

‘Hands Off Our Courts’: California Attorneys Rally Against Trump Administration



Retired Judge Ladoris Hazzard Cordell of the Santa Clara County Superior Court administers the attorney's oath at the Law Day of Action rally in San Francisco, on Thursday, May 1, 2025. Photo: Alaina Lancaster/ALM

Attorneys gathered in cities across California to support the National Law Day of Action. In San Francisco, the crowd chanted “hands off our courts” and “lawyers united must not be divided” as cowbells and drums rang out during a downtown rally.

As part of the Law Day of Action rallying lawyers across the country, attorneys gathered in several California cities on Thursday to reaffirm their commitment to uphold the Constitution and to demand that the Trump administration respect the rule of law.

As helicopters roared overhead, dozens of lawyers gathered in downtown Los Angeles holding signs that read "We love our judges," "Stop disappearing people now!" and "Everyone is entitled to due process," among other slogans. Los Angeles County Bar Association President Sarvenaz Bahar

denounced the "unprecedented threats" against the justice system, pointing to "the independence of the judiciary, the independence of the legal profession or our entire system of checks and balances."

"I meet this moment in history with a deep understanding of what is at stake and an unshakable resolve that if we care about our democracy, silence is not an option," Bahar said.

In San Francisco, City Attorney David Chiu called on a crowd of lawyers filling up the plaza outside Phillip Burton Federal Building to wield their legal "light sabers" against the Trump administration.

Chiu said he was there to recruit them to "represent individuals and organizations who are being targeted, to write amicus briefs and to challenge unconstitutional federal rulemaking, to join my office and other public law offices in litigating lawsuits against the Death Star."

Other rallies in California included gatherings in Oakland, Santa Clara and San Diego. In Sacramento, Chief Judge Troy Nunley of California's Eastern District oversaw a brief ceremony in federal courthouse, where several dozen lawyers reaffirmed their oath of office. Saying he didn't "want to get too political," Nunley noted the country is "dealing with a lot of stress points" right now.

The chief judge, who was appointed by President Obama in 2012, quoted from a [speech](#) President Dwight Eisenhower gave on the first Law Day in 1958: "Freedom under law is like the air we breathe. People take it for granted and are unaware of it — until they are deprived of it. ... The rule of law does more than ensure freedom from high-handed action by rulers. It ensures justice between man and man, however humble the one and however powerful the other."



Rudolph Delson, an employment attorney in Sacramento, in front of the federal courthouse in Sacramento, during National Law Day, on Thursday, May 1, 2025. Photo: Cheryl Miller/ALM

Outside the Sacramento courthouse, employment attorney Rudolph Delson staged a one-man protest near the street, holding a sign made by his 12-year-old daughter that read "Defend the Rule of Law" in large letters colored in red, white and blue on one side, and "This machine sues fascists" on the other.

Delson was alone, save for a couple who stopped by for a few minutes before leaving for a May Day rally elsewhere in the city. The occasional passing car honked.

"I'm scared of what is happening in America," Delson said. "And I'm worried we're going to lose this democracy and become an autocratic country."

After graduating from New York University School of Law, Delson said he landed his first job as a lawyer with Simpson, Thacher & Bartlett, where he did pro bono work for groups such as the Natural Resources Defense Council. Recently, the firm [announced](#) a deal with the Trump administration to provide \$125 million in free legal work suitable to the president to head off the threat of investigations and executive orders.

"It's so distressing to me that people who taught me to be a lawyer did that," Delson said.

The oath ceremony taking place 16 floors up in the courthouse was the "wrong gesture" on Law Day, he said.

"We don't need to tell each other that we're going to follow the rules. We need to tell the administration that we're going to make them follow the rules."

In San Francisco, scores of attorneys and supporters chanted "hands off our courts" and "lawyers united must not be divided" as cowbells and drums rang out in the plaza. Protesters raised signs that read "No Retaliation for Representation," and "Fearless Lawyers = Fair Trials," and some attendees wore shirts that read "Stand With Keker Van Nest & Peters."

