

‘Chill the judiciary’: Judge whose son was murdered sees death threats not being counted

By Jordan Green



Official figures for an alarming rise in threats to state and federal judges do not include cases described by judges in Florida, said federal Judge Esther Salas — who saw her son killed and husband wounded in July 2020, in an attack meant to target her.

Daniel Anderl, Judge Salas’s son, was 20 when he was murdered. Her husband, Mark Anderl, was severely wounded.

In March this year, the U.S. Marshals Service issued a bulletin revealing that federal judges “in several districts throughout the country” have been targeted with anonymous pizza deliveries — an increasingly common threat tactic among far-right and nihilistic groups.

The targets reportedly included immediate family members of Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett.

Some of the pizzas were delivered to judges in the name of Daniel Anderl.

“They’re weaponizing my beautiful son’s name,” Salas told Raw Story. “Everything he stands for is love and light.”

At last count, the number of judges who have received pizzas was 103, including 20 in her son’s name, Salas said. But she added that last week, she participated in a panel with state court judges from Florida, some of whom revealed that they had received pizzas in her son’s name.

Those aren’t included in the official tally, Salas said.

The gunman who killed Salas’s son and wounded her husband was a self-described “anti-feminist” lawyer who disparaged the judge for being a Latina. He killed himself before facing charges.

Since then, Salas has become an outspoken tribune, raising the alarm about threats against judges. Earlier this year, when calls for judicial impeachments in response to rulings adverse to the Trump administration erupted, Salas didn’t hesitate to speak up.

“We have to, as judges, without talking about cases specifically and without getting into matters coming before the court — we are free to stick up for democracy, and we are free to defend ourselves and the rule of law,” Salas said.

“Traditionally, we have been counseled to not speak, to allow our rulings to speak for themselves. We’re in a different time now.”

‘This isn’t going away’

Last Saturday was the fifth anniversary of Daniel Anderl’s death. On Sunday, he would have celebrated his 25th birthday.

On July 31, three other federal judges, including two who have received pizza deliveries in Daniel’s name, will speak at an online forum hosted by Speak Up for Justice, an advocacy group, and concerning “attacks, intimidation and threats to democracy.”

John J. McConnell, the chief judge for the District of Rhode Island, received a pizza after ruling against the Trump administration’s effort to cut off federal funding to the states.

With his son, Judge Robert Lasnik in the Western District of Washington was targeted with pizza deliveries after Lasnik criticized President Trump in an interview with Oregon Public Broadcasting, for calling another federal judge “a radical left-wing lunatic.”

The July 31 panel will also include Judge John C. Coughenour, who sits on the bench with Lasnik and whose home was both swatted, with armed police responding to a false report, and targeted by a bomb threat after he ruled against Trump’s attempt to end birthright citizenship.

Salas said she has tried to respect fellow jurists who prefer to maintain silence, and did not actively recruit them to join her in speaking out.

“It’s definitely a field in which I’ve been standing with a few and not as many as I think we need to come forward,” she told Raw Story.

“This isn’t going away. The death threats and the numbers are hovering to break records, and not in a good way, in terms of threat investigations. This is unprecedented. This is what I view as a strategic, collaborated effort to chill the judiciary by sending these pizzas.”

The FBI declined to comment. The U.S. Marshals Service could not be reached for comment.

‘Identified threats’

Even before Trump returned to office this year, threats against judges were on the rise.

In his 2024 Year End Report on the Federal Judiciary, Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts noted “a significant uptick in identified threats at all levels of the judiciary.”

Roberts also identified four interrelated phenomena threatening the independence of the judiciary: “violence, intimidation, disinformation, and threats to defy lawfully entered judgements.”

Roberts wrote that the number of threats against judges had tripled over the past decade. Citing the murder of Salas’ son, the chief justice also noted the murders of retired Wisconsin state Judge John Roemer in 2022 and Maryland state Judge Andrew Wilkinson in 2023.

In 2022, a man upset about the Supreme Court removing the federal right to abortion by overturning Roe v Wade attempted to kill Justice Brett Kavanaugh.

Salas said she views such threats as part of a right-wing campaign, “from the top down,” to undermine democracy by spreading “disinformation that the judiciary is corrupt.”

Salas also flagged as “disinformation” the use of terms such as “monsters,” “deranged” and “idiot,” deployed to describe judges respectively by Trump, Attorney General Pam Bondi and Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem.

“For me, this is an attempt to erode the public’s confidence in the judicial system,” she said.

“[The public is] reading it on social media platforms; they’re seeing it in the news. After a while, these false claims are repeated over and over again, people believe it. And that is not true.”



Salas told Raw Story she doesn't believe any judges "take these jobs with agendas," while noting that the system provides an opportunity to appeal to a higher court if people disagree with decisions at the trial and appellate levels.

Salas said judges are often reluctant to disclose their profession when they go out in public both because they fear for their safety and because the position no longer commands the respect it once did.

Salas says she hopes the July 31 forum with her three colleagues will allow "people to see the individuals that have been bombarded with death threats and pizzas and everything else ... to see the human being behind the black robe."