

Office for Justice Initiatives

# The Constitution's Promise

## *Out of Many, One*

### LAW DAY REPORT

**Hon. Edwina G. Richardson**

Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Justice Initiatives

**Michelle Smith, Esq.**

Chief of Staff

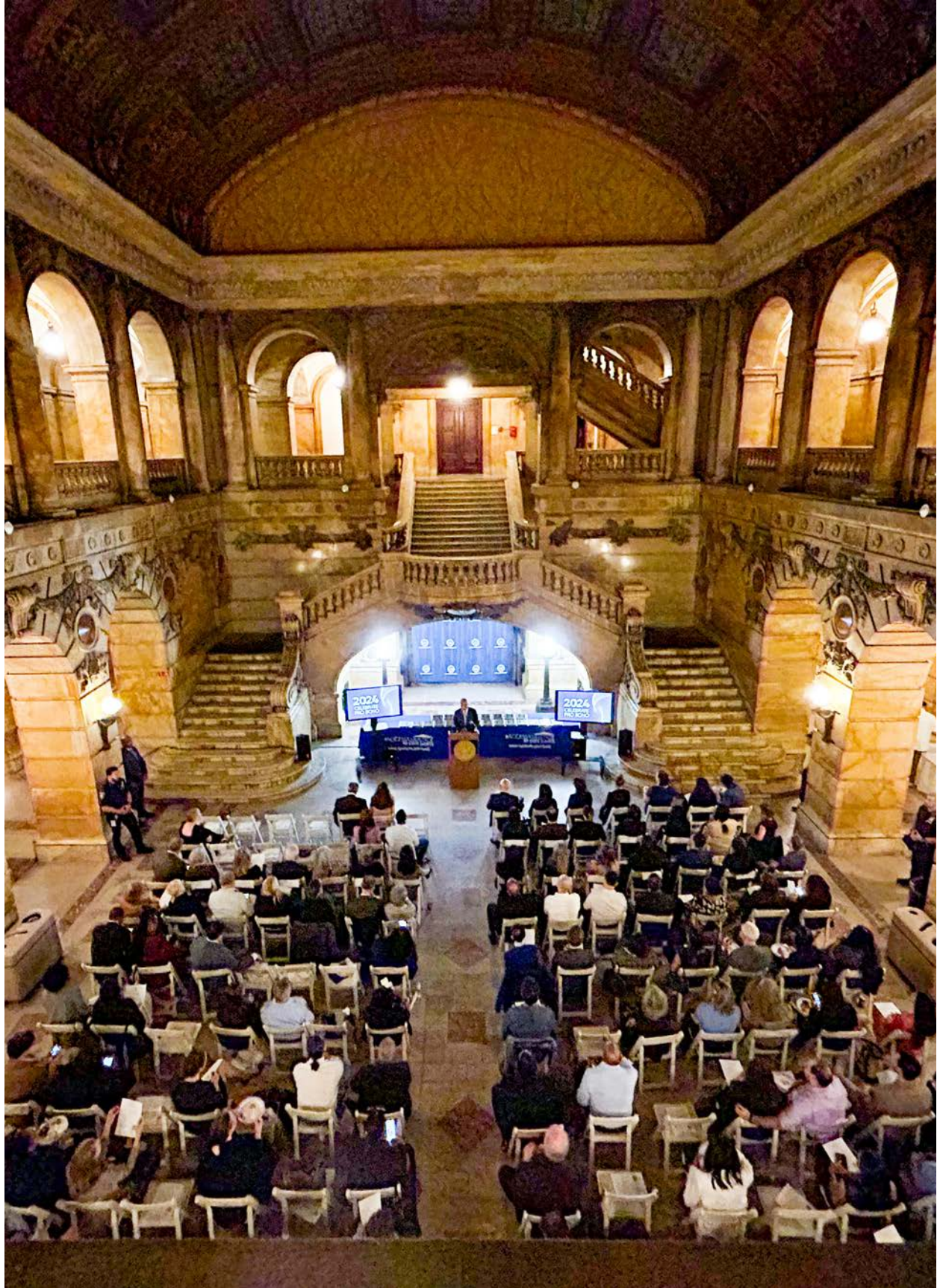
**Rosemary Martinez-Borges, Esq.**

Deputy Chief of Staff

**Beck Zucker, Esq.**

Special Counsel

May 2025



2024 Pro Bono Awards Night

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Hon. Edwina G. Richardson, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Justice Initiatives, administering the Attorney's Oath to CUNY Law School Graduates

