

United States District Court
District of Rhode Island

2026 District Conference

America at 250: The Backbone of Democracy – Courts, Speech, People, and the Purse

Crown Plaza Providence-Warwick
801 Greenwich Avenue, Warwick, Rhode Island

Friday, September 25, 2026



(Cover)

2026 District Conference Committee

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Monica Teixeira de Sousa, Esq.

(Inside cover)

Individuals with disabilities are welcomed and encouraged to attend the Conference. If you require a reasonable accommodation in order to participate in this event, please contact Rana Smith at 401-752-7210 or rana_smith@rid.uscourts.gov.

Registration and Continental Breakfast

8:30 am to 9:15 am

Plaza Foyer

Opening and Welcome

9:15 am to 9:30 am

Plaza Ballroom

Morning Breakout Sessions:

9:45 am to 11:30 am

(Choose one session)

Breakout 1:**Bristol A**

2.0 CLE

“Voices Under Pressure: Censorship, Leverage, and the Future of American Expression”

Free speech issues are at the forefront of the current political landscape. These issues touch every facet of public and private life, from late night talk shows and big law firms to college campuses and public libraries. As federal, state, and local governments ramp up controls on speech, the citizenry is left wondering: What will become of American expression? This session explores the recent discourse surrounding the First Amendment, including increasing government censorship, efforts to restrict the free press, actions targeting dissent, the push and pull between antidiscrimination law and free speech, and the extent of free speech rights afforded to noncitizens. Presenters will delve into the history and spirit of the First Amendment and discuss how key high-profile battles at the center of the free speech debate will shape and redefine the First Amendment as we know it.

Panel:

Professor David D. Cole

Professor Muneer I. Ahmad

Moderator:

Professor Jared A. Goldstein

Breakout 2:**Bristol B**
2.0 Ethics CLE**“Bulwarks of the Constitution: Judicial Independence and the Rule of Law”**

Alexander Hamilton wrote in Federalist No. 78 that “[t]he complete independence of the courts of justice” is “essential” to the performance of the judicial function and “to guard the Constitution and the rights of individuals.” Judicial independence and the rule of law remain as essential today as they were when these words were written in 1788. Judges increasingly are experiencing unprecedented external pressures, including calls for impeachment following decisions; personal attacks that go far beyond disagreement with or criticism of legal reasoning or outcomes; accusations of illegitimacy, incompetence, or impropriety; and violent threats to judges, their staff, and their families. These unprecedented pressures threaten judicial independence and undermine public confidence in the judiciary. Meanwhile, there has been increasing uncertainty as to whether government actors will continue to abide by federal court orders and an alarming number of instances where such orders have been flouted. This panel discussion will examine the enduring importance of judicial independence and the rule of law, the current existential threat to both of these essential safeguards, and what we — as attorneys and citizens — can do to defend and uphold the Constitution.

Panel: Honorable Nancy Gertner, Retired
Professor Stephen I. Vladeck
Attorney Michael Attanasio

Moderator: Honorable William E. Smith, Retired

Luncheon**Olin W. Thompson, III Justice Award**

11:30 am to 12:05 pm

Plaza Ballroom**Keynote Presentation and Q & A**

12:05 pm to 1:45 pm

Plaza Ballroom

2.0 CLE

Presenter: Isabel Wilkerson

Isabel Wilkerson, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Humanities Medal, has become a leading figure in narrative nonfiction, an interpreter of the human condition, and an impassioned voice for demonstrating how history can help us understand ourselves, our country, and our current era of upheaval.

Through her writing, Wilkerson brings the invisible and the marginalized into the light and into our hearts. Through her lectures, she explores with authority the need to reconcile America’s karmic inheritance and the origins of both our divisions and our shared commonality.

Her debut work, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, won the National Book Critics Circle Award, the Heartland Prize for Nonfiction, the Anisfield-Wolf Award for Nonfiction, the Lynton History Prize from Harvard and Columbia universities, and the Stephen Ambrose Oral History Prize and was shortlisted for both the Pen-Galbraith Literary Award and the Dayton Literary Peace Prize.

