



PRESS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

**Hon. Lawrence K. Marks
Chief Administrative Judge**

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New Committee Aims to Promote Court Access for People with Disabilities

New York – As part of the State court system’s initiative to achieve and maintain excellence throughout the judicial branch, Chief Judge Janet DiFiore and Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence K. Marks today announced the formation of an advisory panel charged with developing an action plan to improve access to the New York State courts for all persons, including those with visual, hearing, communication, mobility, cognitive and other disabilities.

The courts’ Advisory Committee on Access for People with Disabilities comprises Unified Court System judges, clerks and administrators, as well as representatives from legal services providers, law firms and advocacy groups from around the State. The Committee will be led by Hon. Rosalyn H. Richter, Associate Justice of the Appellate Division, First Department.

The advisory panel will examine a broad scope of issues, including the procedures for requesting accommodations; the availability of sign language interpreters, as well as the quality of remote video interpreting services for the deaf and hard of hearing; the navigability for those with visual and other disabilities of online court programs and services; barriers faced by jurors who have a disability; and training and other needs to ensure best practices in providing access for court users with special needs. The Committee will submit its recommendations to the Chief Judge on these issues, among other topics of concern.

Court users are protected from disability discrimination by the American Disabilities Act (ADA) and other statutes. Each courthouse has a liaison to assist in providing reasonable accommodations to litigants, attorneys and other court users with special needs. The court system employs a statewide coordinator to oversee the facilitation of such requests, offering training, technical and other resources to the liaisons, as well as to judges and other court staff.

The new panel, which counts the courts' statewide coordinator, Dan Weitz, among its members, will explore how the New York State courts can more effectively respond to and manage accommodation requests and related inquiries.

Additionally, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Edwina G. Mendelson, another member of the advisory group, who heads the courts' newly expanded Office for Justice Initiatives (OJI) – which works to ensure meaningful access to justice for all those who pass through New York's state courthouses – will work closely with the Committee members to seek ways the OJI can enhance accessibility for court users with special needs.

“Access to the courts is a fundamental right, protected by our state and federal constitutions. The advisory panel will work to identify and remove barriers to court facilities and services, wherever possible, ensuring that New York's state courts are readily accessible to all people, regardless of disability or any other factor. I am thankful to the Committee members for their deep understanding of that principle,” said Chief Judge DiFiore.

“Chief Judge DiFiore and I look forward to working with the new advisory group as we strive to eliminate barriers to justice. I commend the Committee's members for their dedication to this critically important effort,” said Chief Administrative Judge Marks.

“I am honored to be chairing the Committee, and thank the Chief Judge and Chief Administrative Judge for their commitment to ensuring full and equal access to our state courts. I know we can make a difference with the assistance of our knowledgeable Committee members,” said Judge Richter.

A roster of the Advisory Committee members is attached.

New York Courts' Advisory Committee on Access for People with Disabilities

Chair

Hon. Rosalyn H. Richter
Associate Justice, Appellate Division, First Department

Members

Maureen Belluscio
Staff Attorney, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, Disability Justice Program

Anne Callagy
Director of Government Benefits, The Legal Aid Society - Civil Practice

Beth Diebel
District Executive, Third Judicial District, New York Courts

Hon. Vincent DiNolfo
County Court Judge, Monroe County

Hon. Sherry Klein Heitler
Chief of Office of Policy and Planning, NYS Office of Court Administration

Hon. Deborah Kaplan
Statewide Coordinating Judge for Family Violence Cases, NYS Office of Court Administration

Kleo King
Deputy Commissioner and General Counsel, NYC Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities

Eve Markewich
Partner, Markewich and Rosenstock LLP

Hon. Edwina G. Mendelson
Deputy Chief Administrative Judge, Office for Justice Initiatives, New York Courts

Hon. Juanita Bing Newton
Dean, New York State Judicial Institute

Charles Perreaud
Jury Commissioner and Court Interpreting Coordinator, Seventh Judicial District, New York Courts

Hon. Robert Pipia
District Court Judge, Nassau County

Michael Schwartz
Supervising Attorney and Director, Disability Rights Clinic, Office of Clinical Legal Education,
Syracuse University College of Law

Liz Sergi
Senior Social Worker, Helen Keller Services for the Blind

Charles Small
Chief Clerk for Civil Matters, Kings County Supreme Court

Nahid Sorooshyari
Senior Staff Attorney, Mobilization for Justice (formerly MFY Legal Services)

Dan Weitz
Director, Division of Professional & Court Services, NYS Office of Court Administration

Counsel to the Committee
Barbara Zahler-Gringer, NYS Office of Court Administration

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