

SABA-DC Quarterly Newsletter

Information on happenings in the South Asian legal community of the DC Metro area



Message from the President

SABA-DC has had an eventful first half of the year. We discussed the intersection of law and national security with a panel of experts, highlighted many interesting issues in our monthly dinner series, and recently named the 2013 Public Interest Fellows. You can read more about the program and each of the three talented fellows inside. And with the help of our membership, we celebrated the successful confirmation of Sri Srinivasan to the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals in May. We look forward to the next six months and hope to see many of you at our future events.

Best, Kavitha J. Babu

- Announcement of 2013 SABA-DC Public Interest Fellows
- Member Spotlight: Vanita Gupta
- Guest Writer: Sandhya Bathija on the confirmation of Sri Srinivasan to the D.C. Circuit
- Winter & Spring Community events

Upcoming Events

**Pro Bono with
SABA-DC**

July 6

SAALT
Naturalization
Clinic

**2013 Supreme
Court Review**

July 9

Venue to be
announced shortly

**Know Thy
Career Options**

July 10

A career panel co-
sponsored with
APABA-DC & AEF
at 555 12th St NW



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Dinner Series Events



January Dinner Series

On January 29, SABA-DC hosted a dinner featuring Dr. Ashwini Tambe, Associate Professor in the Department of Women's Studies at the University of Maryland-College Park, and Divani Nadaraja, a local family law attorney. Discussion focused on the recent high-profile rapes in India, and included a dynamic conversation about violence against women in the South Asian community in the United States. Dr. Tambe spoke at length about the proposed rape laws in India, certain characteristics in South Asian communities that may foster such violence, and how community activists are seeking to further cultural change in South Asian communities. Divani Nadaraja discussed her experience with domestic violence victims from South Asian countries, and how to tackle the unique set of challenges affecting immigrant communities in terms of domestic violence.

February Dinner Series

On February 27, SABA-DC hosted a discussion on Pathways to the Federal Government. Our speakers included Smeetha Ramarathnam, Chief of Staff to the SEC Commissioner Luis Aguilar, and Naveen Parmar, Economic Policy Aide for Senator Amy Klobuchar. The lively discussion ranged from the process of applying to federal jobs, to differences between working in the Executive & Legislative branches, to career tracks for both law students and experienced attorneys.

In honor of Women's History Month, SABA-DC hosted a lively discussion on March 26th regarding an article from the Wall Street Journal entitled "The Queen Bee: Women who reached positions of power were supposed to be mentors to those who followed—but something is amiss in the professional sisterhood." Attendees discussed the various challenges and successes of ascending the ranks of the workplace as a woman of color, especially under the leadership of female supervisors and partners.

Women's Mentoring Circle

April Dinner Series

On April 16, SABA-DC hosted its April Dinner Series entitled "Being a Supreme Court Fellow" featuring current Fellows Michelle Ghetty and Waseem Iqbal. Both fellows discussed the Supreme Court Fellows Program, which gives individuals a unique insight into the policy issues facing the federal judiciary and a special appreciation of the nature of judicial administration. The fellows discussed the rigorous application process and shared how their work contributed to the work of the Supreme Court of the United States, the Federal Judicial Center, the Administrative Office of the United States Courts, and more recently the United States Sentencing Commission. The discussion was very vibrant and the fellows engaged with and answered many questions from the attendees.



SABA-DC Winter & Spring Events

On February 21, 2013, the Public Interest Committee of SABA-DC hosted a happy hour to give law students the opportunity to learn about the SABA-DC Public Interest Fellowship. Law students from around the area attended and were able to speak with representatives from a number of D.C. based organizations looking to host summer interns. The SABA-DC Public Interest Fellowship helps to fund a law student's summer internship with a public interest organization that benefits the South Asian community and the metropolitan D.C. area. Last year, SABA-DC awarded \$5,000 to Masooma Javaid, a law student from American University interning with the Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center. Learn more about our 2013 Fellowship in this newsletter!