# A Message from Hon. Edwina G. Richardson

## Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Justice Initiatives

The rule of law is foundational in a free society and crucial to safeguarding our rights and liberties. Since 1957, Law Day has recognized this power through an annual celebration of the rule of law and our legal system. This year's theme, "the Constitution's Promise: Out of Many, One," invites us to reflect on what the Constitution means for the rule of law today, and what it means for me as the Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Justice Initiatives in the New York State Unified Court System (UCS). My reflections led me to the Constitution's Preamble. Powerful yet concise, the Preamble proclaims:

*We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.*

The Preamble declares that we are a country committed to written law ("this Constitution") and that this law applies to each state individually and collectively. It also outlines our nation's core values—a democratic government, justice, and liberty—that guide us in our pursuit of "a more perfect Union." This phrase is a poignant acknowledgment that the Constitution and our nation are aspirational and imperfect works in progress. The Preamble reminds us that we have something to strive towards, that we cannot be complacent, and that our society is dynamic. It is a call to action, echoed in New York State's motto *Excelsior* (Latin for "ever upward") and the recent passing of the Equal Rights Amendment to the New York State Constitution.

Importantly, the Preamble announces who the Constitution is for: we the People. Today, we have a much more expansive view of who is included in "We the People" than when the Constitution was written. And we are better for it.

"The Constitution's Promise: Out of Many, One" elevates this more expansive view of we the People. It does not minimize identity; instead, it recognizes that we are many. We all have unique backgrounds, cultures, identities, beliefs, religions or no religions, spiritual values, appearances, and so many other characteristics that make us who we are.

But we are one in what matters most. We all have hearts that beat and pump blood; we all bleed red. We have hearts, souls, and minds capable of deep love and compassion, but also hatred. We all have a start date and, regrettably, an end date. We all want safety for our families and loved ones. We want good health and well-being for ourselves and our beloveds.

The United States' unofficial motto, "E Pluribus Unum," reminds us that the Constitution and rule of law can be powerful tools to unite us. And we are not the only country that values the good that comes out of a diverse collective. As a proud descendent of Jamaicans, I take this moment

to boast that Jamaica, whose official motto is "Out of Many, One People," is among those countries. That we are not alone in valuing "the many" signals that this year's Law Day theme belongs to our global community, and reminds us that the rule of law is for all of us.

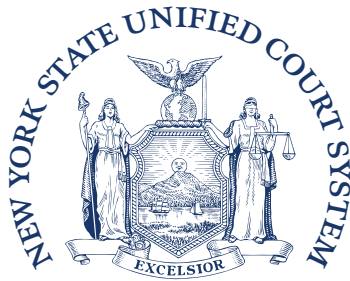
As the third and co-equal branch of government, the judiciary plays an important role in upholding the rule of law. An independent, unbiased, and informed judiciary is foundational to an effective democracy so that our Constitutional values—particularly liberty and justice—are attainable for everyone. Such a judiciary has never been more important.

It is a profound honor for me to lead the New York State UCS' Office for Justice Initiatives. We are dedicated to making the rule of law accessible for every person passing through our courthouses. Every day, we strive to have our justice system reflect the ideals and aspirations in the United States and New York Constitutions. Our work seeks to translate these ideals from aspirations into reality, moving us closer to "a more perfect Union."

While we may never fully realize the Constitution's promise, we cannot become complacent. We must continually, sometimes gradually, shrink the gap between the Constitution's promise and our current reality. More than ever, I am grateful to lead an office dedicated to closing that gap and ensuring meaningful access to justice for all. We remain unwaveringly committed to serving everyone crossing our courthouse doors.

