

## **Escalating Threats Against Judges Must Stop**

By Jeffrey M. Freedman, Esq.

It used to be unless you were military, a police officer or President it was unlikely you put yourself or your family at risk when you chose your profession. Today, federal and state judges face threats against their lives and family members' lives every day. In July 2020, Daniel Anderl, son of U.S. District Judge Esther Salas, was killed protecting his parents from a disgruntled lawyer posing as a delivery person. Anderl was 20 years old.

Since Jan 1, 2025, the U.S. Marshals Service, which protects judges and courthouses, investigated 373 threats to judges (the data doesn't define between threats to state or federal judges). More than 100 anonymous, unsolicited pizza deliveries have been made to judges' homes, indicating individuals who are unhappy with rulings know where judges' live.

Judges' personal and family lives, and mental health have been affected by threats and actual events including Anderl's death and, in 2022, the arrest of an armed man at Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh's home. The man said he planned to assassinate the justice due to the repeal of abortion rights. While presiding over Trump's civil fraud case, NY State Judge Arthur Engoron received threats from Tyler Vogel, stating he would "go after" the judge if Trump were jailed.

Supreme Court justices now have round-the-clock security at home, and Marshals are monitoring hostile online postings. Fifty individuals were charged with making online threats between 2019 and 2024, said Chief Justice John G. Roberts, Jr. Safety concerns started when Roe v. Wade was overturned, and dangers spiraled with lawsuits against Trump, and executive

orders that challenge the constitution. Trump and his supporters' social media posts and verbal attacks fuel the escalation of threats. Truth Social posts such as: "Judges are absolutely out of control, they're hurting our Country, and they know nothing about particular situations, or what they are doing," justify threatening activity for people who have had negative experiences with the courts.

Rep. Jamie Raskin (D), House Judiciary Committee, said "Judicial independence is essential to constitutional democracy, and judicial independence is in danger if judges aren't safe." The Marshals Service needs increased funds to protect judges, courthouse security, and improve measures to keep judges' home addresses from public access.

These threats speak to the decline of respect for our constitution, and for those who have dedicated their lives to be knowledgeable upholders of the laws. We must tone down rhetoric attacking judges and return to an acceptable level of public discourse. As retired Pennsylvania federal chief judge John Jones said, "Regardless of our disagreement with individual judges' decisions, it's unconscionable and intolerable to make any kinds of threats against judges."

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