

EDITORS: Still and video images will be available for download immediately after the rally.



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Hundreds gather at White House to demand Pres. Biden let youth climate case be heard

'We will not be silenced' by the DOJ, youth say

WASHINGTON—Young people suing state and federal bodies over climate change, along with their supporters, turned out today to demand the White House allow a key case against the United States to move forward.

"We will not be silenced!" the plaintiffs and supporters shouted toward the White House during "My Voice. My Rights. Our Future. A Rally to #SaveJuliana" demonstration.

Demonstrators from several generations came to support the 21 youth plaintiffs of *Juliana v. United States*, who allege federal actions causing climate change violate their constitutional rights to life, liberty and property. The case is currently before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

The Dept. of Justice has fought the *Juliana* youth relentlessly for nine years across three administrations. Most recently, DOJ made an unheard-of *seventh* request for a writ of mandamus, a legal tool the department itself calls "extraordinary." This extreme tack is meant to shut the case down before evidence is even heard.

Last month, 30 members of Congress filed a “friend of the court” brief calling for the case to move forward.

During the rally, Isaac Vergun of Beaverton, Ore., was one of several plaintiffs who wore a symbolic gag. He described both outrage at the efforts of the government to silence young people, and hope they will ultimately prevail.

“We keep fighting because this case represents not just our voices as plaintiffs but the collective cry of an entire generation demanding accountability on climate change,” Vergun said. He joined the suit as a plaintiff in 2015 at age 13. The day of the rally was his 22nd birthday.

“When we finally have our day in court, we *will* win and we’ll force the United States, the biggest contributor to climate change in the world, to make systemic change and phase out fossil fuels.”

Juliana is one of several constitutional climate cases currently in federal or state courts. In a significant victory last year, Montana’s District Court ruled in *Held v. Montana* that that state’s laws that promote fossil fuels and require turning a blind eye to climate change are unconstitutional. Our Children’s Trust represents the youth plaintiffs in these cases.

Sunday’s speakers also included Zanagee Artis, a youth climate leader with Zero Hour, Jerome Foster II, of Waic Up and the youngest member of the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council, and Hortencia, an Indigenous elder from the Anahuac Basin in Mexico and spokesperson for #IProtectTheWetland.

Layla H., one of 12 youth plaintiffs in *Layla H. v. Commonwealth of Virginia*, also spoke at the rally. She noted children across Virginia are suffering from more asthma attacks and incidents of Lyme disease because of climate change.

“My family and I have experienced countless extreme storms that have resulted in tens of thousands of dollars of damage to our home and land. I’ve done homework by candlelight multiple times as power outages continue to increase in frequency, experienced severe heat rash due to climbing temperatures, and ultimately have begun to feel like the future I am planning for as a young adult is in no way guaranteed.”

Outside the White House, she posed questions to her state and federal government leaders “Why is it that children as young as eight and ten years old have to beg you to protect their most fundamental rights?,” Layla asked. “And most importantly, why are you so eager to silence them?”

For young people, who cannot yet vote, the courts are the only remedy when their rights have been violated, said Mat dos Santos, co-executive director and general counsel with Our Children’s Trust.

“These young people are doing exactly what they’ve been taught by elders—when they see a wrong, they take steps to right it,” dos Santos said. “It’s the adults in the Department of Justice who are letting the country down by refusing to let these courageous youth be heard. President Biden should do the right thing and let this case move to trial.”

In recent weeks, 70,000+ emails have been sent to President Biden and members of his administration. The case, and the Department of Justice's egregious behavior, has garnered international attention and 300,000+ signatures in support of the *Juliana* youth will be delivered to the White House and Department of Justice.

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Our Children's Trust was founded in 2010 on the idea that courts are vital to democracy and empowered to protect our children and the planet. Without a stable climate system, every natural resource we rely upon to exercise our basic human rights—life, liberty, home, happiness—is under threat. Our work will be achieved when there is universal recognition of children's climate rights by courts around the world and children's fundamental rights to life on this planet are protected. www.ourchildrenstrust.org