SABA-DC, NetSAP, and TiE-DC hosted a sold-out event on March 5th at DLA Piper featuring Reggie Aggarwal, the founder of TiE-DC, a former President of SABA-DC and former member of NetSAP. As founder and CEO of Cvent, Aggarwal shared his journey from Cvent's inception in 1999, to the largest event management software company in the U.S. He talked about the times when the "wheat is separated from the chaff," struggling to pay the office lease and make payroll. And, he provided insights into Cvent's "DNA," the people, and the culture that make it successful today. Aggarwal described how Cvent maintains the corporate culture through an exchange program that brings team members from the U.S. to Indian and from India to the U.S. He cultivates the entrepreneurial spirit at Cvent by motivating "intrapreneurs" to take risks and innovate from within the company.

On April 4, SABA-DC, along with the Asian Pacific American Pacific Asian Bar Association of DC, Hispanic Bar Association of DC, National Bar Association, Women Lawyer Division GWAC, National Bar Association, Region 12, Native American Bar Association of DC, the Network of Arab American Lawyers of ADC, and the Washington Bar Association—Young Lawyers Division, hosted a networking event drawing the attendance of over 200 attorneys from the host associations. The event was a great success, giving attendees the opportunity to meet and mingle with colleagues from the eight participating bar associations. SABA-DC looks forward to co-hosting another event with our colleagues from the other minority bar associations again this fall.

National Security Law Event

On April 23rd SABA-DC hosted “Guantanamo, Drones, and the Courts: A Conversation about National Security Law” at The George Washington University Law School. Panelists included Wells Bennett of the Brookings Institute, Steve Vladeck of American University School of Law, and Raha Wala of the Law and Security Program. The lively and well-attended discussion ranged from changes in policy since President Obama came to office, the feasibility of closing Guantanamo, and openings on the D.C. Circuit Court. It was a fit crowd, and many cookies remained uneaten.



Member Spotlight

Vanita Gupta

SABA-DC's Member Spotlight program highlights members of the South Asian community who have made a genuine impact in the legal profession. This issue's Member Spotlight is on Vanita Gupta.

Vanita Gupta is Deputy Legal Director of the American Civil Liberties Union and Director of the ACLU's Center for Justice, which houses the organization's criminal justice reform, prisoners' rights, and capital punishment work. She is leading the ACLU's National Campaign to End Overincarceration, which advances smart criminal justice reforms aimed at safely reducing correctional populations around the country. In addition, Vanita is an adjunct clinical professor at NYU School of Law, where she teaches and oversees its Racial Justice Clinic. From 2006-2010, Vanita was a staff attorney with the ACLU's Racial Justice Program, focusing on systemic criminal justice reform, immigration detention, and education litigation. She won a landmark settlement on behalf of immigrant children detained in a privately-run prison in Texas that led to the end of “family detention” at the facility. Prior to joining the ACLU, Vanita was

at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund where she successfully led the effort to overturn the wrongful drug convictions of 38 individuals in Tulia, Texas, and served on the legal team that won freedom for renowned prison journalist Wilbert Rideau in his fourth retrial after he had already spent 44 years in prison. She also successfully won significant sentence reductions for several men subject to harsh New York Rockefeller drug penalties.

Vanita has won numerous awards for her advocacy and has been quoted extensively in national and international media on racial justice and criminal justice issues. In 2011, the National Law Journal recognized her as a Top 40 Minority Lawyer Under 40. She serves on the board of the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana. Vanita is a graduate of Yale University and New York University School of Law. And she is the proud mother of two rambunctious sons.