She is a native of Washington, D.C., and a daughter of the Great Migration, the mass movement that she would go on to write about. She won the Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing in 1994, as Chicago Bureau Chief of *The New York Times*, making her the first African-American woman to win a Pulitzer Prize in journalism. She then devoted fifteen years and interviewed more than 1,200 people to tell the story of the six million people, among them her parents, who defected from the Jim Crow South.

As for her new book, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*, the venerable U.K. bookseller, Waterstone's calls it an "expansive, lyrical and stirring account of the unspoken system of divisions that govern our world."

Afternoon Breakout Sessions:

2:00 pm to 3:45 pm

(Choose one session)

Breakout 1:

Bristol A

2.0 CLE

"Strings Attached: When Federal Dollars Become Legal Battlegrounds"

Federal funding has long been a constitutional battleground, but recent years have intensified debates over how far the Executive Branch may go in using Congress' power of the purse to shape national policy. As federal dollars become leverage in disputes over immigration enforcement, public health mandates, education policy, and state autonomy, courts increasingly find themselves refereeing conflicts over discretion and authority. This session confronts the reality that fiscal conditions can function as powerful political tools and sometimes as proxy battles for issues unlikely to pass through ordinary legislation. Panelists will examine how courts navigate these high-stakes disputes, the limits of conditional funding, and whether the modern use of the spending power risks distorting the balance of federalism and separation of powers.

Panel:

Senator Sheldon Whitehouse
Honorable William E. Smith, Retired
Assistant Attorney General Sarah W. Rice

Moderator: Professor Monica Teixeira de Sousa

Breakout 2:**Bristol B**

2.0 CLE (1.0 DEI included)

“Enforcement without Limits? Constitutional Protections in the Immigration Context”

This panel will feature esteemed experts and practitioners who will reflect on key shifts from early immigration to our current immigration system. Using the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, and its principle of unalienable rights to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” as a framework, panelists will explore how changes have influenced our legal system and how immigration enforcement intersects with constitutional protections.

Panel: Sophia Hall, Esq.
Ondine Sniffin, Esq.
Zachary Cunha, Esq.

Moderator: Zachary Lyons

Afternoon Plenary

4:00 pm to 5:00 pm

Plaza Ballroom

1.0 CLE

“Town Hall with the US District Judges for the District of Rhode Island”

The Judges of this District will engage in conversations and discussions about court-related topics to be raised by the members of the bar in attendance.

Panel: Honorable John J. McConnell, Jr.
Honorable Mary S. McElroy
Honorable Melissa R. DuBose
Honorable Patricia A. Sullivan
Honorable Amy E. Moses

Reception

5:00 pm to 6:00 pm

Sponsored by the Federal Bar Association
Plaza Ballroom Foyer

Panel & Moderator Biographies:



Muneer Ahmad

Muneer Ahmad is Sol Goldman Clinical Professor of Law at Yale Law School. He co-directs the Worker and Immigrant Rights Advocacy Clinic (WIRAC). In WIRAC, he and his students represent individuals, groups and organizations in both litigation and non-litigation matters related to immigration, immigrants' rights, and labor, and intersections among them. He has represented immigrants in a range of labor, immigration, and trafficking cases, and for three years represented a prisoner at Guantanamo Bay; he has written on these and related topics. Previously, he taught the Transnational Development Clinic, in which students worked on projects identifying productive sites for intervention for U.S.-based lawyers in global poverty work. This included work regarding the rights of street vendors in India, the barriers faced by immigrant communities in sending remittances to their home countries, access to essential medicines, institutional accountability among international financial institutions, and advocacy on behalf of workers displaced by changes in trade policy. His scholarship examines the intersections of immigration, race, and citizenship in both legal theory and legal practice. Previously, he was Professor of Law at American University Washington College of Law. Prior to joining the faculty at American in 2001, he was a Skadden Fellow and staff attorney at the Asian Pacific American Legal Center in Los Angeles. He clerked for the Hon. William K. Sessions III in the U.S. District Court for the District of Vermont.



