



# FEDERAL CLAIMS BAR ASSOCIATION

*E-Newsletter*  
December 2025

Dear Member,

We are pleased to share with you the December 2025 edition of the Court of Federal Claims Bar Association E-Newsletter.

This issue's theme is: *Our Shared Community: Community at the Core*. We are honored to feature contributions from Chief Judge Matthew Solomson, Bar Association President Julia Collison, Judge Molly Silfen, Chief Special Master Brian Corcoran and Staffer Evan Streb. Each offers a unique perspective on community—its role in sustaining our profession, its power to strengthen our shared purpose, and the ways it continues to shape the work of the Court and the Bar Association.

In addition to these thoughtful reflections, this issue includes important updates and links to upcoming Bar Association events and opportunities for engagement. We hope you find this edition both informative and inspiring as we close out the year and look ahead to the work of 2026.

## **Letter from the Chief Judge**



My relationship with the Court of Federal Claims began long before I joined its bench. I started my legal career as a law clerk to Judge Francis M. Allegra, an experience that introduced me not only to

our Court’s unique jurisdiction but also to its deeply rooted sense of community. Since then, I have had the privilege of serving the Court from many vantage points—litigating on both sides of the “v.” and serving on the Board of Governors of the bar association and as its treasurer. In each of these capacities, I have come to appreciate just how central community is to this remarkable institution’s character.

Within chambers, the daily work of judging is shaped profoundly by those who share in it. My clerk family is, in many ways, an extension of my own. I work to maintain that community long after each clerk has moved on. Every year, I host a barbecue at my home where former and current clerks reconnect and welcome new members into the fold. We also keep an active group chat that allows us to stay in touch, celebrate milestones, and support one another through life’s ups-and-downs. My professional network is always available to them, and they in turn help me screen and recruit potential clerks. Perhaps most importantly, they support one another—sharing advice, encouragement, and new opportunities as their careers evolve. Watching them continue to invest in each other and seeing their many achievements are some of the most rewarding aspects of my position (outside of actual judicial work).

Equally important is the community of my judicial colleagues. Being a trial court judge can be isolating; we do not sit in panels, as everyone knows, and our decisions are our own. But we are fortunate to have an extraordinarily collegial bench. We frequently consult one another on procedural and substantive issues, drawing upon the rich diversity of expertise among the judges. Just by way of example, some of us bring deep experience in patent law; others in tax or administrative law; and yet others in government contracts. Our differing perspectives on a variety of matters only deepen our collective wisdom. I am profoundly grateful to have colleagues whose judgment, generosity, and candor help me avoid mistakes, refine my thinking, and continually grow as both a judge and a person.

Beyond the Court, one of my primary extracurricular commitments—and sources of personal fulfillment—is serving as Dean of the Tikvah Legal Fellowship, conducted under the aegis of the Tikvah Fund. The Tikvah Fund is a Jewish philanthropic foundation and ideas institution dedicated to educating and nurturing future intellectual, religious, and civic leaders with a grounding in Western civilization, Jewish thought, and rule-of-law principles. I have the privilege of running the Fellowship with one of my former law clerks, Tal Fortgang, now a legal-policy fellow at the Manhattan Institute. Through the Fellowship, I mentor law students, help them secure meaningful internship placements, and refer promising fellows for judicial clerkships. The fellows themselves are a constant source of inspiration to me. Their dedication to our Nation and its core values reflects a seriousness of purpose that gives me great optimism about the future of the legal profession.

The bar association also remains a community with special significance. Having served as a board member and treasurer, I have seen firsthand how the bar’s commitment to civility, mentorship, and institutional stewardship strengthens the quality of practice before the Court. Members advocate vigorously while treating one another with dignity. They maintain the Court’s traditions, welcome new practitioners, and help ensure that our shared mission endures. From time-to-time, bar association members also serve as pro bono counsel upon a case’s referral by one of our judges; I have personally seen such representation make a real difference.

These communities—professional, judicial, educational, and personal—have sustained my work in countless ways. They remind me that, even in a trial court where decisions are rendered individually, no one truly administers justice alone. Each case, each challenge, and each moment of service is supported by a network of relationships that lends perspective, wisdom, and continuity. Contributing to this community—through mentorship, collaboration, and gratitude—remains one of the great privileges of serving this Court.

