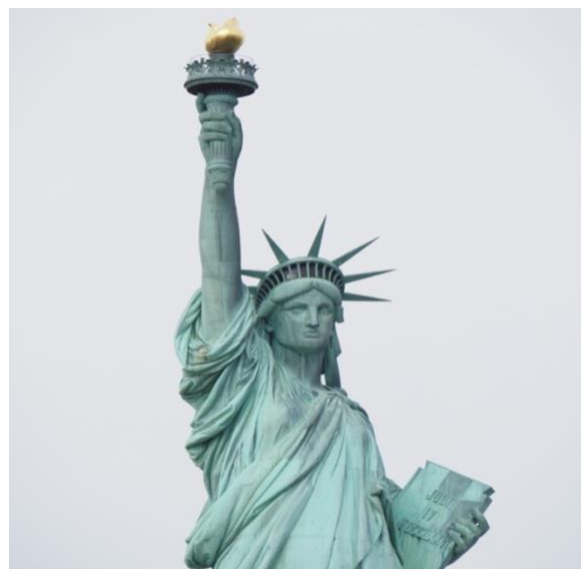
As more of you join our efforts, the lesson is increasingly clear: accountability and standing up for the rule of law makes a difference.

The challenges ahead are urgent, and the stakes could not be higher. We ask that you contribute today to help LDAD continue its crucial work. Every donation matters.

Our work does not happen on its own. It requires people who are willing to act and the resources to make that action possible. Your support enables LDAD to mobilize across the country, bringing our legal expertise to the courts and disciplinary authorities, responding quickly when the rule of law is threatened, and ensuring that those who abuse the power of public office are not met with silence.

We are deeply grateful for the opportunity to share this 2026 Report with you and hope that you will engage with our nonprofit, nonpartisan work by [donating](#), [volunteering](#), and following us on social media, including [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#), [Bluesky](#), and [Facebook](#).

We are grateful for your support.



**LAWYERS
DEFENDING
AMERICAN
DEMOCRACY**