

The American dream is the promise that success and prosperity are within reach for any American through hard work. That promise rests on the strength and stability of the rule of law, grounded in the United States Constitution. At its core, the rule of law ensures that no one is above the law, that everyone is treated equally, and that all people, regardless of position or power, are held accountable to the same legal standards.

This year's Law Day theme, "**The Rule of Law and the American Dream**," underscores that fairness and opportunity can only exist when laws are applied consistently and justly. That requires clear and fair processes for enforcing laws — processes that are transparent, impartial and accessible. It also depends on a judiciary that is free from outside influence to interpret laws and resolve disputes. Equally important, the rule of law also guarantees fundamental human rights, protecting the freedoms that allow individuals to pursue opportunity and live with dignity.

These principles endure only when they are known, understood and upheld.

Because the Constitution empowers the people to govern themselves, it depends on an informed citizenry. Freedom of the press, protected by the First Amendment, serves as a lens through which "We the People" can evaluate whether the rule of law is being honored. A free press promotes transparency, reveals when individuals or institutions attempt to place themselves above the law, and highlights whether people are being treated equally. It also reveals when human rights are violated by the government.

The nation's history shows that while its ideals are enduring, progress toward them is often uneven. Journalists have played a critical role in that progress by documenting injustices, exposing failures in legal systems, and calling attention to moments when accountability is lacking. From civil rights reporting to coverage of local governments and courts, journalists help ensure that laws are applied fairly and that public officials remain accountable.

When the press is free, it strengthens both the rule of law and the American dream. It gives citizens the knowledge they need to understand their rights and advocate for fairness. When the press is constrained, transparency diminishes, accountability weakens, and the protections guaranteed under the rule of law are at risk.

As we observe Law Day, it is important to recognize that the rule of law and a free press work together to safeguard equality, accountability, fairness, judicial independence and human rights — ensuring the American dream remains attainable to all.



★ Law Day 2026

Rule of Law and the American Dream

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This was written by Mary Miller, Education Services Director for the New York Newspapers Foundation's News Media Literacy/NIE program. For teaching guides and lesson plans about the First Amendment and Law Day, go to <https://www.nynpa.com/nie/lawday.html>.