Chief Judge Matthew H. Solomson  
Chief Judge of the U.S. Court of Federal Claims

## President's Message



Dear Colleagues,

This issue's theme of community could not be more fitting for the moment we find ourselves in. The Court of Federal Claims community has just weathered the longest government shutdown in modern history—a disruption that led to furloughs and required employees at both the Court and the Department of Justice to work without pay. The 36th Annual Judicial Conference, a true labor of love by Court staff, judges, and practitioners, was unfortunately cancelled.

In challenging times such as these, we rely on one another. And the message from our CFC community could not have been clearer: the work of the Court matters. Whether representing the interests of the government, advocating for citizens seeking redress, or assisting in the adjudication of claims, members of our bar showed unwavering dedication to their work and to the mission of the Court. They deserve our sincere commendation. I am especially grateful to the members of the Bar Association's Board of Governors who, even while furloughed, attended emergency meetings and helped make difficult decisions.

In light of this year's events, future Judicial Conferences will be scheduled prior to the October 1 start of the federal fiscal year. Please mark your calendars for the new date—September 24, 2026. All 2025 registrations will remain valid, and new registrations will open in July 2026.

It has been an honor to serve as the Bar Association President this year. I have learned a great deal and have had the privilege of working alongside truly exceptional colleagues. I look forward to continuing to serve the Bar Association in the years ahead.

Julia Collison  
President, Court of Federal Claims Bar Association

**Ask the Judge!**  
**Judge Molly Silfen**

1. *The Broader Legal Community:* When you reflect on the legal profession as a whole, what does it mean to you to be part of the broader legal community, and what responsibilities accompany that membership? In your view, what practices or behaviors (such as professional courtesy, shared ethics, and mutual respect) best embody the ideals toward which the legal community should strive?

ANSWER: The legal community has an obligation not only to be honest and candid in all professional interactions, but to uphold an even higher ethical standard. By being admitted to a bar, each lawyer is trusted as an officer of a court. That brings with it an independent obligation to uphold the Constitution, in all its complexity, and to support the nation as one of laws rather than individuals. I also see it as imposing an obligation on us all to resolve our differences without rancor. That is the point of a strong legal system.

2. *Court of Federal Claims Bar Association Community:* The Court of Federal Claims Bar Association represents a distinctive professional ecosystem composed of the bench, private practitioners, and government counsel. How would you describe the character of this community, and what qualities or dynamics do you believe make it unique?

ANSWER: I have been impressed with the Court of Federal Claims bar. It is a community I only really joined when I joined the bench, and I appreciate how welcoming the bar has been. That includes when counsel provides helpful background explanations in cases, as we don't all start with the same background on the spectrum of types of cases the court hears.

3. *Judiciary Community:* How does collaboration, shared challenges, and the Court's accumulated institutional memory shape the judicial community among your colleagues? In what ways have you seen these forces strengthen the work of the Court or your experience on the bench?

ANSWER: Since I joined the court, my colleagues have been exceedingly welcoming and collaborative. It has been so nice to bounce ideas off of people with a wealth of knowledge about the court and about each of its distinct areas of law. Everyone is happy to share their knowledge, and because our chambers are located so close together, it is easy to stop by each other's chambers to ask questions or just chat. Learning from others' wisdom improves the quality of all of our decisions.

4. *Active Participation Across Professional Communities:* Across the multiple professional communities you inhabit (the broader legal profession, the Court of Federal Claims Bar Association, your own chambers, and the judiciary) what does active engagement mean to you? How have you chosen to contribute to these communities throughout your career?

ANSWER: I appreciate in-person interactions, so I often hold hearings in person. I'll even hold status conferences in person, if counsel for all parties are local, so we can have more opportunities to meet in person. I find that those meetings help the parties better understand each other's positions, and the in-person meetings clear up miscommunications much more quickly than exchanging emails or meeting by videoconference. Likewise, in chambers, I appreciate in-person interactions with colleagues and clerks. It allows us to benefit from each other's insights more than just exchanging drafts or questions by email or phone.

5. *Advice for Newer Members of the Bar:* What guidance would you offer to newer members of the bar who are seeking to build their professional community (within the Court of Federal Claims Bar Association specifically, and within the legal community more broadly)?

