

Civil Rights Groups File To Submit Amicus Brief that Supports Admissions Policies That Address Structural Barriers to Education

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Civil rights groups Asian Americans Advancing Justice – AAJC (Advancing Justice - AAJC), NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), and LatinoJustice PRLDEF, together with law firm Arnold & Porter, filed an [amicus brief](#) in support of more equitable access to Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology (TJHSST) in the case *Coalition for TJ v. Fairfax County School Board*. This case challenges and seeks a preliminary injunction against revisions to TJHSST's admissions process that provide greater access for multiple underrepresented and disadvantaged groups.

Last year's revisions to admissions policies at TJHSST broadened access for Black and Latinx students, female students, as well as economically disadvantaged students, English language learners, and students with disabilities, including Asian American students in these groups. The brief is in response to the Coalition for TJ's efforts to block the changes in admission policies that already took effect last school year from being implemented again for this upcoming admissions cycle.

"We continue to be committed to expanding educational opportunities for all. The Asian American community is an incredibly diverse group, and the revised admissions process benefits all students, including Asian American students who are low-income or English language learners, a fact that the Coalition for TJ ignores," **said Niyati Shah, Advancing Justice – AAJC's Director of Litigation.** "All students deserve a high quality education where they can also learn and benefit from the diversity of their peers. We support measures that promote equal educational opportunities for all students, and reject attempts to obscure the rich diversity of our communities."

"The school board has a responsibility to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to compete for admission to TJHSST," **said LDF Senior Counsel Michaele N. Turnage Young.** "Last year's changes unquestionably made TJHSST's admissions process fairer. To use our Constitution to reverse this progress would turn the Equal Protection Clause on its head and cement present-day inequalities for future generations."

"We are pleased to again join in representing amici asking the court for a second time to deny Plaintiff's request to enjoin a new admissions process that data clearly shows is expanding opportunities for Latinx and Black students, English Language Learners, and students from historically underrepresented schools," **said Jose Perez, LatinoJustice Deputy General Counsel.** "The incipient progress being made under the new process should be encouraged, not stifled. We expect the court will again reject Plaintiff's specious attempt to return to an admissions process that patently discriminated against Latinx and other historically underrepresented students."

These civil rights groups serve as counsel for TJ Alumni for Racial Justice (TJARJ), NAKASEC VA, AALEAD, CASA VA, Virginia State Conference of the NAACP, and Hispanic Federation as amici curiae in support of new measures designed to promote access and in opposition to policies that further systemic racism and favor students who come from more affluent backgrounds.

As highlighted in the brief, for the first time in the last 15 years, all of Fairfax County's middle schools had students accepted into TJHSST.

“The recent changes to TJHSST’s admissions process have increased access among a broad range of communities in Fairfax County, including low-income Asian Americans and those who attend historically excluded middle schools. To claim that this expanded inclusion of diverse communities is anti-Asian is wrongheaded because it ignores the great diversity within Asian American communities who benefit from the removal of structural barriers to TJHSST,” **said TJARJ board member Pichchenda Bao.**

"Black students in Virginia — who would have undoubtedly excelled and thrived at TJHSST — have been almost wholly excluded from attending for at least 14 years," **said Virginia State Conference NAACP President Robert N. Barnette, Jr.** "For well over a decade, until the admissions revisions were implemented, Black students were less than 3% of those admitted. The Fairfax County School Board took important steps to improve equal access to educational opportunities, and we ask the Court not to entertain this misguided attempt to undo them."

“It is remarkable that the number of Latino students admitted to TJ this September rose to 62 from 23 in the previous school year,” **said Luis Aguilar, Director of CASA Virginia.** “While this nearly 300% increase is encouraging and shows that the new admissions process is fairer, the Fairfax County Public Schools must do much more to attract talented Latinx students to TJ. We stand ready to partner with FCPS.”

“As an organization that represents underserved Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) youth, Asian American LEAD believe the changes made to improve access to TJHSST will benefit historically marginalized communities including Black, Latinx, and underserved AAPI youth who are often mistakenly viewed as a ‘model minority,’” **said Akil Vohra, Executive Director of Asian American LEAD.**

"The new admissions policy to attend Thomas Jefferson actually provides more access for all eligible Asian American youth in Northern Virginia to apply. To argue that the new policy is anti-Asian trivializes what actually constitutes anti-Asian discrimination," **said Sookyung Oh, Director of NAKASEC Virginia.**

Advancing Justice – AAJC, NAACP Legal Defense Fund, and LatinoJustice PRLDEF stand for racial equity in education and look forward to representing these groups who are encouraging progress to promote access and expand educational opportunities for all communities of color.

Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation's first civil and human rights law organization. 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. 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 NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF. Follow LDF on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).

The mission of Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC is to advance civil and human rights for Asian Americans. Advancing Justice | AAJC is a national 501 (c)(3) nonprofit founded in 1991 in Washington, D.C. Advancing Justice | AAJC is the voice for the Asian American community – the fastest-growing population in the U.S. – fighting for our civil rights through education, litigation, and public policy advocacy. www.advancingjustice-ajc.org.

About LatinoJustice

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

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