Kelly Dermody, managing partner of the San Francisco office of Lieff, Cabraser, Heimann & Bernstein, praised the law firms litigating against the Trump administration, including Perkins Coie, Susman Godfrey, Covington & Burling, Jenner & Block and Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr.

Dermody also praised Keker Van Nest & Peters for being among the first firms to issue "an unambiguous public statement of support" against the firms targeted by the executive orders. She also praised Munger, Tolles & Olson for organizing nearly 900 law firms who signed on one or both of the amicus briefs on the Perkins and Susman cases. Dermody said she was proud of her fellow plaintiffs attorneys for standing up for their colleagues across the aisle.

"Justice has only one side, my friends," Dermody said.

Retired Judge Ladoris Hazzard Cordell of the Santa Clara County Superior Court re-administered the attorney's oath to the crowd, as they raised their right hands. Cordell said the attorney's oath is not just a ritual and not a meaningless gesture.

"The oath is a reminder of a lawyer's core ethical duties, and it is a promise to abide by those duties," she said. "The solemnity of reciting the oath before a judge, before one's peers, before one's community, and, here, before the world underscores your commitment to support the Constitution, your commitment to the rule of law, and your commitment to the integrity of an independent judiciary that today is facing increasing political and personal attacks."

The judge quoted Charles Hamilton Houston, the first general counsel of the NAACP, who said "a lawyer's either a social engineer or a parasite on society."

Cordell said every lawyer and every judge—no matter Big Law or solo practitioner—should "always use your legal talents to make this world a better place. By reaffirming your oath, you're re-committing to do just that."

After the rally, the crowd marched toward San Francisco City Hall.



(l-r) Los Angeles County Bar Association President Sarvenaz Bahar, Presiding Judge Sergio C. Tapia II of the Superior Court of Los Angeles County, and Laura Brill, partner at Kendall Brill & Kelly, lead a crowd in reciting the attorney's oath at a National Law Day of Action rally outside the Central District courthouse in downtown Los Angeles, on Thursday, May 1, 2025. Photo: Kat Black/ALM

In Los Angeles, Superior Court Presiding Judge Sergio C. Tapia II led the crowd in collectively reciting the attorney's oath. He addressed the crowd passionately, with his hand raised in a fist, and praised the diversity of the lawyers in attendance. "I look at all of these beautiful faces, different shapes and colors — that is our democracy, that beautiful tapestry," he said, to cheers and thunderous applause.

As far as cultivating trust in the judiciary, however, there is more work to do, he said. A poll has shown only 64% of respondents have confidence in the Los Angeles Superior Court.

"We cannot be satisfied with 64%," he said. "A democracy where only 64% of the population respects and has confidence in our system of justice is not living up to the promise of a true democracy," he said.

Speaking in an interview, Bahar recalled her childhood in Iran before immigrating to the U.S. at age 13, saying she "had a front row seat to see how it can be when you live in a country where there is no independent judiciary process."

"We should not be bending the knee to requests from the executive branch to limit ourselves on the clients we take and the issues that we advocate," she said. "It is essential for the rule of law in this country that there be an independent legal profession, just as it is critical that we have an independent judiciary."

As lawyers, she said, "we need to have the courage of our convictions and not let ourselves be paralyzed by fear."

Cheryl Niro, a consultant and national organizer of the Law Day of Action rallies, said in a phone interview from Chicago that she was inspired to launch the event after having "literally hundreds of conversations" with lawyers across the country asking, "What can we do?"

"People are being told to not trust judges and to not trust courts, and to disregard those norms and those traditions of equity and fairness that were baked into the system," she said. "And that's actually what

made us realize that our powerful statement would be reaffirming our commitment.”

Editor's Note: This story was updated to correct photo captions: From Sacramento, the image is of employment attorney Rudolph Delson; from Los Angeles, the woman on the right is Laura Brill, partner at Kendall Brill & Kelly, not Judge Dolly M. Gee.