ANSWER: It is always a good idea to get involved in bar association work, pro bono work, or something else outside of your day-to-day litigation matters. Don't stretch yourself thin, and choose wisely. It may help to ask a mentor about what organizations are good to work with. But once you choose something to get involved in, make sure you do it fully. Don't just sign up to be on a membership list for a bar association. Instead, get involved in a committee and volunteer to take on a project or do something substantive for that committee. And, of course, follow through when you agree to take on that project. Meeting people through that work will help you in unexpected ways as your career progresses.

Also, keep in touch with people as you move along in your career. I'm still in touch with mentors, friends, and former colleagues whom I met long ago, from law school and from multiple workplaces. They remain a terrific group of friends and confidants.

**\*Quick Answer Round\***

1. Grammar: Oxford comma or no Oxford comma?

ANSWER: Yes, Oxford comma.

2. Scheduling: digital calendar or manual calendar?

ANSWER: Digital. I have to be able to have a shared calendar with my clerks that we can all look at. I don't know how I (or anyone) survived before shared calendars.

3. While working: background noise (music/podcast) or silence?

ANSWER: Definitely silence, although I enjoy the occasional interruption from clerks or colleagues to break up the day.

4. Lunch: bring or buy?

ANSWER: Mostly bring.

5. Music: best concert you have attended?

ANSWER: Ooh, that's a tough one. My first concert was the Paul Simon Graceland tour, and I was very young. Mostly I'm impressed with my mom for bringing two small kids to the concert, especially because at the last minute my dad couldn't go with us.

## Ask the Special Master!

**Chief Special Master Brian Corcoran**

1. *The Broader Legal Community:* When you reflect on the legal profession as a whole, what does it mean to you to be part of the broader legal community, and what responsibilities accompany that membership? In your view, what practices or behaviors (such as professional courtesy, shared ethics, and mutual respect) best embody the ideals toward which the legal community should strive?

ANSWER: I'll focus on the community of trial lawyers, from which I came and with which I interact on a daily basis as special master. Litigators are often told they are "officers of the court" – this means that we all have responsibilities to the adjudicative process, independent of our duty to act zealously for clients. This goes double in the Vaccine Program, where litigants encounter each other, and the special masters, over and over again. It does not take much to ruin one's reputation if an attorney forgets their broader responsibilities to be ethical and professional.

To function best within any legal community, attorneys must jealously protect their professional reputations by striving for fairness, reasonableness, and civility – toward their opponents and the neutrals/judges with whom they interact. Even though attorneys understandably hope to prevail in their cases, they should not engage in reckless or aggressive behavior that will come back to haunt them later, even if it appears certain conduct will have short-run utility. When in doubt, practice Zen mindfulness – take a breath instead of blowing your top or pulling a fast one.

2. *Court of Federal Claims Bar Association Community:* The Court of Federal Claims Bar Association represents a distinctive professional ecosystem composed of the bench, private practitioners, and government counsel. How would you describe the character of this community, and what qualities or dynamics do you believe make it unique?

ANSWER: Our Court sees itself, accurately, as a special U.S. tribunal given its unique mission – a forum intended solely for claims against the sovereign. Perhaps in part due to the need for a specific kind of expertise to practice in such a forum, and perhaps also because our bar is somewhat small, its members have long prized their professionalism and courtesy – recognizing the fact that we need to "play well with others," given how often we encounter each other professionally. Most of the time, our interlocking system of lawyers, judges, and special masters (for the subset of the bar that practices in the Vaccine Program) functions effectively, and in a manner that in my experience is not common to every practice in the U.S., federal or state.

3. *Special Master Community:* How does collaboration, shared challenges, and the Court's accumulated institutional memory shape the special master community among your colleagues? In what ways have you seen these forces strengthen the work of the Court or your experience on the bench?

ANSWER: The special masters do not always agree substantively on case outcomes or the medical theories we confront, but we strive for collegiality in order to make greater consistency in determinations possible. Also – and although our own cases are not literal controlling “precedent” that mandate how we are to rule in our own decisions – we take into account how certain claims have been treated historically, balancing prior determinations against developments in medical science that may support re-evaluation of a rejected, or accepted, theory. In the course of this process, we gain respect for each other, invariably helping us to improve the quality and reliability of our decisions, which benefits petitioners and the attorneys who practice before us. And the adversity of a heavy docket also brings us together, helping us to look for ways to live up to the Program’s goal of expeditious justice.

4. *Active Participation Across Professional Communities:* Across the multiple professional communities you inhabit (the broader legal profession, the Court of Federal Claims Bar Association, your own chambers, and with other special masters) what does active engagement mean to you? How have you chosen to contribute to these communities throughout your career?

