

# New judges lack immigration experience

## MI court has backlog of more than 31,000 cases

**Dave Boucher**  
Detroit Free Press  
USA TODAY NETWORK

DETROIT — Two new judges joined Detroit Immigration Court in May, following appointments of two others in April and March, meaning a majority of the judges on Michigan's only immigration court started their jobs this year.

And none of the new judges who preside over cases that frequently lead to deportations have any apparent recent immigration court experience, according to information provided by the Executive Office for Immigration Review, the agency within the Department of Justice that oversees immigration courts.

The new judges take the bench as immigration courts across the nation grapple with substantial turnover — in the last year, hundreds of judges have retired or been fired as President Donald Trump's administration leans into its promise to execute the largest mass deportation in the country's history.

At the same time, courts have a suffocating backlog of cases. As of March, Detroit Immigration Court had a backlog of more than 31,000 cases, according to a records project coordinated by Syracuse University.

Two of the new Detroit judges are among 77 judges sworn in on May 20, what federal officials are calling the largest class of new immigration judges in history.

"The Trump administration is committed to reestablishing an immigration judge corps that is dedicated to restoring the rule to the law in our nation's immigration system," acting Attorney General Todd Blanche said in a May 21 statement.

The federal government provides conflicting information on what is required to become an immigration court judge. While previous experience in an immigration court is not required, it is preferred, according to the Executive Office for Immigration Review.

An EOIR website says candidates must have a law degree, be active in a state bar and have "seven years of post-bar admission legal experience." A dif-



The federal government provides conflicting information on what is required to become an immigration court judge. While previous experience in an immigration court is not required, it is preferred, according to the Executive Office for Immigration Review. DAVID RODRIGUEZ MUÑOZ/DETROIT FREE PRESS FILE

ferent DOJ website lists the law degree and state bar admission but says, "applicants must possess qualifying post-licensure litigation or adjudication experience." It does not indicate a seven-year time frame.

All four new Detroit Immigration Court judges earned law degrees at least 10 years ago, but not all have practiced any law consistently in Michigan.

- Denise Kallas has substantial experience in Michigan criminal courts; proceedings in immigration court are civil, not criminal. Until her appointment, she served nearly 30 years as a prosecutor in Oakland County. A spokesperson for Oakland County Prosecutor Karen McDonald did not immediately respond to a request for comment about Kallas. She earned her law degree from the University of Detroit Mercy law school in 1995.

- Jill K. Krishnan has the most known immigration law experience of any of the four recently appointed Detroit judges. From 2008 to 2013 she served as an assistant chief counsel

**Two of the new Detroit judges are among 77 judges sworn in on May 20, what federal officials are calling the largest class of new immigration judges in history.**

with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Atlanta, according to a news release. It's unclear what she's done since then: The news release doesn't list any experience since 2013. A court spokeswoman did not immediately respond to questions about Krishnan's recent work history. Krishnan, who earned her law degree from Vanderbilt University in 2004, is a member of the New York State Bar.

- Christopher Cooper was appointed

in April. Since 1999, he primarily practiced in federal courts in Indiana and Illinois, according to a news release announcing his appointment. From 2017 to 2023, he also served as a judge pro tem — essentially a substitute judge — in an Indiana court that's similar to a Michigan district court. He primarily presided in a felony courtroom "on [an] as needed basis," the news release states. Cooper earned his law degree from the New England School of Law in 1995 and is a member of both the Illinois and Indiana state bars.

- John E. Moriarty is the other new judge, appointed May 20 alongside Kallas. He's licensed to practice law in Pennsylvania, having earned a law degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 2016. In the summer of 2021, he started pursuing a doctorate in politics at Hillsdale College's Van Andel Graduate School of Statesmanship, according to a news release. His law license became inactive in August 2022, but he reactivated it in February, Pennsylvania records show. It was not inactive due to any disciplinary issue, a staff member with the Judicial System of Pennsylvania told the Detroit Free Press, part of the USA TODAY Network.

The Detroit Immigration Court website now lists eight judges assigned to Detroit. In addition to the four new judges, the remaining named on the site are Katherine Hansen, Mark J. Jebson, David Paruch and Ian R. Simons.

Paruch retired late last year, in part over his perception the administration changed its focus from due process to, "grind it out and deport them," he recently told the Free Press.

Before his appointment, Paruch worked as a private lawyer in Detroit Immigration Court for more than 30 years. Jebson worked for a dozen years representing the government in immigration court, while Hansen served more than a decade as a judge in Detroit's 36th District Court. Simons worked as a lawyer for ICE for seven years before his appointment to the bench.

Since the start of the new financial year in October, federal officials have hired 153 new immigration court judges across the country. That's the most in any one year in the agency's history, according to a news release.

## Senate Democrats urge probe into Iran war cost

**Cybele Mayes-Osterman**  
USA TODAY

Senate Democrats are pressing federal budget investigators to probe the gap between the Pentagon's stated cost for the Iran war — \$29 billion — and outside estimates that peg the cost up to tens of billions of dollars higher.