I am delighted to share this year's Law Day Report. It spotlights some of our work that moves us closer to a more perfect Union where the rule of law is accessible for all. As you will read throughout this report, the Office for Justice Initiatives works in many ways to pursue the Constitution's promise.

We in the UCS are indeed many. We in the Office for Justice Initiatives are indeed many. And yet, and yes, in every way that matters, we are also one.



## The Office for Justice Initiatives

The Office for Justice Initiatives is a statewide office that develops policies, programs, and innovative ways to address the evolving needs of all who interact with the New York State Unified Court System. The Office for Justice Initiatives plays a key role in furthering the Unified Court System's mission statement.

As you can see, the Office for Justice Initiatives works on a variety of subjects and has staff with different backgrounds, but we are one office striving to provide meaningful access to equal justice for all. We are pleased to share our team and work that aims to make the Constitution's promise a reality for all who enter a Unified Court System facility.



*"In pursuing the Constitution's promise, we are guided by the closing words of the Pledge of Allegiance: one Nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."*

**Hon. Edwina G. Richardson**

Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Justice Initiatives



*"Out of many voices emerges a unified purpose, bound and driven by a shared destiny."*

**Michelle Smith, Esq.**

Chief of Staff



*"We have an obligation and commitment to each other, to stand strong for one another."*

**Rosemary Martinez-Borges, Esq.**

Deputy Chief of Staff;  
Director, Youth & Emerging Adult Justice



*"To endure in a meaningful way, the rule of law must be for and accessible to everyone."*

**Beck Zucker, Esq.**

Special Counsel

- **Rachelle Auguste, MPA** – Executive Assistant
- **Angie D'Urso** – Management Analyst
- **Mei Wong** – Executive Assistant

## Access to Justice

The Access to Justice Division develops and implements programming to enhance meaningful access to justice in New York State Courts for people of all backgrounds, incomes, and abilities by supporting volunteer attorney programs, self-help services, technological tools, New York State's Attorney Emeritus Program, and more.



*"The Constitution promises a just nation where freedoms are protected."*

**Lisa M. Zayas, Esq.**  
Director

- **Shain Filcher, Esq.** – Associate Counsel, CourtHelp
- **Cornelia Fulmore** – Office Manager
- **Cecille Latty** – Principal Administrative Secretary
- **Yanixa Malca** – Attorney Emeritus Program Coordinator
- **Laurie Milder, Esq.** – Special Counsel, Volunteer Lawyer Programs
- **Ameela Mohammed** – Administrative Assistant
- **Azeeza Tropea** – Administrative Assistant
- **Heidi Saunders** – Community Outreach Coordinator

## Child Welfare & Family Justice

The Child Welfare & Family Justice Division enhances the well-being of children and families involved in the court system. This Division also oversees the Child Welfare Court Improvement Project, which works to improve outcomes for families in child welfare cases by promoting effective practices and policies. Additionally, this Division supports the Statewide Coordinating Judge for Family Court Matters, including implementing the Family Justice Initiative, which aims to increase fairness and equity in family court and reduce further system involvement.



*"We are one humanity, and we strive for and deserve dignity."*

**Trista Borra, Esq., MSW**  
Director

- **Mizrain Cortés** – NYC Family Court CWCIP Coordinator
- **Denisse Davalos, MA** – 10th JD CWCIP Coordinator
- **Dr. Aimée L. Neri Gueye, LMSW, DSW** – 8th JD CWCIP Coordinator
- **Tracy Lyons, MSW** – 9th JD CWCIP Coordinator
- **Tara Muniz** – 4th JD CWCIP Coordinator
- **Sue Shafer, MA** – 5th JD CWCIP Coordinator
- **Amanda Trance** – 3rd JD CWCIP Coordinator

## Diversity, Inclusion & Equal Justice in the Courts

The Office of Diversity & Inclusion promotes the court system's commitment to ensuring a diverse workforce and bias-free environment by providing trainings and resources (such as an online resource library, Mosaic newsletter, and Diversity Dialogues podcast), and annual diversity and inclusion summits. The Office of Diversity & Inclusion also houses our Equal Justice in the Courts initiative, which is dedicated to rooting out all forms of bias and discrimination in our court system through a multi-faceted approach.



