



# **NEWS RELEASE**

**New York State  
Unified Court System**

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

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## **New Judicial Co-Chair Named to Surrogate's Court Advisory Committee**

**NEW YORK**—Chief Administrative Judge Joseph A. Zayas and First Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Norman St. George today announced the appointment of Albany County Surrogate Deborah S. Kearns as Judicial Co-Chair of the Surrogate's Court Advisory Committee. Judge Kearns will serve alongside Queens County Supreme Court Justice and former Queens County Surrogate Peter J. Kelly in leading the Committee.

The SCAC is responsible for proposing legislative changes related to practice and procedure in New York's Surrogate's Courts, which operate in all 62 counties and handle matters involving trusts and estates, adoptions, and guardianships. Judge Kearns, previously a member of the Committee, succeeds New York County Surrogate Renee Roth, who recently passed away.

"Judge Kearns' cross-functional experience and deep knowledge of Surrogate's Court practice make her ideally suited for this pivotal leadership role," said Chief Administrative Judge Zayas. "Her balanced, comprehensive approach will greatly benefit the Committee's work. I look forward to her contributions in her new capacity as Judicial Co-Chair."

"Judge Kearns has devoted her legal and judicial career to Surrogate's Court matters," said First Deputy Chief Administrative Judge St. George. "Her broad expertise, collaborative leadership style, and commitment to innovation will strengthen the Committee's ongoing efforts to advance procedures that support the financial stability and well-being of New Yorkers across the State."

Judge Kearns expressed gratitude for the appointment, stating, "I am honored to be appointed as Co-Chair of the Surrogate's Court Advisory Committee. It is a privilege to assume this role given the remarkable impact former Co-Chair Judge Roth has had on Surrogate's Court law and practice throughout New York State. I look forward to working with Judge Kelly and the members of the Committee to continue enhancing the law and improving services in Surrogate's Courts statewide."

Judge Kearns was elected Surrogate of Albany County in 2024. From 2015 through 2024, she served as Chief Clerk of the Court, supervising personnel, managing resources, drafting decisions, and assisting Surrogate's Court Chief Clerks throughout the Capital Region's Third Judicial District. Before joining the Unified Court System, she was Senior Associate Attorney with the law firm of Lavelle & Finn, LLP, advising individuals and families on tax and long-term care planning, administering estates, and providing pro bono estate planning services. Earlier in her career, she worked as an associate at White & Case LLP in New York City.

A graduate of Albany Law School, Judge Kearns was Executive Editor for Business of the Albany Law Review and is an adjunct faculty member, teaching trusts and estates. She also holds an LL.M. in taxation from New York University and previously directed Albany Law School's Transactions and Tax Law Clinic.

She is a frequent lecturer on Surrogate's Court practice, has authored numerous articles, contributes commentary to McKinney's Surrogate's Court Procedure Act, and serves as Vice Chair of the New York State Bar Association's Surrogate's Court Committee. She has also served in multiple leadership roles within the Surrogate's Court Chief Clerk's Association and was honored by the New York City Fire Department for providing pro bono estate administration assistance to families affected by the 9/11 attacks.

In recognizing Judge Roth's legacy, Chief Administrative Judge Zayas added, "Hon. Renee Roth served as New York County Surrogate in Manhattan for 26 years — from 1982 to 2008 — issuing influential opinions and implementing procedures to enhance court operations. Her longstanding leadership of the SCAC helped drive important legislative reforms, and her impact on Surrogate's Court practice will be felt for years to come."

Judge Kearns' appointment takes effect immediately.



Surrogate Deborah S. Kearns

A roster of the Surrogate's Court Advisory Committee follows.

## **Surrogate's Court Advisory Committee Roster**

### Co-Chairs

Hon. Peter J. Kelly

*Queens County Supreme Court Justice and former Queens County Surrogate*

Hon. Deborah S. Kearns

*Albany County Surrogate*

### Members

Rozlyn Anderson Flood, Esq.

*Assistant Vice President, Planned Giving, Thomas Jefferson University & Jefferson Health*

Hon. John M. Czygier, Jr.

*Former Suffolk County Surrogate*

Carl L. Distefano, Esq.

T. Randolph Harris, Esq.

*McLaughlin & Stern, LLP*

Andrea Hyde, Esq.

*Of Counsel, Bond, Shoeneck & King, PLLC*

Antar P. Jones, Esq.

*The Law Office of Antar P. Jones, PLLC*

Cheryl I. Katz, Esq.

*Partner, Forchelli Deegan Terrana, LLP*

William P. LaPiana, Esq.

*Dean, New York Law School*

Linda LoCascio, Esq.

*Court Attorney-Referee, Kings County Surrogate's Court*

Hon. Margarita Lopez Torres

*Former Kings County Surrogate*

Richard J. Miller, Jr., Esq.

*Hughes Hubbard & Reed LLP*

Hon. Acea Mosey  
*Erie County Surrogate*

Hon. Javier Ortiz  
*New York City Civil Court Judge and former Kings County Public Administrator*

John J. Reddy, Esq.  
*Former Counsel to the New York County Public Administrator*

Lydia Romer, Esq.

Joseph Samulski, Esq.  
*Former Head of Trusts and Estates Department, Bank of New York*

Charles T. Scott, Esq.  
*Former Westchester County Surrogate's Court Chief Clerk  
Greenfield, Stein & Senior, LLP*

Yi Wang Stewart, Esq.  
*Farrell Fritz, P.C.*

Hon. Vincent W. Versaci  
*Schenectady County Surrogate*

Pamela A. Walker, Esq.  
*The Walker Firm, PLLC*

Ronald J. Weiss, Esq.  
*Retired Partner, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP*

Counsel to Committee  
Meredith R. Jones, Esq.  
*Special Counsel for Surrogate & Fiduciary Matters, Office of Court Administration*

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