News



Minister JaNaé Bates Imari, center, co-executive director of the interfaith group ISAIAH, speaks during a news conference, Tuesday, July 7, 2026, at the Minneapolis State Capitol in Saint Paul, Minn. (Video screen grab)

Adelle M. Banks

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Four months before the midterm elections, Minnesota faith leaders who previously have protested against federal immigration agents have unveiled a multistate initiative to ensure fair elections.

"Our churches, our mosques, our synagogues, our places of worship will become democracy hubs," said Minister JaNaé Bates Imari, co-executive director of the interfaith group ISAIAH Minnesota, as she opened a Tuesday (July 7) news conference at the Minneapolis State Capitol in Saint Paul backed by dozens of other clergy. "We are doing all that we can to ensure that every single elected official on every level of government understands that they are also to be held accountable."

In December, faith leaders in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul area organized to counter a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement operation that targeted undocumented Somali immigrants. In June, they decided to spearhead a new cause, in part due to concerns about possible Trump administration interference in the elections. In a brief interview in May, when asked if he would send ICE agents or National Guard members to the polls in November, President Trump said, "I'd do anything necessary to make sure we have honest elections."

On Tuesday, Bates Imari said clergy gathered in eight other states to express dedication to a "team democracy" approach to the election season.

"We are going to step up and lean into our moral authority to ensure that we will not allow any kind of federal intimidation or overreach to try to break any of our constitutional rights to have a say in our vote and in our voice," she said.

Organizers of the "Faith in Us" movement said they have collected more than 1,700 names on an online letter calling on election administrators, secretaries of state and other elected officials to protect the voting process. The letter cites examples of possible limitations that they oppose.

"We are deeply concerned about the executive order severely restricting vote-by-mail, and we are outraged by the rapid gerrymandering of racially discriminatory election maps in many states following the Supreme Court's decision to end the Voting Rights Act commitment to racial equality in elections," reads the letter.

Movement leaders plan to deliver the letter to elected officials with a request that they pledge to abide by state laws and the Constitution and not comply with executive orders or Department of Justice requests that would restrict voting.

Todd Lippert, lead multifaith organizer for Faith in Us, told Religion News Service his organization applauded a recent court ruling that blocked parts of the executive order that restricted mail-in ballots.

"(B)ut with the DOJ's decision to appeal that decision, and the Postmaster General's recent comments that the U.S. Postal Service will no longer deliver mail ballots to states that refuse to hand over voter rolls, we remain concerned that these actions will continue to sow chaos and disenfranchise voters," he said.

Other clergy speaking in Minnesota joined in opposing threats to fair elections and supporting the importance of the right to vote.

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"Everyone must be able to vote without intimidation from ICE or any other armed force, and every vote must be counted," said Rabbi Adam Stock Spilker, senior rabbi of Mount Zion Hebrew Congregation in St. Paul. "As religious leaders, we are coming here into the public square, into the realm of community and politics, because our faith means nothing if our spiritual and American values of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are not actualized in the communities where we live."

Imam Makram El-Amin of Masjid An-Nur in Minneapolis voiced support for "my Somali brothers and sisters who have been under attack by this administration" and said he is urging fellow imams to assist people in registering and voting.

"Every eligible voter should be free from fear and intimidation while approaching the polls," he said. "Voting is more than a civic act. It is what we call in Islam an 'amana.' It is a sacred duty, a sacred trust."

As the U.S. has just marked the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the Faith in Us events and others this week and later this summer are turning greater attention to civic engagement.

For example, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism is holding one of three "Protect Our Vote" trainings on Wednesday. On Thursday, NETWORK Advocates for Catholic Social Justice plans to launch a nonpartisan voter education and engagement campaign called "See.Love.Vote" with dozens of faith and secular groups.

Under the "Freedom Summer" theme — reminiscent of 1964 Civil Rights activists' voter registration work — other activities are being planned, from an African Methodist Episcopal Church "Freedom Revival" in Orlando, Florida, on Friday to a "Good Trouble Lives On" weekend in mid-July that encourages faith leaders to preach on the "good trouble" theme often voiced by the late ordained minister and Congressman John Lewis.