



ABOUT FRIENDS OF THE THIRD BRANCH

We were founded in 2023 by four retired Montana lawyers who recognized that Montana’s courts and judges are facing increasing pressure from partisan efforts to influence, weaken, or politicize the judiciary.

These threats to the independence of our courts erode public trust, restrict access to justice, and endanger our constitutional rights. We believe that Montanans deserve judges who are independent, accountable to the law—not political agendas—and capable of upholding checks and balances without interference.

To protect the independence of courts, Friends of the Third Branch works in three areas:



Public Education. We simplify complex legal and legislative issues so everyone can understand the attacks on our courts, how changes to our judicial system could harm people’s lives, and how people can help.



Legislative Analysis. Whether in a legislative session or during the interim, we track bills and other actions that affect the independence of the courts and provide nonpartisan analysis of their potential impacts.



Civic Engagement. We provide tools and information so lawyers and citizens can engage directly with lawmakers and administrative officials to voice their support for a court system that is free from politics.

When citizens have to go to court, whether it's for a business dispute, a divorce, or a traffic violation, no one wants to think that **their judge might consider party affiliation in their decision-making.**

IN JUST A FEW SHORT YEARS, FRIENDS OF THE THIRD BRANCH HAS:

- Worked with partners to **defeat proposed Constitutional Amendments** in 2023 that would have undermined the courts and the judicial process.
- Provided real-time updates and analysis on **more than 100 judicial-related bills** in the 2023 and 2025 Montana Legislative Sessions.
- **Helped defeat dozens of efforts** to make judicial elections partisan.
- Built a growing **network of thousands of Montanans** committed to judicial fairness.
- Created **accessible fact sheets and guides** on court structure, judicial selection, and proposed reforms.

OUR ISSUES

Protecting the rule of law so we all receive equal justice.

Upholding the separation of powers so that each branch of government follows the Montana Constitution and does not go beyond its powers.

Ensuring courts and judges are accountable to the people, not to politicians, the ultra-wealthy, the powerful, or the well-connected.

Defeating attempts to add party labels or other partisan affiliations to the election of judges

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