Nearly 120 Criminal Justice Leaders Urge Supreme Court to Block Extreme Texas Abortion Ban

DAs, law enforcement leaders and former judges and DOJ officials stress the Texas law erodes the rule of law and will undermine trust and public safety

Today, a bipartisan group of 118 current and former elected prosecutors and law enforcement leaders, and former state attorneys general, federal and state court judges, U.S. Attorneys and Department of Justice officials filed an amicus brief urging the United States Supreme Court to halt Texas’ six-week abortion ban while the courts review its constitutionality. The group emphasized that this law – “perhaps the most blatant attempt to subvert federal authority since the Jim Crow era” – clearly disregards well-settled judicial precedent, erodes trust in the criminal legal system and rule of law, and undermines public safety.

The amicus brief was filed in support of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ)’s application to vacate the Fifth Circuit’s divided decision in United States of America v. State of Texas and reinstate the earlier comprehensive district court decision that barred enforcement of the Texas law while the DOJ claims work their way through the courts. The Texas statute in question, S.B. 8, bans abortions after six weeks, before many women even know they are pregnant, and empowers everyday citizens to enforce the law. The signatories say the law is “nakedly designed to override this Court’s existing precedents by deputizing private citizens as bounty hunters tasked with enforcing laws the State could not enforce itself, and then disclaiming responsibility before the courts.”

“For nearly five decades, the Supreme Court has maintained that abortion is a constitutionally protected right. Upending that judicial precedent and allowing states to disregard federal law would have dangerous consequences for trust in the rule of law and public safety,” said Miriam Krinsky, Executive Director of Fair and Just Prosecution, the organization that coordinated the brief. “Allowing Texas’ abortion ban to stand would not only increase the risk of unsafe and unsupervised procedures for millions of people, but it would also open the door for state legislatures to brazenly ignore federal law and infringe on numerous other constitutional rights. This is an unacceptable starting point for the elected prosecutors and criminal justice leaders who are entrusted with keeping communities safe and – whether or not one supports the right to abortion – this end run around the anchor of the rule of law should concern us all.”

Amici emphasize that trust in the criminal legal system, which is critical to promoting public safety, would be severely damaged by putting enforcement in the hands of average citizens who are not obligated to follow the same policies and ethics as actual law enforcement officials: “The justice system is intended to be a shield through which victims can obtain redress for harms, not a sword that arms
unaffiliated private citizens to go after their neighbors for personal gain. S.B. 8 turns the justice system on its head, incentivizing these ‘deputized’ citizens to use overzealous, intrusive, and abusive measures…. These tactics create the potential for unchecked vigilantism and will necessarily undermine public safety.”

“Ignoring longstanding Supreme Court precedent and allowing subversion of federal law deeply erodes faith in the rule of law and the role of judicial review in our constitutional system,” said former Solicitor General Seth Waxman, a signatory on the brief.

Amici stress the urgency of the situation and the damage resulting from the refusal by the Fifth Circuit to maintain the status quo and hold this law and its unprecedented vigilante structure in abeyance as the case is being litigated, noting that S.B. 8 “cannot—and should not—be allowed to remain in place for a single day longer. The erosion of trust and damage it has created, and will continue to create, should be of great concern to all who value a system of laws and who seek to promote the well-being of our communities.”

“As an elected prosecutor, I am accountable to my community to seek justice and promote public safety, and I make difficult decisions every day about which cases to pursue. And as a former judge, I know well that the unprecedented legal concept of deputizing private citizens to make these critical decisions is a subversion of the role of law enforcement and a danger to community safety,” said Dallas County District Attorney John Creuzot, a signatory to the brief.

“As a law enforcement leader with decades of experience, I know what it takes to promote community safety and am deeply concerned by the precedent that would be set by allowing untrained citizens to enforce the law,” said signatory Darrel Stephens, former Police Chief of the Charlotte Mecklenburg, N.C. Police Department and former Executive Director of the Major Cities Chiefs Association.

Amici are represented by a team of attorneys from Fair and Just Prosecution and the law firm of Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP, including John Mastando, Lauren Bernstein, Melissa Rutman, Tania Matsuoka, Frank Ungerer and Lauren Wands.

Read the brief here and see below for a complete list of amici.

