

## New Lawyers Spotlight:

### How has your view of the U.S. Constitution changed since becoming a lawyer?



#### Travis Allen

Associate Attorney, Meagher & Geer

Before law school, my view of the Constitution was similar to that of the “bill on capitol hill” and other reportedly important social studies topics taught to students in catchy songs designed to churn out upstanding citizens. I did not grasp the enormity of the Constitution’s role nor did I understand its effect on my day-to-day life.

During 1L year, my nascent awareness of the Constitution’s role in framing and guiding American law began to solidify. I was awestruck by the gravity of the document and intimidated by the Supreme Court’s power of interpretation.

My studies of Constitutional jurisprudence ultimately gave me a deep sense of gratitude that I live in this country. As the son of a refugee and as a gay man, the protections the Constitution affords my family are personal, and instill within me a sense of civic pride and patriotism unknown prior to my legal education.

Today, as a new lawyer, I see the constitution in a different light: as the framework that guides and bounds American law, a manifestation of the principles we as Americans hold most dear, and the solid foundation upon which we continue to build our democracy.



#### Amanda Brodhag

Assistant Hennepin County Public Defender

My view of the Constitution hasn’t changed dramatically since becoming an attorney, but I feel more passionate about the views I held. A professor in college told me the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Amendments were written not for the guilty, but for the innocent. As a criminal defense attorney, I strongly believe it’s my job to keep the state accountable and that’s exactly why

those amendments were written. An infringement into personal liberty is something I do not take lightly and fight every day to protect, especially for marginalized people and poor people – people whose rights others seem to glance over nonchalantly.

One thing I’ve become more conscious about since becoming a lawyer is the lackadaisical manner with which we as a country treat people who have been charged with crimes. The fight I have made for the release of

clients charged with low level offenses because their speedy trial rights were violated is problematic. These pillars of justice our country was founded on should be held in the highest regard, and experience has taught me unfortunately they are not. Since becoming an attorney, I’ve become more zealous about making sure these liberties are protected, especially when our own government violates them.

#### Christopher Jison

Judicial Law Clerk, First Judicial District

I might have a unique perspective as an American who spent his formative years in Germany. I didn’t have the benefit of any Civics or American History classes to inform my opinion. To me the Constitution was an ancient document from a distant land that I thought had little impact on my daily life.



Law school brought that document to life. For many, law school Constitutional Law classes might have seemed like a re-hashing of old hat—an archaic lecture given over the span of a couple of centuries. It was all new to me. I saw systems built upon fundamental policies that attempted to balance the liberties of the people and the individual. I found language that, though sometimes ambiguous, still forced the greatest minds of today to grapple with who we are as a nation. Most importantly, I found that the Constitution remains as relevant today as it ever was—not just to me as a lawyer, but also as an individual. As a lawyer, I am grateful to now understand how the Constitution reflects our values as a people.

#### Cassie Navarro

Attorney, Baillon Thome Jozwiak & Wanta

While I had a clear understanding of the Constitution’s purpose and significance in law school, I now have a deeper appreciation for its practical impact on the day-to-day lives of individuals because it is the foundation for several of the protections I help my clients enforce. In my practice, I represent victims of discrimination and retaliation in the workplace, as well as public employees whose Constitutional rights have been violated. The principles set forth within the First and Fourteenth Amendments are particularly critical to my practice because they are the basis for laws that prohibit discrimination and harassment. It is an honor and privilege to assist people in advancing rights that stem from the Constitution.





### Sean Cahill

Assistant County Attorney,  
Hennepin County Attorney's Office

When I was in law school, I found the Constitution more of an aspirational document. Something that embodied our best values, our vision for justice, an expression of an envisioned utopia. While clearly particular in some respects, its broad, seemingly ambiguous language had little practical meaning in everyday practice. In my years in the criminal justice system, it has become quite the opposite. The Constitution is the most practical document that defines the operation of our society and our endeavor for a just community. The Constitution draws lines—hard lines—that define fairness, freedom, and justice. As a prosecutor, every act I take is shaped by the Constitution. From investigation to trial, I am always thinking about what the Constitution requires of me. Can I use this evidence? Have my officers played fair? Who do I need to testify at trial? Is this conduct criminal or an exercise of a constitutional right? Have I been open and transparent? Have I followed the rules? Am I serving justice? These questions, asked everyday, made me realize the Constitution is not simply a “living document,” but the lifeblood of fairness and justice that sustains the life and integrity of the criminal justice system. It has flesh-and-blood ramifications. It has rules. It limits the everyday actions of public servants to ensure their work does not sacrifice the integrity of the people they serve. At times, it tells me I must set aside my goals to maintain the

guarantee of another person's personal dignity. To me, the Constitution sets down real, hard rules so that I never lose sight of my own integrity, and in doing so, I never lose sight of the dignity of the citizens I serve.

### Lily Ansel

Law Student, Mitchell Hamline School of Law



Prior to starting law school, I viewed the U.S. Constitution primarily as a historical document that simply set forth the static rules of our government and the rights of citizens. Since starting law school, I have learned that the Constitution is a flexible document that allows judges to apply the historic principles to evolving modern issues. Additionally, before law school I thought Supreme Court opinions were based solely on political views. I now see that, while political views may shape a particular Justice's reasoning, in order to persuade a majority of the Court to join in the decision, the justice writing the opinion must use principled constitutional arguments and temper partisanship. Doing otherwise may invite dissent and jeopardize precedential value. Opinions must be based on arguments grounded in constitutional interpretation rather than politics. Law school has given me a deeper respect for the complexity, malleability, and durability of our Constitution and the role it plays in the legal profession and in our society.

## JAMS Welcomes...



### Daniel H. Mabley



Handled a wide range of civil and family matters during 26 years on the Hennepin County (Minnesota) District Court; also spent 15 years in prosecuting attorney roles in Dakota, Hennepin and Ramsey counties

[jamsadr.com/mabley](http://jamsadr.com/mabley)

### Lawrence Zelle, Esq.



Fifty years of experience as a lawyer, arbitrator, mediator, negotiator and settlement broker; earned a national and international reputation for expertise in disputes involving questions of insurance or reinsurance

[jamsadr.com/zelle](http://jamsadr.com/zelle)

**JAMS Minneapolis Resolution Center | 612.332.8225**  
**333 South Seventh St. | Suite 2550 | Minneapolis, MN 55402**