

News

BCLP FILES AMICUS BRIEF ON BEHALF OF COALITION OF CIVIL RIGHTS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS IN SUPPORT OF THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS SERVICE

Dec 05, 2025

International law firm BCLP today announced that it has filed an amicus brief in the U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts on behalf of a coalition led by The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights urging the court to issue a preliminary injunction to stop the U.S. Department of Justice from unlawfully shutting down the Community Relations Service (CRS). The coalition includes more than 102 civil-rights, community-based, educational, faith, disability, and public-safety organizations, who say that the illegal closing of this agency will deprive communities of color and other historically marginalized groups of critical services and resources for addressing conflicts ranging from police-involved shootings to violence against houses of worship.

Created by Congress in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, CRS was a standalone federal agency dedicated to mediating civil-rights conflicts and helping communities navigate crises involving hate crimes and other civil rights matters. Congress expanded and reaffirmed CRS's mission repeatedly for more than six decades.

But on October 31, 2025, the Justice Department unilaterally eliminated CRS, withdrawing it from ongoing mediations, closing regional offices, and terminating the staff Congress funded to carry out CRS's statutory duties. These actions occurred against the express direction of Congress and without legal authority.

In the brief, which was filed in support of plaintiffs in *Ethical Society for Police, et al. v. Pamela Bondi, et al.*, the coalition states that the Justice Department's claim that CRS's only statutory obligation is to submit an annual report to Congress ignores decades of Congressional action, statutory text, and the reality that CRS has long functioned as the federal government's primary conciliator during civil-rights and hate-crimes emergencies.

Further, the brief challenges the Justice Department's assertion that CRS's mission could be fulfilled by a single employee seated in a different prosecutorial agency – despite Congress having funded annually a national structure of regions and field offices – which, given the scope and breadth of CRS's duties, is legally and practically impossible.

The brief also documents how CRS's interventions have historically helped preserve peace during watershed civil rights moments – from the voting-rights marches in Selma, to school desegregation in Boston, to the aftermath of the Tree of Life massacre, the Pulse Nightclub attack, and the killings of George Floyd and Tyre Nichols.

Saurish Appleby-Bhattacharjee, a BCLP partner and former federal prosecutor who advised the coalition along with firm lawyers based in Chicago, St. Louis and New York, said, "CRS, created by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, is a federal civil-rights conflict mediator, which serves a unique and Congressionally mandated role. After DOJ implemented its plans to unlawfully shutter CRS this fall, several plaintiffs filed suit in the District of Massachusetts, seeking to enjoin DOJ's actions."

He continued, "Based on BCLP's strong amicus advocacy in other matters, including the National Guard cases this year in California, Illinois, and Oregon, various stakeholders impacted by CRS's shuttering reached out and requested the firm's help in filing an amicus brief on behalf of the coalition. BCLP immediately accepted the invitation and worked to draft the brief filed today, highlighting CRS's history, critical work, and the harms that result from CRS's unlawful shuttering by DOJ."

MEET THE TEAM



Saurish Appleby-Bhattacharjee

Partner, Chicago / Los Angeles

saurish@bclplaw.com

[+1 312 602 5004](tel:+13126025004)

This material is not comprehensive, is for informational purposes only, and is not legal advice. Your use or receipt of this material does not create an attorney-client relationship between us. If you require legal advice, you should consult an attorney regarding your particular circumstances. The choice of a lawyer is an important decision and should not be based solely upon advertisements. This material may be "Attorney Advertising" under the ethics and professional rules of certain jurisdictions. For advertising purposes, St. Louis, Missouri, is designated BCLP's principal office and Kathrine Dixon (kathrine.dixon@bclplaw.com) as the responsible attorney.