Michael Attanasio

With more than 30 years of first-chair trial experience, Mike represents Fortune 500 companies and executives in high-stakes commercial litigation, white collar investigations, and enforcement matters. He also conducts internal investigations and advises Boards of Directors on strategic responses to litigation and regulatory risk. Over the course of his career, Mike has represented some of the most prominent companies in the world, including Google, Qualcomm, Sony, Illumina, and UnitedHealthcare, as well as individuals under investigation for securities fraud, insider trading, and price-fixing.

A fellow in the American College of Trial Lawyers and a former federal prosecutor, Mike is ranked Band 1 by Chambers for Commercial Litigation and in 2026 he was recognized by the

Daily Journal among its Leading Commercial Litigators in California. He has been named one of the Top 250 lawyers in America by Forbes, one of the Top 100 Lawyers in California by the Daily Journal, a “Game Changer” by The Recorder, and a “White Collar MVP” by Law360.

In one of the defining moments of his career, Mike served as lead counsel for Jenner & Block in its challenge to a retaliatory Executive Order issued by the President. The Executive Order sought to revoke security clearances, forbid access to federal buildings, and restrict the firm’s work with federal contractors. In less than a week, Mike led a Cooley team that filed suit to enjoin the Executive Order. His widely praised arguments secured first a temporary restraining order and then summary judgment. The litigation against the Executive Orders targeting the legal industry was hailed for its success in defending the profession and the rule of law.

In another high-profile case, Mike was co-trial counsel for baseball legend Roger Clemens in the obstruction of Congress and perjury prosecution brought against Clemens by the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Columbia. After a nine-week trial, the jury returned not guilty verdicts on all six counts. Mike’s cross-examination of prosecution witness Andy Pettitte, a former teammate of Clemens, was called a key turning point in the trial by several observers. Throughout the trial and in his closing argument, Mike also took the lead in debunking DNA evidence that prosecutors claimed linked Clemens to the use of performance-enhancing drugs.



David D. Cole

David Cole is the Hon. George J. Mitchell Professor in Law and Public Policy at Georgetown University Law Center and former National Legal Director of the ACLU. He writes regularly for the *New York Review of Books* and is legal affairs correspondent for *The Nation*. He is the author or editor of ten books, including *No Equal Justice: Race and Class in the American Criminal Justice System*, and *Engines of Liberty: How Citizen Movements Succeed*.

David has litigated many pathbreaking cases in the Supreme Court, including *Texas v. Johnson*, which extended First Amendment protection to flag burning; *Bostock v. Clayton County*, which established that Title VII bans discrimination on the basis of transgender status and sexual orientation; and *National Rifle Association v. Vullo*, which held that government officials cannot use their regulatory authority to coerce private parties into blacklisting a disfavored political organization. He has received many awards for his civil liberties work.

**Zachary A. Cunha**

Zachary A. Cunha spent twenty years of his career in public service with the Department of Justice, most recently serving as the Presidentially-appointed, Senate-confirmed U.S. Attorney for the District of Rhode Island from 2021-2025; prior to that, he worked as an AUSA in the Brooklyn, Boston, and Rhode Island U.S. Attorney's Offices, as well as heading the Boston USAO's Affirmative Civil Enforcement practice and serving as Chief of the Civil Division in the District of Rhode Island. Before joining the Justice Department, Mr. Cunha began his career as an Assistant Corporation Counsel for the City of New York, where he represented the City and its officials in federal court litigation. He is currently a partner at Nixon Peabody in Providence and Boston, handling complex litigation, False Claims Act cases, government investigations and white-collar criminal defense matters.

**Hon. Melissa R. DuBose**

On January 3, 2025, Judge DuBose made history as the first Black District Judge for the U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island. Before her historic federal appointment, she had a distinguished career as an Associate Judge on the Rhode Island State District Court, where she handled both criminal and civil cases in Providence County.

Judge DuBose is deeply committed to both her community and the legal profession. She serves on the Board of Directors for Roger Williams University School of Law and is an active member of the Committee on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in Rhode Island Courts. In 2021, she was also appointed to the Rhode Island Foundation Board, further solidifying her impact on the state.