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Fair and Just Prosecution is a national network of elected prosecutors working towards common-sense, compassionate criminal justice reforms. To learn more about FJP’s work, visit our website and follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

List of Amici

Roy L. Austin
Former Deputy Assistant Attorney General, Civil Rights Division, U.S. Department of Justice
Former Deputy Assistant to President Obama for the Office of Urban Affairs, Justice and Opportunity (White House Domestic Policy Council)
Diana Becton  
District Attorney, Contra Costa County, California

Wesley Bell  
Prosecuting Attorney, St. Louis County, Missouri

Buta Biberaj  
Commonwealth’s Attorney, Loudoun County, Virginia

Shay Bilchik  
Former Administrator, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice  
Former Chief Assistant State Attorney, Miami-Dade County, Florida

Sherry Boston  
District Attorney, DeKalb County, Georgia

Chesa Boudin  
District Attorney, City and County of San Francisco, California

RaShall M. Brackney, Ph.D.  
Police Chief, Charlottesville Police Department, Virginia

Joseph Brann  
Former Chief, Hayward Police Department, California  
Former Director, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice

Aisha Braveboy  
State’s Attorney, Prince George’s County, Maryland

Bobbe J. Bridge  
Former Justice, Supreme Court, Washington

Jim Bueermann  
Former President, National Police Foundation  
Former Chief, Redlands Police Department, California

John Choi  
County Attorney, Ramsey County (St. Paul), Minnesota

Jerry L. Clayton  
Sheriff, Washtenaw County (Ann Arbor), Michigan
Dave Clegg
District Attorney, Ulster County, New York

Michael W. Cotter
Former U.S. Attorney, District of Montana

Brendan Cox
Former Chief, Albany Police Department, New York

John Creuzot
District Attorney, Dallas County, Texas

Deirdre M. Daly
Former U.S. Attorney, District of Connecticut

Satana Debbery
District Attorney, Durham County, North Carolina

Parisa Dehghani-Tafti
Commonwealth’s Attorney, Arlington County and the City of Falls Church, Virginia

Brandon del Pozo
Former Chief, Burlington Police Department, Vermont

Steve Descano
Commonwealth’s Attorney, Fairfax County, Virginia

Lloyd Doggett
U.S. Representative, 35th District, Texas
Former Justice, Supreme Court, Texas

Michael Dougherty
District Attorney, 20th Judicial District (Boulder), Colorado

Mark Dupree
District Attorney, Wyandotte County (Kansas City), Kansas

Jenny Durkan
Mayor, City of Seattle
Former U.S. Attorney, Western District of Washington
Matt Ellis
District Attorney, Wasco County, Oregon

Zachary Fardon
Former U.S. Attorney, Northern District of Illinois

John Farmer
Former Attorney General, New Jersey
Former Assistant U.S. Attorney, New Jersey

John P. Flannery
Former Assistant U.S. Attorney, Southern District of New York
Former Special Counsel, House and Senate Judiciary Committees

Lisa Foster
Former Director, Office for Access to Justice, U.S. Department of Justice
Former Judge, Superior Court, California

Kimberly M. Foxx
State’s Attorney, Cook County (Chicago), Illinois

Gil Garcetti
Former District Attorney, Los Angeles County, California

Kimberly Gardner
Circuit Attorney, City of St. Louis, Missouri

Stan Garnett
Former District Attorney, 20th Judicial District (Boulder), Colorado

José Garza
District Attorney, Travis County (Austin), Texas

George Gascón
District Attorney, Los Angeles County, California
Former District Attorney, City and County of San Francisco, California
Former Chief, San Francisco Police Department, California
Former Chief, Mesa Police Department, Arizona

Sarah F. George
State’s Attorney, Chittenden County (Burlington), Vermont
Nancy Gertner
Former Senior Judge, U.S. District Court, District of Massachusetts

Deborah R. Gilg
Former U.S. Attorney, District of Nebraska

Sim Gill
District Attorney, Salt Lake County, Utah

Joe Gonzales
District Attorney, Bexar County (San Antonio), Texas

Deborah Gonzalez
District Attorney, Western Judicial Circuit (Athens), Georgia

Eric Gonzalez
District Attorney, Kings County (Brooklyn), New York

Mark Gonzalez
District Attorney, Nueces County (Corpus Christi), Texas

Emily Jane Goodman
Former Justice, Supreme Court, New York

Christian Gossett
District Attorney, Winnebago County, Wisconsin

Barry Grissom
Former U.S. Attorney, District of Kansas

Joseph R. Grodin
Former Associate Justice, Supreme Court, California

Deborah Hankinson
Former Justice, Supreme Court, Texas

Andrea Harrington
District Attorney, Berkshire County, Massachusetts

David J. Hickton
Former U.S. Attorney, Western District of Pennsylvania
Jim Hingeley  
Commonwealth’s Attorney, Albemarle County, Virginia

Natasha Irving  
District Attorney, 6th Prosecutorial District, Maine

Shalena Cook Jones  
District Attorney, Chatham County (Savannah), Georgia

Melinda Katz  
District Attorney, Queens County, New York

Steven Kirkland  
Former Civil Judicial District Court Judge, Harris County, Texas

Zach Klein  
City Attorney, Columbus, Ohio

Justin F. Kollar  
Former Prosecuting Attorney, County of Kaua’i, Hawaii

Lawrence S. Krasner  
District Attorney, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