In a letter sent May 27, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Massachusetts; Sen. Jeff Merkley of Oregon, the top Democrat on the Senate Budget Committee; and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-New York urged the Congressional Budget Office to "take into consideration the significant divergence between the administration's public estimates" for the Iran war's cost and outside estimates from media outlets and analysts.

"We are concerned that the administration has not been fully truthful or transparent in its public accounting of the war's costs so far," they wrote. Another 17 Democratic senators signed the letter.

The Congressional Budget Office is a government agency charged with providing nonpartisan analysis and information to lawmakers on the Hill.

Pennsylvania Rep. Brendan Boyle, the top Democrat on the House Budget Committee, asked the CBO in early March to investigate the cost of the war with Iran, which began Feb. 28 with a massive bombing campaign by the United States and Israel.

Jules Hurst, the Pentagon's comptroller, told Congress during a May 12 budget hearing that the Iran war cost taxpayers \$29 billion, a \$4 billion increase from the \$25 billion price tag Hurst had given lawmakers two weeks earlier. That total did not include the cost of damage to U.S. military bases and assets from Iran's attacks, which the Pentagon had not yet fully tallied up, according to Hurst.

Independent estimates of the cost range from slightly to vastly higher than Hurst's number. Mark Cancian, a senior defense adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, told USA TODAY in early May that the



Jules Hurst, the Pentagon's comptroller, told Congress during a May 12 budget hearing that the war with Iran cost taxpayers \$29 billion. Independent estimates of the cost range from slightly to vastly higher. ANNA MONEYMAKER/GETTY IMAGES FILE

cost for the period covered by Hurst's first estimate was likely closer to \$32 billion to \$35 billion. An analysis by the American Enterprise Institute also pegged the cost at up to \$35 billion, from the start of the war through April 7, when the United States and Iran struck a temporary ceasefire deal.

A source familiar with congressional estimates previously told USA TODAY that battle damage could add another \$15 billion to the total cost. CBS and CNN, citing anonymous sources, reported in April that the total cost of the war was closer to \$50 billion.

The military has requested a record \$1.5 trillion for its budget next year, and Pentagon officials have said they would submit a supplemental request to Congress for additional funds for the war.

The war has not returned to all-out war since the ceasefire began, even though the U.S. military launched what it called "self-defense" strikes on southern Iran on May 25 and Israel continues to pummel Lebanon in what it has said is a "deepening" operation against Hezbollah, an ally of Iran. Negotiations between the United States and Iran are ongoing over the Strait of Hormuz.

Thirteen American service members and at least 3,000 Iranians have been killed in the war.

### ANALYSIS

## Trump's grip on Senate, key priorities in doubt

**Zachary Schermele**  
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — Texas Sen. John Cornyn's bruising election loss showed President Donald Trump is as dominant as ever in the Republican Party.

It also underlined another harsh political reality: His era with near-total control over a functioning majority in the Senate may already be over.

Intent on political retribution against several longtime lawmakers, the president in recent weeks decided to create two new wild cards within the Senate GOP ranks by functionally ending their congressional careers. Both Cornyn and Sen. Bill Cassidy have since become lame ducks, and it's anyone's guess how often they'll buck the White House on its legislative priorities between now and the midterm elections.

Case in point: Days after Trump successfully pushed Cassidy out, the Louisiana Republican flipped his vote to support an end to the war with Iran.

Add the Cornyn-Cassidy pair to the list of Republican senators with reputations for consistent defiance of Trump, and the math isn't pretty.

Retiring Sen. Thom Tillis, R-North Carolina, has consistently bashed the Trump administration. Sen. Rand Paul, R-Kentucky, has long held steadfastly to his own libertarian principles, including on ending the Iran war. Another soon-to-be retiree, Mitch McConnell, the former Senate majority leader from Kentucky whom Trump has called a "political hack," isn't afraid to disagree with the president either.

Then there are the two moderates: Sens. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, and Susan Collins, R-Maine, have long had reliably independent streaks. Trump has attacked them both many times.

That's as many as seven Republican senators whose votes Trump can't always count on. In a chamber where the GOP holds a three-seat majority, that's a big problem.

The new dynamics mean "there will be fewer political calculations going



Following his election loss, Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, may be less likely to back the president's political agenda. BRANDON BELL/GETTY IMAGES

into people's decision-making process," Tillis said recently in the halls of the Capitol.

The addition of two new free agents in the Senate Republican conference likely cements the reality that several of Trump's biggest, most controversial legislative priorities won't be gaining steam any time soon.

Among them, his passion for eliminating the filibuster. A number of Republican senators have been at least privately wary about changing the Senate's rules to permanently pass legislation with only a simple majority.

Then there's the SAVE America Act. The legislation would institute a slate of election restrictions and changes that have caused alarm among voting rights groups. Senate Majority Leader John Thune's frank assessment of the bill's slim chances hasn't gotten any rosier. Having more Trump critics in the GOP won't simplify that political calculation.

Meanwhile, the Department of Justice's new "anti-weaponization" fund is adding fuel to the fire. Concerns about the nearly \$2 billion reserve prompted "screaming" from multiple Senate Republicans at during Attorney General Todd Blanche's acting a May 22 meeting, said Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas.

"We have a 53-47 majority. If you lose four senators, you're below 50 and you can't get anything done," he said.