



# **NEWS RELEASE**

**New York State  
Unified Court System**

**Hon. Joseph A. Zayas  
Chief Administrative Judge**

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## **New Downstate Co-Chair Appointed to Failla LGBTQ Commission**

**NEW YORK**—Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson today announced the appointment of New York State Court of Claims Judge Javier E. Vargas as the new downstate co-chair of the Richard C. Failla LGBTQ Commission. Judge Vargas will serve alongside upstate co-chair State Supreme Court Justice Grace M. Hanlon of Western New York’s Eighth Judicial District.

Judge Vargas succeeds New York County Family Court Supervising Judge Karen Lupuloff as co-chair. Judge Lupuloff, who is retiring from the bench, will remain a member of the Commission.

“Judge Vargas brings a wealth of experience, a deep commitment to equity, and a powerful personal story to this key leadership role. His appointment reflects the Commission’s ongoing mission to ensure that all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, are treated with fairness and dignity in our courts. I am confident that the Failla LGBTQ Commission will continue to thrive and expand its vital work under the leadership of Judges Vargas and Hanlon,” said Chief Judge Wilson.

Judge Vargas, the first openly gay Latino judge appointed to the New York State Court of Claims, has served the judiciary in numerous roles over more than two decades. His judicial career includes appointments to the New York City Family Court and Civil Court, as well as key legal positions within the New York State Unified Court System. A native of Arecibo, Puerto Rico, he came to New York to pursue higher education and a life of authenticity and service.

Judge Vargas is a frequent lecturer on topics including the Child Victims Act, domestic relations law, housing law, and diversity/intersectionality. Active in numerous professional associations, he currently serves as Chair-Elect of the Hispanic National Bar Association’s Judicial Division and Vice President of the Latino Judges Association and is a former HNBA regional deputy president and past chair of the Puerto Rican Bar Association Scholarship Fund Selection Committee. Judge Vargas is the recipient of numerous accolades, among them the International Association of LGBTQ Judges’ President’s Award, the Cervantes Society’s Spirit Award, and the HNBA’s Latino Judge of the Year Award.

“I want to extend my sincere gratitude to Chief Judge Wilson for this tremendous honor and for his confidence in my ability to serve as Commission co-chair, alongside Justice Grace Hanlon, with our dedicated commissioners who share my deep commitment to equity, dignity, and meaningful inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals within the judiciary and throughout our courts,” said Judge Vargas. “I hope to use my life and professional experiences to offer a new perspective —

working collaboratively to advance the Commission’s urgent, impactful work — and am eager to contribute my knowledge, energy, and steadfast commitment to ensuring that our courts continue to be humane places for all people. I know I have big shoes to fill, as my dear colleague Judge Karen Lupuloff co-chaired the Commission with great earnestness and fortitude.”

Expressing his appreciation to Judge Lupuloff for her tireless advocacy as the Commission’s co-chair since June 2023, Chief Judge Wilson added, “I am grateful to Judge Lupuloff for her dedication and many accomplishments as downstate co-chair of the Commission, which has advanced its goals and extended its reach thanks to her perseverance, sensitivity, and collaborative approach. I am pleased that she will be staying on as a member of the Commission so that we may continue to benefit from her experience, talents, and passion for equal justice.”

Established in 2016, the Richard C. Failla LGBTQ Commission serves as a vital advocate for LGBTQ issues within the New York State Unified Court System. The Commission promotes equal access to justice, supports LGBTQ employees and litigants, and partners with community organizations to foster a more inclusive legal environment.

For more information about the Failla Commission, visit <https://ww2.nycourts.gov/ip/LGBTQ/index.shtml>.



Judge Javier E. Vargas

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