*"The elasticity built into our Constitution allows our 'American experiment' to evolve and thrive."*

**Tony Walters**  
Director



*"Despite or in spite of our differences, we recognize our shared humanity."*

**Nicole Hylton**  
Deputy Director and  
Special Projects Coordinator



*"Equal justice is a central tenet of the Constitution."*

**Randy Bowens**  
Statewide Coordinator for Equal  
Justice in the Courts

- **Taydra Jones, MBA**, Senior Management Analyst
- **Kiran Mukhtar**, Court Analyst
- **Melissa Wade**, Principal Court Analyst

## Guardianship Matters & Elder Justice

The Office of Guardianship Matters & Elder Justice engages in efforts to strengthen the statewide adult guardianship system under Article 81 of the Mental Hygiene Law. This Office provides guidance to judicial leadership on the needs of vulnerable populations and the aging. It also oversees the Guardianship Assistance Office, which assists lay guardians appointed under Article 81.



*“The Constitution’s promise means no one gets left behind.”*

**Diana Colón, Esq.**  
Special Counsel

- **Kiana Douglas** – Assistant Court Analyst
- **Aruna Hekinian, Esq.** – Assistant Counsel
- **Olga Perez, Esq.** – Assistant Deputy Counsel
- **Alexandra Quinteros** – Principal Court Analyst
- **Sandy Walker** – Court Analyst

## Judiciary Civil Legal Services



The Judiciary Civil Legal Services Division provides programmatic oversight of the Judiciary Civil Legal Services grant—an over \$104.5 million grant that provides funding to support legal services that help New Yorkers ensure essentials of life.

*“Because we are many and diverse, we have collective power.”*

**Gillian T. Alman, Esq.**  
Director

## Problem Solving Justice Division

The Problem Solving Justice Division (formerly the Division of Policy & Planning) supports alternatives to incarceration for justice-involved individuals by providing guidance and support to judges and court employees of New York State’s 350+ problem-solving and accountability courts. This Division also promotes best practices in foreclosure matters and supports elder justice initiatives.



*“The legacy for those of us who dedicate our careers to the courts reflects a shared commitment—each act of service, each small decision, contributing over time to a fairer, more responsive system for all.”*

**Steven Helfont, Esq.** – Director

- **Thomas Carr, Esq.** – Assistant Deputy Counsel
- **Sky Davis, MA** – Regional Project Director
- **Jennifer Dunn, MA** – Principal Court Analyst
- **Leslie Ebright, MPH** – Technology Analyst
- **Judith Leconte** – Senior Court Analyst
- **Susan McCafferty, MA, MPA** – Opioid Court Project Director
- **Dennis Reilly, Esq.** – Statewide Drug Court Coordinator
- **Tabatha Sellick** – Statewide Family Treatment Court Coordinator
- **Kimberly Schwarz, MS** – Regional Project Director
- **Lisa Smith, Esq.** – Assistant Deputy Counsel
- **Kimberly VanCamp, MA** – Statewide Mental Health Court Project Director



*“We are always striving for a more perfect union.”*

**Christine Edwards, Esq.**  
Chief Counsel

## Youth & Emerging Adult Justice

The Youth & Emerging Adult Justice Division provides oversight, guidance, and training on youth justice matters, including implementing the Raise the Age legislation and supporting emerging adult courts.



*“By embracing, educating and empowering our youth, we are furthering our commitment to developing the next generation of leaders.”*

**Rosemary Martinez-Borges, Esq.**  
Director



## The Constitution's Promise: Out of Many, One

### Law Day and This Year's Theme

Held annually on May 1, Law Day celebrates the rule of law in America. This day provides an opportunity to learn about how the law and the legal process can promote justice and protect our liberties. Each year, the American Bar Association (ABA) selects a theme that highlights a particular part of our legal system. This year's theme, "The Constitution's Promise: Out of Many, One," is a nod to our nation's unofficial motto, "E Pluribus Unum."

