

Amir Ali (judge)

Amir Hatem Mahdy Ali (born 1985)^[1] is a Canadian-American lawyer and academic who is a United States district judge of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia.^[2]

Education

Ali received a Bachelor of Software Engineering from the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, in 2008 and a Juris Doctor, *magna cum laude*, from Harvard Law School in 2011.^[3]

Early career

After graduating, Ali served as a law clerk for Judge Raymond C. Fisher of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit from 2011 to 2012 and for Justice Marshall Rothstein of the Supreme Court of Canada from 2012 to 2013.^[4] From 2013 to 2017, Ali practiced at the law firm Jenner & Block.

Amir Ali



Judge of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia

Incumbent

Assumed office
November 22, 2024

Appointed by Joe Biden

Preceded by Beryl Howell

Personal details

Born

Amir Hatem Mahdy Ali

1985 (age 39–40)

Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Citizenship

American (since 2019)^[1] (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/03/11/amir-ali-judge-usaid/>)

Education

University of Waterloo (BSE)

Harvard University (JD)

^[5] He also argued and won a case before the U.S. Supreme Court as a fifth-year associate.^[6] From 2021 to 2024, Ali was the executive director of the MacArthur Justice Center,^{[7][8]} a nonprofit law firm founded by businessman and philanthropist J. Roderick MacArthur. Since 2018, Ali has been a professor at Harvard Law School, where he directs the school's criminal justice appellate clinic.^[7] ^[4] Ali has also been an adjunct professor of litigation and constitutional law at the University of District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law and Georgetown University Law Center.^{[9][10]} He served on the Appellate Project's board of directors.^{[11][12]}

Notable cases

In 2016, Ali argued for the petitioner in *Welch v. United States*, obtaining an 7–1 majority opinion that the Supreme Court's determination in *Johnson v. United States*, which found the Residual Clause of the Armed Career Criminal Act was unconstitutionally vague, constituted a substantive rule change and was therefore retroactive.^{[13][14][15]}

In 2018, Ali represented Louisiana prisoner Corey Williams before the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Williams v. Louisiana*.^[16] Williams had been wrongfully convicted of capital murder in 1998 at the age of 16 and spent over 20 years at Angola Penitentiary.^[16] In response to Ali's petition, the District Attorney agreed to immediately release Williams.^[17]

In 2019, Ali argued for the petitioner in *Garza v. Idaho*, and obtained a 6–3 majority opinion from the U.S. Supreme Court establishing that a criminal defendant has the constitutional right to an appeal that has been forfeited by his attorney even if the defendant's plea agreement states that it waives the right to appeal.^{[18][19][20]}

In 2022, Ali argued for the petitioner in *Thompson v. Clark*, and obtained a 6–3 majority opinion by Justice Brett Kavanaugh recognizing a federal cause of action against police officers who pursue false charges against someone.^{[21][22][23]}

Federal judicial service

On January 10, 2024, President Joe Biden announced his intent to nominate Ali to serve as a United States district judge for the United States District Court for the District of Columbia.^[3] On February 1, Biden nominated Ali to a seat vacated by Judge Beryl Howell, who assumed senior status.^[24] On February 8, a hearing on his nomination was held before the Senate Judiciary Committee.^[25] During his hearing, Senator Lindsey Graham questioned Ali about his leadership of the MacArthur Center and statements made by the group's previous director, who said in 2020 that advocates for defunding police agencies were part of a "movement toward making police departments obsolete". Ali responded, "I do not believe law enforcement is or should be obsolete, or defunded."^[26] On March 7, his nomination was reported out of committee by an 11–10 party-

line vote.^[27] On November 20, the United States Senate invoked cloture on his nomination by a 50–48 vote.^[28] Later that day, his nomination was confirmed by a 50–49 vote.^[29] He received his judicial commission on November 22, 2024.^[30] Ali became the first Muslim and Arab American federal judge to serve in D.C.^{[31][32][33]}

Notable rulings

On February 13, 2025, Ali issued a temporary restraining order on Executive Order 14169, which would have ordered cuts in funding for foreign assistance programs governed by USAID and the U.S. Department of State.^{[34][35]} The order issued halted the government from restricting foreign aid and assistance that was already in place before President Donald Trump took office, without fully enjoining the executive order itself.^[36] According to Ali, the purpose of suspending parts of the order was to allow for time to review programs for their efficiency and consistency with federal priorities, as no explanation had been provided for the blanket suspension of all congressionally appropriated foreign aid.^{[37][38][39]} Ali issued a deadline of February 18 for the Government to inform the court of its "status of compliance".^{[40][41]} After such payments failed to resume and an appropriate response was not provided, Ali ordered all aid issued before the temporary restraining order to be paid by February 26.^{[42][43]} Ali rejected the Trump administration's requests to extend the deadline. The administration appealed Ali's court order to both the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals and the U.S. Supreme Court, asking for it to be put on hold.^{[44][45][46]} The Circuit Court initially rejected the request. The Supreme Court issued a temporary administrative stay, placing Ali's order on hold while it considered the case and allowing Trump's executive order to remain in effect.^{[47][48]} But on March 5, 2025, the Supreme Court vacated its administrative stay and left Ali's order in effect.^[49]

On March 6, Judge Ali ruled that USAID must pay for nonprofits' and businesses' completed work by March 10, following instructions by the Supreme Court to further clarify what actions the government must take to provide for the release of funds.^{[50][51][52]}

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External links

- Amir Ali (<https://www.fjc.gov/node/13761895>) at the *Biographical Directory of Federal Judges*, a publication of the Federal Judicial Center.
 - Appearances at the U.S. Supreme Court (https://www.oyez.org/advocates/amir_h_ali) from the Oyez Project
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