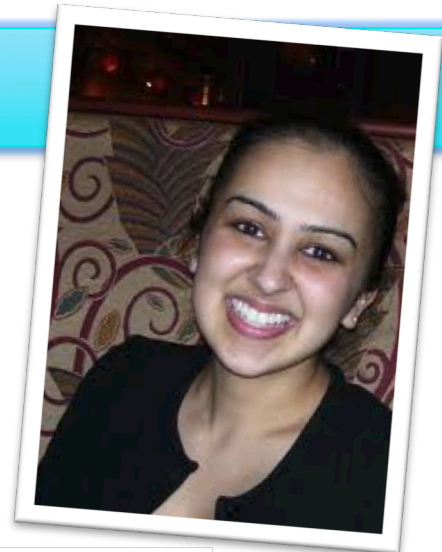
SABA-DC 2013 Public Interest Program Fellowship Recipients

SABA-DC provides financial assistance in the form of summer fellowships to law students working at public interest organizations in the metropolitan D.C. area. The primary purpose of the fellowship is to help fund a student's internship with a public interest organization for the benefit of the South Asian community and the metropolitan D.C. area. This year, SABA-DC awarded a record \$12,000 to three fellows: Sonia Desai, Navneet Jaswal, and Keerat Pannu. We are excited to recognize the accomplishments of these three talented individuals.

Keerat Pannu

My name is Keerat Pannu and I am a second year law student at George Mason University School of Law. I grew up in northern Virginia and attended college at Georgetown University. Upon graduating from law school I hope to pursue a career as a civil rights attorney. My interest in civil rights began when I interned for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund during college. Through this experience I was exposed to the power of a legal education. The attorneys I worked with had the ability to change the civil rights landscape, even history, and I was determined to follow in their footsteps. Since then I have pursued my passion for public service, and civil rights in particular, by interning with Chancellor Rhee at D.C. Public Schools, the Alliance for Excellent Education, and the White House.

This summer, I will be interning with the Office of General Counsel at the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR), U.S. Department of Justice. EOIR's mission is to adjudicate immigration cases by fairly, expeditiously, and uniformly interpreting and administering the Nation's immigration laws. EOIR conducts immigration court proceedings, appellate reviews, and administrative hearings. These cases involve detained aliens, criminal aliens, and aliens seeking asylum as a form of relief from removal. During my internship with the EOIR, I will assist the Associate General Counsels with their work. The General Counsels work on the development of agency regulations, review and comment on proposed legislation, and respond to Freedom of Information and Privacy Act requests. They also administer EOIR's Attorney Discipline Program and the Fraud Program, and coordinate EOIR's involvement in litigation. Through this internship, I hope to gain a better understanding of immigration law and legal policymaking in the field of immigration.

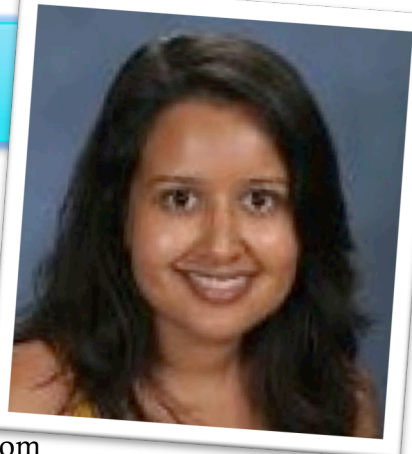




Navneet Jaswal

Originally from St. Louis, MO, I attended Saint Louis University where I majored in Political Science, International Studies and Women's Studies. At SLU, I was the Pre-Law Department's coordinator for community service and was lucky enough to help facilitate programs such as "Missouri Youth In Government" and "Project Citizen" with local high school students. I ultimately earned masters degree at SLU in Political Science with a concentration in Law, Culture, and Politics. Prior to beginning law school, I spent two years serving as a Teach For America Corps Member, during which I received my teaching certification and taught 2nd, 4th, and 5th grade for the Saint Louis Public Schools District. Recently, I completed my first year at The George Washington University Law School and will be working for the D.C. Rental Housing Commission this summer where I hope to hone my legal research and writing skills through drafting decisions regarding appeals to the agency.

Sonia Desai



My name is Sonia Desai and I am a third-year law student at The George Washington University Law School. Prior to law school, I served as a U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer in Botswana for two years, where I assisted the Ministry of Education in the implementation of a national life skills education pilot program in the government schools. I graduated from the University of Miami, cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa, with majors in International Studies and Political Science, and minors in English and Ecosystem Science and Policy.