William Lansdowne  
Former Chief, San Diego Police Department, California  
Former Chief, San Jose Police Department, California  
Former Chief, Richmond Police Department, California

Timothy K. Lewis  
Former Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, Third Circuit  
Former Judge, U.S. District Court, Western District of Pennsylvania

Rebecca Like  
Acting Prosecuting Attorney, County of Kaua’i, Hawaii

Robert L. Listenbee  
Former Administrator, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice

Rory Little  
Former Associate Deputy Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice
Karen Loeffler
Former U.S. Attorney, District of Alaska

Patricia A. Madrid
Former Attorney General, New Mexico

Kenneth Magidson
Former U.S. Attorney, Southern District of Texas

Beth McCann
District Attorney, 2nd Judicial District (Denver), Colorado

Mary McCord
Former Acting Assistant Attorney General and Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General for National Security, U.S. Department of Justice
Former Criminal Division Chief, U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Columbia

F. Scott McCown
Retired State District Judge, Travis County, Texas

Karen McDonald
Prosecuting Attorney, Oakland County, Michigan

Barbara McQuade
Former U.S. Attorney, Eastern District of Michigan

Ryan Mears
Prosecuting Attorney, Marion County (Indianapolis), Indiana

Christian D. Menefee
County Attorney, Harris County, Texas

Brian Middleton
District Attorney, Fort Bend County, Texas

Stephanie Morales
Commonwealth’s Attorney, Portsmouth, Virginia

Marilyn Mosby
State’s Attorney, Baltimore City, Maryland
Michol O'Connor  
Former Justice, Court of Appeals, First Judicial District, Texas  
Former Assistant U.S. Attorney, Southern District of Texas

Jody Owens  
District Attorney, Hinds County, Mississippi

Alonzo Payne  
District Attorney, 12th Judicial District, Colorado

Joseph Platania  
Commonwealth’s Attorney, City of Charlottesville, Virginia

Richard Pocker  
Former U.S. Attorney, District of Nevada

Abdul Pridgen  
Chief, Seaside Police Department, California

Ira Reiner  
Former District Attorney, Los Angeles County, California  
Former City Attorney, Los Angeles, California

Carole Rendon  
Former U.S. Attorney, Northern District of Ohio

Eric Rinehart  
State’s Attorney, Lake County, Illinois

Mimi Rocah  
District Attorney, Westchester County, New York

Rachael Rollins  
District Attorney, Suffolk County (Boston), Massachusetts

Jeff Rosen  
District Attorney, Santa Clara County, California

Stephen Rosenthal  
Former Attorney General, Virginia

Marian Ryan  
District Attorney, Middlesex County, Massachusetts
Sarah R. Saldaña
Former U.S. Attorney, Northern District of Texas
Former Director, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Dan Satterberg
Prosecuting Attorney, King County (Seattle), Washington

Eli Savit
Prosecuting Attorney, Washtenaw County (Ann Arbor), Michigan

Shira A. Scheindlin
Former Judge, U.S. District Court, Southern District of New York

Mike Schmidt
District Attorney, Multnomah County (Portland), Oregon

Carol Siemon
Prosecuting Attorney, Ingham County (Lansing), Michigan

Norm Stamper
Former Chief, Seattle Police Department, Washington

Darrel Stephens
Former Executive Director, Major City Chiefs Association
Former Chief, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, North Carolina

Jack Stollsteimer
District Attorney, Delaware County, Pennsylvania

David Sullivan
District Attorney, Northwestern District, Massachusetts

Edward J. Tarver
Former U.S. Attorney, Southern District of Georgia

Shannon Taylor
Commonwealth’s Attorney, Henrico County, Virginia

Carolyn Engel Temin
Former Judge, First Judicial District, Pennsylvania

Anne Tompkins
Former U.S. Attorney, Western District of North Carolina
Raúl Torrez  
District Attorney, Bernalillo County (Albuquerque), New Mexico

Anthony F. Troy  
Former Attorney General, Virginia

Gregory Underwood  
Commonwealth’s Attorney, City of Norfolk, Virginia

Matthew Van Houten  
District Attorney, Tompkins County, New York

Cyrus R. Vance  
District Attorney, New York County (Manhattan), New York

John Walsh  
Former U.S. Attorney, District of Colorado  
Former Chair, Attorney General’s Advisory Committee on U.S. Attorneys

T. John Ward  
Former Judge, U.S. District Court, Eastern District of Texas

Andrew Warren  
State Attorney, 13th Judicial Circuit (Tampa), Florida

Seth P. Waxman  
Former Solicitor General, U.S. Department of Justice

Jared Williams  
District Attorney, Augusta, Georgia

Monique H. Worrell  
State Attorney, 9th Judicial Circuit (Orlando), Florida