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**action &
impact.**

The Ascend Justice Newsletter • February 2026



At Ascend Justice, we are working toward strong communities where people have the power to navigate fair systems and overcome violence. We've given a lot of thought to what we'll need in order to be successful: relentless advocacy, transformed systems, and strength in numbers (that's where you come in!). But there's a fundamental component of that vision that we've never had to discuss until now – the rule of law. While never perfect, the equal application of the rule of law has been the cornerstone of progress and justice in our country, but it's clear that we can no longer take that for granted.

Under the guise of immigration enforcement, federal agents in Chicago, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, and other places have routinely engaged in clear violations of the Constitution: forcibly entering homes without a judicial warrant, arresting protesters and journalists who report on protests, and literally killing American citizens who fail to comply with their arbitrary (and often indecipherable) demands. That they have done so with impunity and without consequences is the very definition of the breakdown of the rule of law.

We cannot allow this to become the norm. We cannot let ourselves get used to this.

If we claim to believe in the rule of law, it surely follows that we cannot carve out a class of unprotected people who can be locked away indefinitely without access to lawyers or fair trials – and we certainly can't entitle the government to make that determination based on nothing more than a person's ethnicity, appearance, or language. You don't need to be a student of history to know that governmental abuses like these are rarely (never?) limited to the original target.

Now is the time to act. Protecting our fragile democracy is our responsibility.

The erosion of the rule of law undermines trust in a fair system, driving survivors—especially immigrants – further from safety. Ascend Justice works every day to help people in abusive personal relationships, and now our work includes addressing the legitimate fears our clients are experiencing. We have organized food and supply drives for people afraid to leave their homes and legal clinics for those most at risk of detention and separation from their children. We do this in collaboration, working with local neighborhood organizations, rapid response teams, and mutual aid funds that share our vision: strong communities, fair systems, overcoming violence. Everywhere you look, there are ways to help.

If you want to get more involved and don't know where to start, please reach out to our Communications Manager, [Meggan Taylor Trevey](#).



Looking Back

We did some incredible things together last year! We have a lot to show for our hard work and a lot of gratitude for the clients, funders, sponsors, and volunteers who helped us get here. We could not do this work without you all.

Over the last fiscal year, we grew our staff at a healthy pace, continued diversifying our funding streams, gained new supporters and sponsors, held unforgettable events, created real change with our advocacy, and helped more clients than ever before!

[Take a look at our 2025 Annual Review](#)—hot off the presses—and look back at all the things we accomplished together.

Join Our Board of Directors

We are currently seeking to fill a limited number of openings on our Board of Directors. If you are interested in learning about our mission, practice areas, and survivor needs; if you want to serve as an ambassador for Ascend Justice in the community; and if you are passionate about identifying and securing the financial resources our organization needs to keep fighting for survivors, then get on board!

Contact our Executive Director, [Margaret Duval](#), for application details and board criteria and responsibilities. Applications are due by March 27.



Survivors and people with lived experience are encouraged to apply.



Our Amazing YPB

Earlier this month, our Young Professionals Board (YPB) hosted their annual Friendraiser! We gathered at Hubbard Inn again this year for an evening of good food, good drinks, and good people, all with the goal of adding new members to our already impressive YPB.

[Applications are still open](#) if you are under 40 and want to join other young professionals in board service at Ascend Justice. Just be sure to apply soon — our application period ends February 27!

Volunteer with Us

If you are an attorney in the Chicago region, [we have lots of volunteer opportunities available!](#) Come work in our Emergency Orders of Protection clinic, where you will help clients prepare and submit their petitions. Join our regular incarcerated litigants calls and help imprisoned women get simple divorces. Take on a family defense case and help wrongly accused parents and caregivers. Or help our incarcerated clients with their clemency and resentencing hearings. We welcome individual volunteers and teams of attorneys from law firms.

If you are a student, [check out our internship programs!](#) Pick your primary focus (client support/social work, family defense, family law, immigration, incarcerated survivors, or orders of protection) and work directly with clients, learning both the practice of law and trauma-informed client service.

Questions about volunteering at Ascend Justice?
Email volunteerservices@ascendjustice.org!



Teaching Other Lawyers About Resentencing

Earlier this month, our incarcerated survivors team presented to a group of about 50 lawyers (generously hosted at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP) on the Illinois Gender-Based Violence Resentencing Act.

The training first covered some background information on the criminalization of survivors,



detailing how people who are being abused can be coerced into committing crimes or helping others commit crimes, and can get sentenced without the abuse being taken into account. We then gave an overview of the new Illinois gender-based violence resentencing law that is being used to reduce sentences in cases where domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence played a role in their conviction. We also had three currently incarcerated clients talk about their experiences live during the presentation.

The training was incredibly well received, and by the end, many attendees expressed that they were eager to take on pro bono resentencing cases!



We're Hiring: Staff Attorney, Family Law

Are you an attorney who wants to make a difference? We are seeking a staff attorney to join our family law team!

You will work with compassionate colleagues in a supportive, collaborative environment, representing clients who have experienced gender-based violence in Domestic Relations matters.

Interested? [Apply today!](#)



Save the Date: 2026 Celebration of Courage

It's only February, but we already can't wait to see you all at this year's Celebration of Courage! Mark your calendars and join us:

Thursday, June 11
Chicago Athletic Association
White City Ballroom



Want to sponsor this event? Check out our 2026 [sponsorship package!](#)

CELEBRATION OF COURAGE



There are so many ways to support us!

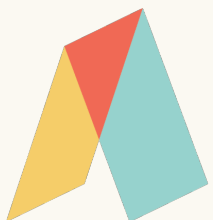
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