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**New Report Examines Weaponization
of Immigration Court System**

*Advocates Launch Immigration Court Watch App to
Ensure Greater Accountability, Transparency*

WASHINGTON, DC – The immigration court system has failed to fulfill the constitutional and statutory promise of fair and impartial case-by-case review, according to a new report released today by Innovation Law Lab and the Southern Poverty Law Center, entitled [*The Attorney General's Judges: How the U.S. Immigration Courts Became a Deportation Tool.*](#)

The report, based on over two years of research and focus group interviews with attorneys and former immigration judges from around the country, links the current crisis of accountability to the Attorney General's absolute control over the immigration court system.

In conjunction with the report, the groups also announced the launch of an Immigration Court Watch app, which enables court observers to record and upload information on immigration judge conduct to create greater judicial accountability.

Under the Immigration and Nationality Act, the attorney general is required to create an immigration court system in which independent judges decide cases by applying law to the evidence on the record following a full and fair hearing. According to the report, however, today's immigration courts are plagued by systemic bias and neglect.

“Despite the life-and-death stakes of many immigration cases within the current system, case outcomes have less to do with the rule of law than with

the luck of the draw,” said Melissa Crow, Southern Poverty Law Center senior supervising attorney. “Under the Trump administration, the attorneys general have gone even further by actively weaponizing the immigration court system against asylum-seekers.”

The report explains how the Office of Attorney General has created an immigration court system that is biased, inconsistent and driven by political whims. It also examines the conflict that arises when immigration judges, who are expected to be neutral arbiters, are supervised by the United States’ chief law enforcement officer who prioritizes deterrence and deportation of immigrants, instead of an impartial review process.

The report recommends removing the immigration courts from the attorney general’s control and recreating them as Article I courts. To ensure that immigration judges are insulated from political pressures, they must be selected based on merit, receive tenure and be removed only for good cause. The immigration courts must also include more effective mechanisms of internal and appellate accountability.

“One of the key factors driving the immigration court crisis is the failure of judicial accountability,” said Stephen Manning, executive director of Innovation Law Lab. “The new Immigration Court Watch app addresses that lack of accountability, ensures greater transparency and will be a valuable resource for collecting and storing usable data on the pervasive abuses in the immigration court system.”

The new tool will allow data on immigration judge conduct to be gathered and stored in both individual and aggregate forms. This will provide advocates with valuable information to fight systemic patterns of bias and other unlawful court practices. This data can be used to bolster policy recommendations, advocacy and legal strategies.

Advocates, attorneys and other court watchers are encouraged to download and access the app available here: <https://courtwatch.lawlab.cc/signup>.

“By establishing a presence in immigration courts within their communities and sharing their observations and information, advocates can help us leverage the power of technology, collaboration and strategic alignment to create the first interconnected information system which captures data about due process issues in U.S. immigration courts in real-time,” Manning said.

The report can be found here: https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/com_policyreport_the_attorney_generals_judges_final.pdf

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The Southern Poverty Law Center, based in Alabama with offices in Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and Washington, DC, is a nonprofit civil rights organization dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry, and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of society. For more information, visit www.splcenter.org.

The Innovation Law Lab is a nonprofit organization dedicated to upholding the rights of immigrants and refugees. By bringing technology to the fight for justice, Law Lab builds power for lawyers, human rights advocates, and immigrants in hostile immigration court jurisdictions, remote immigration detention facilities, and along the U.S.-Mexico border. For more information, visit www.innovationlawlab.org.