As described on the ABA's [website](#), this year's theme emphasizes that "the Framers established the Constitution as representatives of 'We the People, in order to form a More Perfect Union,'" as described in the Preamble to the United States Constitution. By focusing on the Preamble, this year's Law Day theme highlights the aspirations contained within it. The theme explores and renews "our duties to one another under the Constitution and our democratic norms. The Constitution establishes a framework for government that unites us as one citizenry ... And through this commitment to our Union, we each provide for the common good through government response to" evolving needs.

Our Law Day report highlights ways that the Office for Justice Initiatives pursues the Constitution's promise and what this theme means to us.

## The Unified Court System's Mission Statement

Just as the Preamble proclaims our nation's principles, so, too, does the Unified Court System's mission statement. It guides us in our pursuit of the Constitution's promise. Take a look to see which words resonate with the Office for Justice Initiatives' work:

*The **mission** of the Unified Court System (UCS) is to deliver **equal justice under the law** and to achieve the just, fair and timely resolution of all matters that come before our courts.*

*In the **service** of our mission, the UCS is **committed** to operating with **integrity** and **transparency**, and to ensuring that all who enter or serve in our courts are treated with **respect, dignity** and **professionalism**. We affirm our **responsibility** to promote a court system **free from any and all forms of bias and discrimination** and to promote a judiciary and workforce that **reflect the rich diversity of New York State**.*



# How the Office for Justice Initiatives Pursues the Constitution’s Promise

The breadth of the Office for Justice Initiatives’ work recognizes that there are many ways to fulfill the Constitution’s promise. In pursuit of the Constitution’s promise, the Office for Justice Initiatives promotes accessibility, awareness, inclusivity, collaboration, and innovation throughout the Unified Court System. The following pages highlight our endeavors in these areas.

## 1. Promotes Accessibility

For meaningful rule of law, our laws must be accessible to everyone subject to them. Further, our courts—as the branch of government dedicated to interpreting and applying our laws—must be accessible. Access can take different forms, such as enabling the ability to appear in court virtually or in-person, with an attorney or unrepresented. We continuously consider ways to improve access to our courts and ways that court users can understand and navigate court processes. Here are some ways that the Office for Justice Initiatives promotes an accessible court system.

### Provides Resources for Court Users

The Office for Justice Initiatives supports many programs that help court users access and navigate our courts, thereby fostering a judiciary for all court users. This past year, the Office for Justice Initiatives continued to provide resources that assist unrepresented litigants, including:

#### Help Centers

Located in courts and Public Access Law Libraries, Help Centers provide the public with free information about the law and court procedures. The Unified Court System has over 35 Help Centers throughout the state, including one that just opened in the 5th Judicial District on April 17, 2025. Over 128,000 individuals accessed Help Centers last year. The Access to Justice Division supports these Help Centers by hosting quarterly meetings to foster collaboration and engagement among staff across the state, providing trainings, conducting site visits, and assisting on-site staff.

#### CourtHelp

CourtHelp is an online legal information hub designed to aid unrepresented litigants with navigating their cases. CourtHelp provides access points to multiple resources including, the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility page, Ask A Law Librarian, Court Locator tool, the Help Center directory, LawHelp, and DIY (Do-It-Yourself) document assembly form programs. DIY Forms are free and available to all who have access to a computer and stable internet. The Access to Justice Division maintains this site. You can visit CourtHelp at <https://www.nycourts.gov/courthelp>.

#### Virtual Court Access Network

Court users may struggle to attend court proceedings for reasons such as limited access to a computer and/or the internet, lack of transportation, childcare responsibilities, or safety concerns. The Virtual Court Access Network sites provide safe and secure ways for individuals to access courts in their community.

The Office for Justice Initiatives’ Access to Justice and Child Welfare & Family Justice Divisions support Virtual Court Access Network sites and expansion, including resources earmarked to support Tribal Nation members’ equitable access to family court proceedings.