Prior to her judicial career, Judge DuBose served as senior legal counsel at Schneider Electric, specializing in corporate compliance, ethics, and fair trade. A lifelong Rhode Islander, she earned her undergraduate degree in Political Science from Providence College and went on to teach history for over a decade at Providence Public Schools. She later earned her Juris Doctor from Roger Williams University School of Law. Afterward, she was appointed Special Assistant Attorney General, where she worked in the criminal division.

Judge DuBose's remarkable journey reflects a lifelong commitment to justice, public service, and equity, leaving a lasting legacy in both Rhode Island's legal community and beyond.



Hon. Nancy Gertner (Ret.)

Judge Nancy Gertner is a retired federal judge, appointed to the United States District Court (D. Mass) by President Clinton in 1994. She served on the court until 2011 when she retired to join the faculty at Harvard Law School where she is now a senior lecturer of law, instructing Law and Neuroscience and Sentencing and Mass Incarceration. While she was on the bench, Judge Gertner also taught sentencing and comparative sentencing institutions at Yale Law School. Prior to 1994, Judge Gertner was a civil rights and criminal defense lawyer in and around the Greater Boston area at Silverglate, Shapiro & Gertner, during which she also taught at Boston University Law School and was a visiting professor at Harvard Law School. Judge Gertner is a graduate of Barnard College and Yale Law School where she was an editor on The Yale Law Journal, also receiving her M.A. in Political Science at Yale University.

In addition to teaching, Judge Gertner is the Managing Director of the Massachusetts General Hospital Center for Law Brain and Behavior. She is of Counsel at Fick & Marx LLP of Boston and Guttman Buschner PLLC of Washington, D.C. She was named one of “The Most Influential Lawyers of the Past 25 Years” by Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly. Judge Gertner has received numerous awards, notably being the second woman to ever win the American Bar Association’s Thurgood Marshall Award (the first was Justice Ginsburg). Judge Gertner has also won the Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award from the American Bar Association Commission on the Status of Women in the Profession, the Massachusetts Bar Association’s Hennessey Award for Judicial Excellence, and the National Association of Women Lawyers’ Arabella Babb Mansfield Award. Additionally, she was a Commissioner on President Biden’s Commission on the Supreme Court of the United States, and has written and spoken widely and prominently on various legal issues, with recent focus on the rule of law. Judge Gertner’s opinion pieces appear regularly in the Boston Globe, WBUR’s *Cognoscenti* and occasionally the New York Times and the Washington Post. She also is a regular commentator on CNN, MSNBC, and WGBH’s “Jim Braude and Margery Eagan” show. Her autobiography, *In Defense of Women: Memoirs of an Unrepentant Advocate*, was released on April 26, 2011. Her book, *The Law of Juries*, co-authored with attorney Judith Mizner, was published in 1997 and updated in 2010. She has published articles, and chapters on sentencing, discrimination, and forensic evidence, women’s rights, and the jury system. Her forthcoming book *Incomplete Sentences*, is a retrospective on her time on the bench, examining her personal experience of sentencing human beings and interviewing some of the men she sentenced.



Jared A. Goldstein

Jared Goldstein is a Professor of Law and Director of the Prisoners' Rights Clinic at Roger Williams University School of Law. After graduating from the University of Michigan Law School in 1994, Professor Goldstein clerked for the Honorable Louis Pollak of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania and then served as a Bristow Fellow in the Solicitor General's Office of the U.S. Justice Department. From 1996 to 2001, he worked in the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the Justice Department. From 2001 to 2005 worked at Shearman & Sterling, he helped represent Kuwaitis imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in a case that twice reached the Supreme Court. Since 2005, Professor Goldstein has taught constitutional law at RWU Law, where he also served as Associate Dean from 2019 to 2022. Goldstein's book, *Real Americans: National Identity, Violence, and the Constitution* was published in 2022 by University Press of Kansas. In 2023, Professor Goldstein launched the Prisoners' Rights Clinic, in which he supervises law student attorneys in civil rights cases brought by incarcerated people challenging prison abuses and mistreatment, including excessive force, denials of medical care, and deprivations of religious freedom.