This summer, I will be interning at the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor at the U.S. Department of State. In particular, I will be a Program Intern at the Office of Global Programs, where I will work to promote international legal standards for human rights through assignments that involve research and evaluation of complex democracy and international human rights issues and ensuring adequate oversight of legal assistance instruments. Through this internship, I hope to learn more about and gain experience with the practical utilization of international legal instruments by the U.S. government and the intersection between human rights law and international assistance.



Sri Srinivasan and Why South Asians Should Care About the Federal Courts

By Sandhya Bhatija

When word got out that Sri Srinivasan was nominated to a federal appeals court, the South Asian community was – possibly for the first time – excited about the judiciary.

In April, members of the North American South Asian Bar Association and the South Asian Bar Association of D.C. flooded Srinivasan's nomination hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee to show their support, knowing that if Srinivasan was confirmed, South Asians would be represented for the first time on a federal appeals court in the United States.

From the time President Obama announced Srinivasan's nomination, to the day he was confirmed 97-0 by the Senate on May 23, the South Asian community rallied behind him. They took an interest in the judiciary and in educating others about what this meant for South Asians. Their efforts paid off, and in the end, we have a judge, born in Chandigarh India and raised in Lawrence, Kansas, sitting on what is considered the second most powerful court in the country.

It's a huge victory for our community and it should be celebrated. But South Asians shouldn't stop now. Whether it's access to health care, racial and religious profiling or immigration laws – issues impacting South Asians are continuously before the federal courts. We have a chance to ensure that the judges that hear these cases are fair and are able to fully understand and appreciate the arguments made for them.

As of June 10, there are 81 vacancies, and 20 future vacancies, on federal courts across the country. President Obama is working with U.S. senators to fill these vacancies. The president, in filling district court seats, relies on recommendations from home state senators in order to ensure the process moves smoothly and that the candidate is not blocked later on.

But despite this, there is still unprecedented obstruction in confirming Obama's nominees. About 75 percent of President Obama's nominees waited more than 100 days for a floor vote, while on 15 percent of President Bush's nominees waited that long. On average, President Obama's district court nominees wait 108 days from committee hearing to full Senate vote, compared to 34 days when George W. Bush was president.

These delays are a problem because it makes our judicial system inefficient. In 2009, the average wait for a civil litigant's trial was 25.3 months. That's almost two years before someone can receive justice.

The federal courts can't protect our rights if they aren't working at maximum capacity and we need to do something about this. The judicial nominations process does not exist in a vacuum. We can have a say.

For starters, we can help by giving names of outstanding candidates to our home state senators, who suggest these candidates to the president. We can also begin to educate members of the South Asian community about the role the courts play in their daily lives and encourage them to tell their senators the types of judges they want on the bench.

As a minority group, we appreciate the importance of diversity. It's not that diverse judges will always side with the diverse parties before them, but that the judges will be more likely to decide a case fairly. President Obama has made a commitment to appointing diverse judges. His confirmed nominees have been more diverse than any president in history: 42 percent women, 18 percent African American, 12 percent Latino and 7 percent Asian American.

While Srinivasan's nomination is momentous, it's just the beginning. President Obama has praised Srinivasan as a "trailblazer who personifies the best of America." Now that he has been confirmed to the D.C. Circuit, many are speculating he could be next in line for a seat on the U.S. Supreme Court.

The message we can take out of this is that we can make a difference and we can influence this process. South Asians shouldn't only be involved when there is a candidate representing our community. As a growing minority community, issues that impact us will continue to go before the federal courts. It's in our best interest to advocate that current vacancies are filled with diverse judges who understand the Constitution is about expanding the rights of all Americans, not the privileged few.

Sandhya Bathija is the campaign manager for Legal Progress, the legal policy and communications program at the Center for American Progress. A key mission of Legal Progress is to educate the public about the impact of the courts on issues they care most about