#### Court Navigator Program

This free court-sponsored program provides essential non-legal services to unrepresented court users. The Court Navigator Program recruits and trains community members to aid unrepresented court users with navigating courthouses, organizing paperwork, and providing information about available court resources and services. The Access to Justice Division works with local courts to develop, implement, and sustain the programs. The Access to Justice Division works closely with on-site program supervisors, develops and conducts training modules, and regularly engages with external partners to continuously improve and strengthen the programs infrastructure.



Administrative Judge Deborah H. Karalunas, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Edwina G. Richardson, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge James P. Murphy, and District Executive Donald C. Doerr cut the ribbon at the Grand Opening of the 5th Judicial District's Help Center.



Help Centers provide computer help, court forms, and other resources to court users.

*“I like the idea that as one person, I may be able to impact many.”*

**Heidi Saunders**

Community Outreach Coordinator,  
Access to Justice Division

Without legal knowledge or skills, many court users are at a disadvantage when they come to court. To address this, the Access to Justice Division supports volunteer attorney programs. These programs connect court users with legal services, thereby increasing accessibility and meaningful rule of law in our courts and improving litigants’ chances for success. These volunteer attorney programs include:

#### **Consumer Debt Volunteer Lawyer for a Day**

this consumer consortium program provides limited representation to consumer debtors in New York City Civil Court. In 2024, over 150 volunteer lawyers and law students assisted over 3,700 litigants.

Guardian Ad Litem Housing Program – The Guardian Ad Litem Housing Program recruits, trains, and provides judges presiding over landlord/tenant matters with a pool of guardians whose role is to safeguard the rights of impaired tenants. The Access to Justice Division works closely with on-site program coordinators to strengthen and improve the program. The Access to Justice Division helps these programs expand across New York State and administers programmatic support, such as gathering data, developing trainings, and reviewing policies and laws. The program is presently available throughout New York City and Westchester County.

#### **Attorney Emeritus Program**

The Attorney Emeritus Program is co-administered by the Access to Justice Division and the Feerick Center for Social Justice at Fordham Law School. This program facilitates pro bono services by senior attorneys. In 2024, participants volunteered over 18,000 hours to civil legal services organizations. More information about this program is available [online](#).

Key developments over last year include the launch of a virtual training on client-centered lawyering for pro bono attorneys on December 4, 2024, and hosting Q&A sessions with volunteers.

*“By leveraging the collective expertise of senior attorneys, we reinforce the Constitution’s promise that justice should be available to all, regardless of socioeconomic status.”*

**Yanixa Malca**

Attorney Emeritus Program Coordinator,  
Access to Justice Division

*“Through outreach, technology, and partnerships, the Office for Justice Initiatives fosters a more inclusive legal system, turning ‘Out of many, One’ into a reality by making the courts accessible to all.”*

**Cornelia Fulmore**

Office Manager, Access to Justice Division

#### **Family Court Volunteer Attorney Program**

This program provides unrepresented litigants with free online and phone legal consultations regarding support, custody, visitation, family offenses, and guardianship matters. This program helped close to 500 court users throughout 2024.

The Judiciary Civil Legal Services Division also furthered several initiatives that expand access to justice, including:

- Eviction assistance clinics that help tenants apply for “one-shot deals” to stave off evictions.
- SNAP application clinics to help individuals apply for benefits, Medicaid, and cash assistance, thereby promoting food security.
- Supporting tech hubs in Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx to bridge the digital divide.
- Expanding helplines for various legal issues, including housing, family, and immigration.
- Launching Fair Hearing Help NY, a free, virtual resource for unrepresented individuals in Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance administrative hearings.

#### **Facilitates Access at All Life Stages**

The Office of Guardianship Matters & Elder Justice joined the Office for Justice Initiatives’ portfolio in 2024. The Office of Guardianship Matters & Elder Justice advocates for effective guardianships and to promote the well-being of older adults and vulnerable populations that interact with the Unified Court System. The Office of Guardianship Matters & Elder Justice uses a multi-pronged approach to accomplish this, including providing training and education to judges and lay guardians; assessing the guardianship and elder justice systems in New York State through stakeholder meetings and collaborations; facilitating implementation of policy, operational, and legislative changes; and increasing the availability of guardians, court evaluators, and court examiners. The Office of Guardianship Matters & Elder Justice’s work will improve access to justice for our most vulnerable court users.

