

August 31, 2026

Early Career Scholars Medal Selection Committee
The American Law Institute

Dear Members of the Selection Committee:

It is my great privilege to nominate Farhang Heydari, Associate Professor of Law at Vanderbilt Law School, for the American Law Institute's Early Career Scholars Medal. Professor Heydari joined our faculty in 2023 and has held a tenure-track appointment since that time, placing him within the Medal's eligibility window. In my seventeen years as Dean of Vanderbilt Law School, I have reviewed and recruited a large number of junior scholars. I can say with confidence that few have arrived with a research agenda as fully formed as Professor Heydari's, and fewer still have executed it so deftly.

Professor Heydari's scholarship proceeds from a deceptively simple observation: The law of policing has trained its attention on the municipal patrol officer. Yet that focus leaves most of the machinery of American policing unexamined and unregulated. Professor Heydari's project is to identify the institutional actors and incentive structures that generate policing on the ground. His scholarship seeks to explain why existing law has failed to reach the many other sources of policing besides the municipal officer, and it specifies the legal architecture to reach them. Each of Professor Heydari's articles locates an overlooked source of enforcement power, describes it in previously undocumented detail, and suggests a novel, concrete regulatory design for the future. The result is a body of scholarship that is both descriptively original and directly usable by legislators and agency officials. That combination is precisely what this Medal is designed to recognize.

Two early articles established the method. In *The Private Role in Public Safety*, 90 GEO. WASH. L. REV. 696 (2022), Professor Heydari mapped the breadth of private influence across the criminal process, from crime prevention and emergency response through traditional investigation and adjudication procedures. There, Professor Heydari argued that public safety law must also govern those private inputs, rather than treat them as background conditions. In *The Invisible Driver of Policing*, 76 STAN. L. REV. 1 (2024), Professor Heydari demonstrated how the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration spent decades training state and local police how to use traffic stops to find drug traffickers, violent offenders, and even terrorists. That campaign, which proceeded almost entirely without public oversight, pulled the agency away from the systemic regulation of automakers—its actual mission. Professor Heydari then generalized this case study as a broader account of how non-law-enforcement agencies abandon regulatory duties in favor of individual criminal enforcement. Both of these articles were selected for review in JOTWELL, a distinction rarely accorded a scholar at this early stage.

Professor Heydari's article, *Rethinking Federal Inducement of Pretext Stops*, 2024 WIS. L. REV. 181, moves from a single agency to the federal apparatus as a whole. There, he catalogues the grants, training programs, and asset forfeiture arrangements through which federal agencies induce local departments to make pretextual stops. He further demonstrates how this practice of pretextual stops solves few crimes and imposes substantial social costs. Professor Heydari proposes that the federal government subject these stops to rigorous cost-benefit analysis; he further calls for greater monitoring of the incentives that drive these stops by Congress and the executive branch.

The Sheriff's Constitution, 113 GEO. L.J. 1041 (2025), then turns to another problem of constitutional urgency: the "constitutional sheriff" who declines to enforce the laws of which he disapproves. Professor Heydari situates the phenomenon within the long, understudied history of the sheriff's office. He shows that the principal features distinguishing sheriffs from police chiefs—direct election, countywide jurisdiction, and minimal supervision—can be corrosive to the rule of law. Professor Heydari's suggested remedy pairs reviving state judicial review of sheriff discretion with legislative reforms setting clearer enforcement parameters for sheriffs. As with all Professor Heydari's articles, the article produces ambitious, but feasible, solutions for state actors to regulate the less well understood forms of policing.

Professor Heydari's newest solo article, *Weird Cops*, 79 VAND. L. REV. (forthcoming 2026), may prove the most consequential of all. The article also closes the circle on the administrative-state thread running through his earlier work. *Weird Cops* identifies a category of law enforcement officials that legal scholarship has essentially ignored: over 130,000 officers employed by *regulatory agencies*, rather than police departments. These officers (i.e., the "weird cops") operate routinely alongside municipal police and federal agents. Furthermore, they are an integral part of the administrative state, rather than a curiosity at its margins. Professor Heydari further demonstrates how these officers carry broad police powers, despite facially narrow mandates. According to Professor Heydari, their signature risk is mission drift—the tendency of these officers, who are commissioned for a discrete regulatory purpose, to expand into the enforcement priorities of conventional policing. He additionally demonstrates how these officers are subject to even less oversight than the municipal police officers they increasingly resemble. Professor Heydari's proposed "limited cop" model would confine the authority of agency officers to enforcement actions tied to the agency's actual mission. Although the article will not be published until later this year, I expect it to define a field.

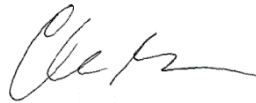
Professor Heydari's influence on public policy is not merely prospective. Before joining us at Vanderbilt, he served as the founding Executive Director of the Policing Project at New York University School of Law, where he built a staff of thirty and directed an advocacy program on policing technology. Professor Heydari chaired the Subcommittee on AI and Law Enforcement of the National Artificial Intelligence Advisory Committee. Under his leadership, the Subcommittee issued recommendations on public summary reporting for high-risk AI, public use policies for high-risk AI, and field testing of law enforcement AI tools. In addition, Professor Heydari served on the Axon AI and Policing Technology Ethics Board, where he authored the Board's reports on facial recognition and automated license plate readers. He is a principal author of the Department of Justice guidebook on collecting and analyzing police-stop data. Furthermore, Professor Heydari's evaluations of cutting-edge police technologies, which he has documented with coauthors in both *Putting Police Body-Worn Camera Footage to Work: A Civil*

Liberties Evaluation of Truleo's AI Analytics Platform, 46 CARDOZO L. REV. 2247 (2025), and *Regulating Police Robots*, 16 U.C. IRVINE L. REV. (forthcoming 2026), give regulators a framework for governing innovations adopted faster than the law can absorb them. Professor Heydari's scholarship consistently provides grounded, well-researched recommendations on novel topics directly to the officials best positioned to act upon them.

I should add that Professor Heydari is an exceptional teacher and colleague. He has won Vanderbilt's Hall-Hartman Outstanding Professor Award four times in three years of teaching. In addition to teaching the law school curricular staples Criminal Law and Criminal Procedure: Investigation, Professor Heydari has built two additional courses—Administering the Carceral State and Policing, Technology, and Artificial Intelligence—and has constructed his own materials for both courses. Professor Heydari is an active figure on campus, serving the law school and university through active committee work, presenting frequently at faculty workshops, and engaging in the broader Nashville community (including serving as a board member of a local nonprofit, Open Table Nashville). Not surprisingly, our faculty voted in December 2025 to promote him to Associate Professor of Law in one of the most enthusiastic proceedings I have ever witnessed.

Professor Heydari produces precisely the kind of scholarship the American Law Institute exists to encourage. He finds the parts of the legal system that no one is watching, describes them with rigor, and tells lawmakers what to do about them. For all these reasons, I recommend Professor Farhang Heydari for the Early Career Scholars Medal with great enthusiasm.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Chris Guthrie", with a stylized, flowing script.

Chris Guthrie
Dean
University Distinguished Professor
John Wade-Kent Syverud Professor of Law