Sophia Hall

Sophia Hall is the Deputy Litigation Director at Lawyers for Civil Rights (LCR), a non-profit legal organization founded at the request of President John F. Kennedy in the 1960s at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. LCR is one of the largest and oldest organizations in New England working on legal and policy issues at the intersection of racial justice, immigration, public health, and entrepreneurship. LCR provides legal services to communities of color and immigrants facing discrimination.

As an experienced litigator, Sophia handles a broad range of civil rights matters, with a particular focus on employment and police misconduct litigation. Sophia's legal work is regularly featured in media such as the *New York Times*, the *Boston Globe*, and NPR. In addition to her litigation, Sophia also spearheads Election Protection, a non-partisan voter protection initiative that mobilizes thousands of volunteers statewide to ensure equal access to the ballot box. Sophia has

been recognized as “Lawyer of the Year” by *Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly*, a “Top Lawyer” by the Boston Magazine, and as one of Boston’s Most Impactful Black Women.

Prior to joining LCR, Sophia was a Staff Attorney with the AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts, New England’s largest HIV/AIDS service organization. There, she represented low-income individuals living with HIV/AIDS on a wide range of legal issues and advised the organization on legal matters. Sophia also worked at the Boston College Law School Legal Assistance Bureau supervising law students in a variety of civil matters.

Sophia was recently appointed by Governor Maura Healey to the Council for Black Empowerment, where she advises the Commonwealth on community matters. She also serves on the Board of Directors for Community Servings, a non-profit organization that provides medically-tailored meals to low-income people living with disabilities. She is the Chair of the Boston Bar Association’s Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Section. Sophia actively mentors other women of color attorneys and law students through the Women’s Bar Association and the Boston College Law School Black Alumni Network.

Sophia is a graduate of Boston College Law School, where she served on the National Frederick Douglass Moot Court Team. She holds a bachelor’s degree from Emory University. She is also a recent graduate of Harvard Business School’s Executive Leadership Program for Women of Color. Sophia lives in Boston with her fiancé, Jemel Robinson, and their daughter, Rosaria Robinson.



Zachary Lyons is the founder and managing attorney of Lyons Legal Group, an immigration law firm in Providence, Rhode Island. The firm handles all types of U.S. immigration matters, with a current focus on employment-based visas and green cards for healthcare, charter schools, startups, and entertainment clients.

In federal court, Zach has successfully litigated habeas corpus petitions, writs of mandamus, Administrative Procedure Act (APA) claims, and district court review of naturalization denials.

Zach is a 2017 graduate of Roger Williams University School of Law. Prior to law school, he taught English in Chile. Outside of the law, Zach enjoys running, eating international food, supporting Liverpool F.C., and spending time with his wife and two young children.



Honorable John J. McConnell, Jr.

John J. McConnell, Jr., is the Chief Judge of the United State District Court for the District of Rhode Island. President Barack Obama nominated him, and the U.S. Senate confirmed the nomination in May 2011. On top of his administrative duties as Chief Judge, he hears a full docket of both civil and criminal cases. He served for six years as a member of the Committee on Codes of Conduct of the Judicial Conference of the United States. He also has served on the Planning Committee for the 2024 Conference for Chief Judges of U.S. District and Bankruptcy Courts; co-chaired the First Circuit Post-Pandemic Operations Committee; served on the First Circuit Conference Planning Committee, First Circuit Judicial Council, and First Circuit Jury Plan Committee. He currently serves on the First Circuit Workplace Conduct Committee and he is the 1st Circuit District Judge Representative on the Judicial Conference of the United States. He is a former member of the Board of Directors of the Federal Judges' Association.

Before becoming a judge, Chief Judge McConnell was a trial attorney for 25 years. He tried cases in over thirteen states, representing persons injured by asbestos and lead paint. He was also one of the States' negotiators of the \$365 billion settlement between the States and the tobacco companies. He clerked for the late Associate Justice of the R.I. Supreme Court Donald F. Shea.