ANSWER: Engagement is not the same thing for a judicial neutral as it is for a practicing attorney. A special master’s existence can be monastic in nature, with long hours spent alone in chambers reading pleadings and records or writing decisions. This invariably takes us out of “circulation” with the legal community, narrowing our world to one populated only by our clerks and colleagues, with engagement limited to popping into someone else’s office to ask a question. Outside of trials or status conferences, engagement for us sometimes means those times we are asked to make public statements about our work – as here.

But for those lawyers who actually inhabit the “real world,” there are many ways to engage with the broader community of lawyers, and I always found in my career that efforts in this regard paid great dividends. Whether it is doing pro bono work with an organization whose mission you support, serving on legal aid boards, or just running in a “lawyers have heart” race, any connections you can make outside your immediate legal practice are well worth pursuing.

5. *Advice for Newer Members of the Bar:* What guidance would you offer to newer members of the bar who are seeking to build their professional community (within the Court of Federal Claims Bar Association specifically, and within the legal community more broadly)?

ANSWER: Our bar goes out of its way to educate counsel about best practices, legal trends, etc., so it is wise for attorneys new to the Court of Federal Claims to “plug into” the CFC Bar Association and take advantage of its many informative offerings. Seek advice, come to events, and get to know the practitioners, even in areas having nothing to do with your own. Despite the focus of their work, Vaccine Program lawyers end up learning a lot about the CFC, and often become leaders among the attorneys practicing in our Court. These same kinds of approaches matter elsewhere as well in the larger world of law. Getting involved, helping with the greater legal community, and just showing interest in it is an important to professional engagement and personal development.

**\*Quick Answer Round\***

1. Grammar: Oxford comma or no Oxford comma?

ANSWER: Definitely include the Oxford comma; be formal in punctuation but not in expression of ideas or utilization of jargon-y words.

2. Scheduling: digital calendar or manual calendar?

ANSWER: I use both a paper calendar and an electronic one that law clerks and staff can access.

3. While working: background noise (music/podcast) or silence?

ANSWER: I listen to music while working only when no one is around – I don’t want my clerks to discover my eclectic musical tastes, which run from John Coltrane and Willie Nelson to Oasis and Led Zeppelin (although dang! I’ve inadvertently revealed my secret to the Bar now).

4. Lunch: bring or buy?

ANSWER: Always bring; I spent too many years in private practice worrying about billable hours to waste time leaving the office to pick up lunch.

5. Music: best concert you have attended?

ANSWER: I saw the legendary Replacements in the summer of 1987 in NYC – lots of toilet paper thrown, erratic performances, and all-around rock and roll goodness.

## Ask the Staffer!

**Evan Streb**

1. Can you describe your role at the U.S. Court of Federal Claims and what a typical day looks like for you? In your role, what do you feel you contribute to the Court community, and what part of that contribution are you most proud of?

ANSWER: As a Programmer/Analyst, my job is to write and maintain computer programs like CM/ECF and the court's internal and external websites to make sure they function with the latest updates installed. I make sure the websites are all up-to-date with the latest possible information. The importance of the court's external website is significant: it is not just a place for users to find the information they need, it is also the digital face of the organization, and I am proud to handle that responsibility. I also provide customer support for court users as well.

2. What does being part of the Court of Federal Claims community mean to you, and how have you seen that community show up in your day-to-day work?

ANSWER: I've only been with the Court of Federal Claims for a little over a year. Before that, I spent 18 years at the Ohio Northern Bankruptcy Court. The staff has been a great help in my transition to this role in a new court, and they're always willing to help out when I need assistance. This assistance gets passed on to the end user, so that when I provide a solution, the content comes from not just me, but it can be two or three or more of us.

3. You interact with many parts of the Court, including judges, chambers staff, attorneys, and other administrative teams. What stands out to you about how these groups work together?

ANSWER: From what I've seen as a full-time remote worker, there is a camaraderie and respect among all the different groups and teams. The type of relationship that makes working here easy!

4. How would you describe the sense of community within your own office or department? What helps create a positive and collaborative environment?

ANSWER: We have a Teams thread where each member of the group contributes issues or solutions that they are encountering throughout the day. We also conduct team meetings every month or so that are more involved. At these meetings we discuss long-term projects and their current statuses. It is essential to keep team members communicating as much as possible to encourage an exchange of ideas. If I'm working on something and someone else has a better way of fixing the issue, I want to know about it, and I find open communication is better than written words.

