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Read the full amicus brief [here](#).

**Civil Rights Groups Submit Amicus Brief in Support of Race-neutral Admissions Policy at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology**

[Asian Americans Advancing Justice – AAJC](#) (Advancing Justice – AAJC), the [Legal Defense Fund](#) (LDF), and [LatinoJustice PRLDEF](#), together with law firm Arnold & Porter, submitted an [amicus brief](#) urging the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit to reverse the order by U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia and protect admission policies that remove barriers to educational opportunities for *all* students at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology (TJ).

In March, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit stayed the District Court’s order enjoining TJ’s race-neutral admissions process in *Coalition for TJ v. Fairfax County School Board*, allowing thousands of applicants this fall to continue to receive a fairer chance to compete for admissions at TJ. The United States Supreme Court also declined to reverse the Fourth Circuit’s stay.

Advancing Justice – AAJC, LDF, and LatinoJustice PRLDEF filed this amicus brief on behalf of their clients the Virginia State Conference of the NAACP, TJ Alumni for Racial Justice, CASA Virginia, Hispanic Federation, Asian American Youth Leadership Empowerment and Development, and the Hamkae Center to affirm their support for race-neutral policies that increase diversity, provide fairer access to education, and are in line with the Equal Protection Clause.

“After decades of under-identifying Black, Latino, English Language Learner and low-income students, including under-served Asian American students who have the aptitude to excel at TJ, the school board rightfully implemented changes to remove barriers to fair educational opportunities,” said **Eri Andriola, Litigation Staff Attorney, Asian Americans Advancing Justice – AAJC**. “No student should be denied an equal chance to a quality education, and we will continue to push back against attempts to dismantle ongoing efforts to level the playing field and provide opportunities for hardworking students of color.”

“School boards should be able to remove biased admissions criteria that disadvantage Black, Latino, Asian, low-income, and English Language Learner students without having

to worry about being sued,” said **LDF Senior Counsel Michaele Turnage Young**. “By removing biased admissions criteria, TJ’s revised admissions process helped equalize opportunity for all students, including low-income Asian American students – enrollment for whom increased from one admittee in 2020 to 51 the following year. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit should reverse the District Court’s erroneous decision, which if not reversed, would deter schools across the country from complying with our Constitution and anti-discrimination laws.”

“As our amici brief points out, the district court got it wrong when it essentially ruled that rectifying a long history of under-identifying Black and Latino students for admission to TJ is a constitutional wrong,” said **Francisca Fajana, Director of Racial Justice Strategy at LatinoJustice PRLDEF**. “We ask the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals to reverse the district court’s erroneous decision.”

“Gifted and talented programs, including magnet schools, play a critical role in our public schools. But far too often gifted Black students have not had, and do not have, a fair opportunity to participate in these programs, a problem even the Commonwealth of Virginia has recognized,” said **Robert N. Barnette, President, Virginia State Conference of the NAACP**. “The Fairfax Public Schools has worked with the community to increase equitable access to TJ. Hopefully, the courts will support the progress made.”

“For too long, education opportunities for marginalized communities in the Commonwealth - such as BIPOC, immigrant, non-English speaking, and working-class Virginians - were overlooked, under-resourced, or made inaccessible,” said **Zowee Aquino, Policy and Communications Lead at Hamkae Center**. “As an Asian American from Southeast Virginia, this was the reality that I and many other students internalized, until the TJ admissions process reforms challenged this notion and sought to change it. While there’s certainly more work to be done, the Fairfax County School Board have taken a meaningful step towards improving education in Virginia by prioritizing equitable access and using a community-centered approach to address a complex, historic problem.”

“Latino and other students of color are disproportionately denied access to opportunities for rigorous and advanced coursework provided by specialized schools like Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology. This racial and economic disparity creates exclusionary and isolated learning environments for students from marginalized identity groups,” said **Ingrid Alvarez, Vice President for Policy and Strategic Engagement, Hispanic Federation**. “Allowing school districts like Fairfax County to build a more equitable and inclusive school community by implementing admissions processes that provide all students with fair opportunity to compete is beneficial to all students.”

“We remain steadfast in our support of Fairfax County Public Schools’ ability to expand access to TJ to Latino, Black, ELL and low-income students” said **Luis Aguilar, Director of Virginia region, CASA, Inc.** “We do so because our Latino students deserve no less.”

“Underserved youth from marginalized communities, including the Asian Americans that AALEAD serves, continue to confront barriers to educational opportunities despite their qualifications and hard work,” said **Akil Vohra, Executive Director, Asian American LEAD**. “We will continue to support action taken by school districts to make admissions policies fairer and more accessible to all.”

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*Asian Americans Advancing Justice – AAJC has a mission to advance the civil and human rights of Asian Americans and to build and promote a fair and equitable society for all. Visit our website at [advancingjustice-aaajc.org](http://advancingjustice-aaajc.org).*

*Founded in 1940, the Legal Defense Fund (LDF) is the nation's first civil rights law organization. LDF's Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the Legal Defense Fund or LDF. Please note that LDF has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights.*

*LatinoJustice PRLDEF works to create a more just society by using and challenging the rule of law to secure transformative, equitable and accessible justice, by empowering our community and by fostering leadership through advocacy and education. For nearly 50 years, LatinoJustice PRLDEF has acted as an advocate against injustices throughout the country. To learn more about LatinoJustice, visit [www.LatinoJustice.org](http://www.LatinoJustice.org).*