Chief Judge McConnell is the past chair of the Board of Crossroads RI, the state's largest provider of services to those experiencing homeless. Formerly he served as chair of the Board of Trinity Repertory, was a member of the Board of the Nonviolence Institute, a member of the Board of Trustees of Roger Williams University, and on the board of many other community organizations.

Chief Judge McConnell, born in Providence, R.I., received his A.B. from Brown University in 1980 with a concentration in Urban Studies and his J.D. from Case Western Reserve University School of Law in 1983, where he received the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Award.



Honorable Mary S. McElroy

Mary S. McElroy is a District Judge for the United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island. She was nominated by President Donald J. Trump and confirmed on September 30, 2019. Judge McElroy clerked for the Honorable Donald F. Shea of the Supreme Court of Rhode

Island from 1992-1993 and was in private practice until 1994. She served as an assistant public defender for the Rhode Island Public Defender from 1994-2006, as an assistant federal defender with the Federal Defender for the Districts of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island from 2006-2012, and as the Rhode Island Public Defender from 2012-2019. Judge McElroy was born in Providence, Rhode Island and received her B.A. from Providence College in 1987 and her J.D. from Suffolk University Law School in 1992.



Honorable Amy E. Moses

Amy E. Moses was appointed as a United States Magistrate Judge on May 13, 2025. She earned a Bachelor of Science from the University of California, Berkeley and a Juris Doctor, with honors, from the George Washington University School of Law, where she served as the Student Director of the Jacob Burns Community Legal Clinics.

Prior to her appointment to the federal bench, Judge Moses held the positions of General Counsel at Utilidata, Inc., Vice President and Rhode Island Director of Conservation Law Foundation, and Deputy Counsel to Rhode Island Governor Gina M. Raimondo. She spent several years litigating at Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom, LLP. Judge Moses served as a law clerk for the Honorable William E. Smith and later for the Honorable John J. McConnell, Jr., both of the United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island. She began her legal career in the Rhode Island Supreme Court Law Clerk Department.



Sarah Rice

Sarah Rice is a Deputy Chief of the Civil Division in the Rhode Island Office of the Attorney General, where she heads the Public Protection Bureau, leading the Office's affirmative litigation and other civil enforcement efforts. She has represented Rhode Island as part of the team of states challenging federal actions disrupting and conditioning federal funding, including successfully arguing motions for temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction in *New York v. Trump*, the District of Rhode Island case challenging the January 2025 federal funding freeze.

Before joining the Office in 2022 after returning to her home state, Sarah served as an Assistant Attorney General in Maryland, where she litigated major matters in state and federal court, including defense of Maryland's 2010 redistricting plan.



Hon. William E. Smith (Ret.)

Judge Smith is a former judge on the United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island. Appointed in 2002, he served more than 23 years on the federal bench, including six years as chief judge, becoming the youngest jurist to hold that position in the district's history. Over the course of his tenure, Judge Smith presided over more than 130 jury and bench trials, authored more than 1,600 opinions and regularly mediated cases both on his own docket and those referred by fellow judges. He also sat by designation on the U.S. Courts of Appeals for the First and Ninth Circuits and on the U.S. District Courts for the Districts of Massachusetts, Puerto Rico and Idaho. Before his judicial appointment, Judge Smith practiced labor and employment law for 15 years at Edwards & Angell, then Rhode Island's largest law firm.

Judge Smith has demonstrated a longstanding commitment to legal education and public service. For more than 15 years, he has served as an adjunct faculty member at Roger Williams University School of Law, teaching Complex Litigation, Expert and Scientific Evidence, and Judicial Process. He also served for 12 years on the law school's board of directors, including nine years as chair, helping guide its strategic growth and institutional development. In addition, he is a senior fellow at the Watson School of International and Public Policy at Brown University, where he led a study group on courts and public policy, reflecting his continued engagement at the intersection of law, governance and public affairs. He has received numerous awards for judicial excellence and honorary degrees from Bryant University and the Roger Williams University School of Law.