5. What guidance would you give someone who is just joining the Court to help them feel connected and become a part of the community?

ANSWER: Always answer the phone with a smile. The other person can hear it in your voice.

**\*Quick Answer Round\***

1. Grammar: Oxford comma or no Oxford comma?

ANSWER: Absolutely you need the Oxford comma. There are tons of examples out there where not using the Oxford would result in confusion, but there are no examples where using the Oxford would detract from the meaning of the sentence.

2. Scheduling: digital calendar or manual calendar?

ANSWER: Gotta go digital. Keep it all in the iPhone so I always have it when I need it. And it's much easier to share with other people who need that information.

3. While working: background noise (music/podcast) or silence?

ANSWER: Music all the time, every time.

4. Lunch: bring or buy?

ANSWER: My job is so awesome I get to work from home and make my own lunch! On nice days I'll venture out and grab something, though.

5. Music: best concert you have attended?

ANSWER: Slowdive at Mahall's bowling alley in Lakewood during their 2023 reunion tour. Shoulder-to-shoulder and way too hot, but it was an absolutely glorious ocean of swirling guitar noise that I'll never forget.

## Help Celebrate Former Chief Judge Kaplan

The Bar Association would greatly appreciate your support in its efforts to commission a portrait of former Chief Judge Kaplan. As is its custom, and now that Judge Kaplan's time as Chief Judge has ended, the Bar Association is working with Judge Kaplan and the Court to commission a painting of Judge Kaplan. Like with the portraits of other past chief judges, the portrait will hang in the courthouse in honor of Judge Kaplan's service to the court as chief. The process is currently underway, and we need your help. Please consider donating to the Bar Association's portrait fund at: [https://donate.stripe.com/8wM3fc7dKfeuf6wfYY?utm\\_campaign=kaplan](https://donate.stripe.com/8wM3fc7dKfeuf6wfYY?utm_campaign=kaplan).

A donation in any amount will be much appreciated and help us in honoring Judge Kaplan. Because the Bar Association is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, contributions to the portrait fund may be tax-deductible. We thank you in advance for your support.

## Upcoming Events

February 3, 2026 – Educational Program  
Patent Infringement Litigation Under 28 U.S.C. § 1498(a) and CFC Patent Rules Review  
Information [here](#)

March 2025 – Education Program  
Bid Protest 101  
Information [here](#)

## Carole Bailey Scholarship

Congratulations to April Stoddard, winner of the 2024 Carole Bailey Scholarship. April is a 1L at Western New England University School of Law, and alumna of Smith College. She has committed her life to public service as a Social Worker, and wrote a compelling essay about her career and desire to continue serving vulnerable populations as a lawyer.

Applications for the 2025 Carole Bailey Scholarship closed on September 25, 2025. A winner will be selected soon from more than eighty qualified applicants.  
Information [here](#)

## **Seeking Volunteer Contributors for 2027 Deskbook For Practitioners (7<sup>th</sup> Edition)**

Every decade, the Court of Federal Claims Bar Association publishes an updated edition of the *Deskbook for Practitioners*, a reference book for the Court's practitioners. The sixth edition was published in 2017, with publication of the seventh edition scheduled for early 2027. The *Deskbook* is the product of collaboration among Government and private sector attorneys who volunteer to update the *Deskbook*. The Bar Association provides a complimentary hard copy of the *Deskbook* to each of its members upon request.

Work on the updated *Deskbook* will begin in early 2026, and the Bar Association is looking for additional Government and private sector contributors for certain of the book's chapters. The Bar Association would welcome contributions from attorneys who could help to update chapters addressing the following topics, among others: Military Pay Claims, Civilian Pay Claims, Indian Claims, Congressional Reference Cases, and Attorney Fees. If you are willing to contribute, please contact outgoing Board of Governors member Jason Bergmann ([jason.bergmann@usdoj.gov](mailto:jason.bergmann@usdoj.gov)).

## **Judicial Conference**

The 2025 Judicial Conference has officially been rescheduled for September 24, 2026. All 2025 registrations will remain valid, and new registrations will open in July 2026. Information [here](#)

## **Membership**

Need to join or renew your membership? Click [here](#).

## **Important Announcements from the Court**

Please visit the home page of the Court's [website](#) for important announcements.