

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

## As DOJ employees fear what comes next, alums form group to help

BY ANNA STOLLEY PERSKY ([HTTPS://WWW.ABAJOURNAL.COM/AUTHORS/64811/](https://www.abajournal.com/authors/64811/))

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*A career federal litigator who left the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division after President Donald Trump's inauguration in January founded the Justice Connection, an organization that supports the department's current and former employees. (Image from Shutterstock)*

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Since President Donald Trump took office, his administration has started reshaping the U.S. Justice Department, including firing career lawyers who investigated him and demoting others who worked on cases relating to the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol. In addition, the administration pushed

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federal employees back into the office, vowed to continue downsizing the government and sent the message that employees who aren't sufficiently loyal should find other jobs.

The White House also fired many federal employees on probationary status; however, more than 24,000 workers who were fired are now being rehired following court orders.

Stacey Young, a career federal litigator who left the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division after Trump's inauguration, in January founded the Justice Connection, an organization that supports the department's current and former employees. The goal is to have an "army of alumni from the largest law firm in the world" prepared to help DOJ employees through the complex federal employment appeals process when they are fired, demoted or face other related issues.

"There are very few lawyers who work in this field, and they are already overwhelmed. Meanwhile, we have a huge reserve of very smart lawyers who we just need to train in this area," Young adds.

Also, the plan is for alumni to represent DOJ employees facing civil lawsuits and congressional or criminal investigations, Young says. Many of the lawyers may provide their services for free, according to her.

The Justice Department did not respond to requests for comment. The agency includes 94 U.S. attorneys' offices, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Prisons and the Drug Enforcement Administration, among others.

### The Justice Connection

(<https://www.thejusticeconnection.org>) is also connecting DOJ employees with financial planners and mental health professionals. Employees have expressed concern to Young and volunteers about the stability of their jobs and their physical security, such as the possibility of their being doxed or otherwise attacked.

Alumni are also helping current employees when they face issues related to whistleblowing, providing information to the media and what to do when approached with a task the employee believes may be illegal, unethical, unprofessional or against DOJ policy, says Young.

"The problems each Justice Department employee could face will be different depending on where they work [in the agency], but who understands the Justice Department better than DOJ alumni?" she says.

In March, the Justice Connection co-hosted a Zoom job search event to learn about legal roles available in state and local governments.



*Stacey Young says the goal of the Justice Connection is to have an "army of alumni from the largest law firm in the world" prepared to help Department of Justice employees through the complex federal employment appeals process when they are fired, demoted or face other related issues. (Photo by Eric Kayne)*

The group “is a signal of safe harbor. It’s a way of telling Justice Department employees that we recognize how important the work they do is and that we will help them,” says Jennifer Ricketts, a member of the Justice Connection Advisory Committee and a former director of the agency’s Federal Programs Branch.

## **‘Byzantine’**

In general, federal employees have job protections through laws like the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 and must be fired for cause. The process involves multiple steps, including notice and the right to appeal.

Employees who want to challenge being fired can go through a “byzantine” federal employment appeals process, often ending up at the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, a quasi-judicial agency in the executive branch, according to Ricketts.

“There are numerous protections for career civil servants and those laws continue to be in effect no matter the messaging or efforts of this administration. We just need to get the information to them,” says Jocelyn Samuels, another Justice Connection Advisory Committee member. Previously, she served as a commissioner for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and was acting assistant attorney general for the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division.

## **Dismantle civil service**

There is also ongoing work with alumni from other federal agencies as they set up similar efforts, according to Young, who has experience creating an organization from scratch. In 2016 she founded and served as president of the Justice Department’s Gender Equality Network, which advocated for a “safe, healthy and fairer” workplace environment within the DOJ and other agencies.

Young says that after Trump won the 2024 election, she realized that Justice Department career employees, along with other federal employees, would face unprecedented challenges. To start efforts that would help DOJ employees, Young thought she needed to be working outside the agency.

The Government Accountability Project, a nonpartisan organization that supports and defends government whistleblowers, agreed to serve as a sponsor for the newly created Justice Connection.

Young originally hoped to raise \$1 million dollars to help maintain a small staff and fund support services for DOJ employees. Now the group hopes to raise more than that, she says.

Before the inauguration, Young wrote in a New York Times opinion piece that federal employees were worried about their safety and financial security under the Trump administration.

“And if you value the civil service, don’t just tell us; tell your friends, neighbors, co-workers and family members too—especially whenever the pernicious ‘deep state’ narrative rears its ugly head,” the Jan. 12 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/12/opinion/administrative-deep-state-trump.html>) piece states.

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