Judge Smith now serves with JAMS as a mediator, arbitrator and court-appointed neutral.

**Ondine G. Sniffin**

Attorney Ondine G. Sniffin practices exclusively in the field of immigration law, with extensive experience in family-based immigration and removal defense. A graduate of Boston University School of Law, Ms. Sniffin began her career serving immigrant communities in Southeastern Massachusetts as the Legal Director of the immigration unit at a nonprofit agency in Fall River, Massachusetts. Over the course of more than eleven years in that role, she represented indigent immigrants and mentored numerous law students pursuing careers in immigration law.

In March 2007, Ms. Sniffin was among the first attorneys to respond to a large-scale workplace enforcement action conducted by hundreds of ICE agents, during which 361 undocumented immigrant workers were arrested and detained. Working alongside other immigration advocates, she represented several detainees who were later released, providing critical legal assistance during one of the region's most significant immigration enforcement operations.

With more than 28 years of experience practicing immigration law, Ms. Sniffin has dedicated her career to advocating for immigrants and their families. From 2008 through 2020, she served as an adjunct professor at Roger Williams University School of Law, where she taught courses in Refugee Law and Policy and Gender-Based Asylum Law.

Now in private practice, Ms. Sniffin represents clients before the Boston Immigration Court and local immigration offices throughout Massachusetts and Rhode Island. She is bilingual and brings both professional expertise and personal understanding to her work, having come from a family of immigrants herself. Her background continues to fuel her commitment to fighting for fair and just treatment of immigrants every day.



Honorable Patricia A. Sullivan

Patricia A. Sullivan has served as United States Magistrate Judge, U.S. District Court, District of Rhode Island since 2012. Prior to serving in this capacity, she practiced law at the firm formerly known as Edwards & Angell, LLP and Edwards Angell Palmer Dodge, LLP, Providence, Rhode Island from 1978 until 2012. She has served as the Adjunct Faculty at Roger Williams University School of Law and as the Chair, Co-Chair or Member of numerous court, community, and Bar Association Committees. She has been a Member of the Board of Trustees, Roger Williams University School of Law from 2013 to the present and has served as Treasurer since 2022. She graduated from Wellesley College, B.A. with honors, 1973; and Georgetown University Law Center, J.D., magna cum laude, 1978.



Monica Teixeira de Sousa

Monica Teixeira de Sousa is a Distinguished Research Professor of Law and Director of the Housing Policy Clinic at Roger Williams University School of Law, where she teaches courses including Property, Housing Law and Policy, Family Law, Education Law, and Race & the Foundations of American Law. Since joining RWU Law in 2022, she has been recognized as Professor of the Year (2024) and was invited to teach America's Housing Law and Policy at the Universidade de Lisboa. She is a co-author of the Aspen casebook *Race and the Foundations of American Law* (2025), which received the American Association of Law Libraries' Joseph L. Andrews Legal Literature Award.

Before joining RWU, Professor Teixeira de Sousa was a tenured professor at New England Law | Boston, where she founded and directed the First-Generation Students Program and led international human rights programming in partnership with the Irish Centre for Human Rights in Galway. She began her legal career as a Skadden Fellow at Rhode Island Legal Services, where she created a school-based legal clinic at her former elementary school serving low-income families. Her work focuses on housing, education, and systems of exclusion, and she remains active in the community through her service on the board of Project Weber/RENEW and on the Investment Committee of the Rhode Island Community Investment Cooperative.



Stephen I. Vladeck

Stephen I. Vladeck is a professor of law at the Georgetown University Law Center, and is a nationally recognized expert on the federal courts; the Supreme Court; national security law; and military justice.

Vladeck is author of the New York Times-bestselling book, “The Shadow Docket: How the Supreme Court Uses Stealth Rulings to Amass Power and Undermine the Republic,” which has won numerous awards, including the 2024 Order of the Coif Book Award. Vladeck is also a highly regarded appellate advocate, having argued before the U.S. Supreme Court and numerous lower federal civilian and military courts. He has received numerous awards for his influential and widely cited legal scholarship, his prolific popular writing, his teaching, and his service to the legal profession—including the 2024 University of Texas President’s Research Impact Award and his selection by the Order of the Coif to serve as its Distinguished Visiting Professor for 2025.

Vladeck is CNN’s Supreme Court analyst and editor and author of “One First,” a popular weekly newsletter about the Supreme Court. He is also a co-author of Aspen Publishers’ leading national security law and counterterrorism law casebooks. And he is a member of the Board of Trustees of Amherst College (from which he received his B.A. summa cum laude with Highest Distinction in History and Mathematics in 2001) and Earthjustice—the nation’s premier nonprofit public interest environmental law organization.

Vladeck graduated from Yale Law School in 2004—where he was executive editor of the Yale Law Journal and won the Harlan Fiske Stone Prize for outstanding moot court oralist and shared the Potter Stewart Prize for best moot court team performance. After law school, he clerked for the Honorable Marsha S. Berzon on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit and the Honorable Rosemary Barkett on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit. Vladeck lives in the District with his wife, Karen (Founder and Managing Partner of Risepoint Search Partners), and their daughters, Madeleine and Sydney.



Isabel Wilkerson

Isabel Wilkerson is the barrier-breaking author of the *New York Times* bestsellers *The Warmth of Other Suns* and *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*, whose courage and conviction have cemented her as one of the most important narrative nonfiction writers of our time.

A gifted storyteller, Wilkerson has become a highly sought-after speaker, captivating audiences across the country with the universal human story of migration and reinvention, as well as the unseen hierarchies that have divided us as a nation. She draws a direct link between the leaderless revolution known as the Great Migration and the movements for social justice in our day, both responses to unacknowledged and unaddressed history and inequalities in America. Wilkerson empowers audiences to be courageous citizens, lead their communities with empathy, and embrace our capacity for change with optimism and resolve.

Wilkerson's beloved book, [*The Warmth of Other Suns*](#), tells the true story of three brave souls among the six million who made the decision of their lives during the Great Migration, a watershed in American history. Wilkerson spent 15 years working on *The Warmth of Other Suns*, interviewing more than 1,200 people to reveal what she calls one of the greatest underreported stories of the 20th century.

In 2020, Wilkerson published [*Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*](#) to critical acclaim, with Dwight Garner of *The New York Times* calling it "an instant American classic" and Oprah choosing it as her summer book club pick, saying it was the most important book she had ever selected. *Caste* examines the unspoken caste system that has shaped America and shows how a hierarchy of division still defines our lives today.

Wilkerson won the Pulitzer Prize in 1994 for her narrative writing as Chicago Bureau Chief of *The New York Times*, making her the first Black woman in the history of American journalism to win a Pulitzer Prize and the first Black journalist to win for individual reporting. A graduate of Howard University, she has lectured on narrative nonfiction at the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University and has taught at Princeton, Emory, and Boston universities. She has lectured at more than 300 other colleges and universities across the United States, Europe, and Asia. Her work has garnered twelve honorary degrees, most recently from Northwestern, Colby and Smith. She has appeared on national programs such as CBS's *60 Minutes*, NPR's *Fresh Air*, NBC's *Nightly News*, MSNBC, CNN, C-SPAN, among others.

**Sheldon Whitehouse**

Sheldon Whitehouse represents Rhode Island in the United States Senate, where he serves as a senior member of the Judiciary Committee and the Ranking Member of the Judiciary Subcommittee on Federal Courts, Oversight, Agency Action, and Federal Rights. An experienced prosecutor and fierce defender of democracy, Whitehouse has championed legislation to root out special interest control of our politics and pushed to enact stronger ethics and transparency standards in the Supreme Court.

On the Judiciary Committee, the Senator authored the first significant bipartisan law to address the opioid crisis, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act. He is a leading advocate for protecting access to justice, including the Seventh Amendment right to a civil jury.

The Senator served as Rhode Island's United States Attorney and Attorney General before being elected to the United States Senate in 2006.