Nested within the Office of Guardianship Matters & Elder Justice is the Guardianship Assistance Office, which helps lay guardians navigate the court system by providing them with legal information. The Guardianship Assistance Office assists court users in many ways, such as explaining court processes and connecting court users with interpretation services.

*“When I answer the phone to help someone with their question or refer them to someone else, I don’t know who’s on the other line; all I know is I am helping the person the best way possible, and it doesn’t matter who’s on that other line.”*

**Sandy Walker**

Court Analyst, Guardianship Assistance Office

Additionally, the Access to Justice Division is working to simplify forms used in Mental Hygiene Law Article 81 guardianships through the Elder Justice Innovation Grant.

### Oversees Funding of Civil Legal Services

The Judiciary Civil Legal Services Division oversees distributing funds from the Judiciary Civil Legal Services grant, which provides a stable funding source for civil legal service providers that assist low-income individuals.

Totaling over \$104.5 million, the Judiciary Civil Legal Services grant funds over 80 legal services providers throughout New York to provide legal assistance to rural, urban, and suburban areas. This vital funding allows many individual to access legal assistance needed to secure the essentials of life, which includes housing, family matters, healthcare, education, and subsistence income. The Judiciary Civil Legal Services grant also supports legal services providers who assist with immigration matters.

The Judiciary Civil Legal Services Division supports the Office for Justice Initiatives’ broader work by providing information on developments and emerging trends in civil legal needs, performing data analyses of legal and access to justice services, developing policy recommendations, and fostering partnerships with external stakeholders.

## 2. Promotes Awareness, Education, and Inclusivity

Awareness, education, and inclusivity promote a judiciary that is compassionate towards and responsive to those it employs and serves. This in turn promotes the rule of law for “We the People.” Below are some ways that the Office for Justice Initiatives promoted awareness, education, and inclusivity throughout the Unified Court System over the past year.

### Leads Educational Programs

The Office for Justice Initiatives facilitated many educational programs that promote awareness and inclusivity throughout the Unified Court System, which in turn fosters a court system for all employees and court users. These programs included:

#### Cultural Consciousness Trainings

In 2025, the Office of Diversity & Inclusion launched a new training series to raise cultural consciousness among judges and court staff. The skills taught in this course help the Unified Court System towards its goal of being a fair and just court system for all.

In January 2025, the Office of Diversity & Inclusion piloted this program with over 50 judges and court staff in the 6th Judicial District. The Office of Diversity & Inclusion’s Deputy Director and Special Projects Coordinator Nicky Hylton designed and facilitated this multi-day program in which participants actively engaged and reflected on their internal processes and learned concrete ways to improve serving court users from all walks of life.

On March 28, 2025, the Office of Diversity & Inclusion held a similar cultural consciousness training at the Court of Claims’ Court Attorneys Conference.



The Office of Diversity & Inclusion team (from left to right): Tony Walters, Kiran Mukhtar, Nicole Hylton, Taydra Jones, Melissa Wade, and Randy Bowens.

### Diversity Summit

The Office of Diversity & Inclusion held its fourth annual Diversity Summit on December 12, 2024. This year's theme, "Better Together: Understanding and Resisting Xenophobia in the Workplace," taught Unified Court System judges and staff about xenophobia (fear or dislike of someone, or treating them unfairly, because they have a different background and/or identity) and "othering." This event encouraged all 322 attendees to come together and foster respect and belonging in the Unified Court System.

*"Everything we do can be summed up by saying that we work to ensure the Unified Court System is doing its part in realizing our greatest potential."*

**Melissa Wade**

Principal Court Analyst, the Office of Diversity & Inclusion

### Identity-Based Hatred Programming

The Office of Diversity & Inclusion facilitated programs to combat identity-based discrimination so that everyone who enters or works in the Unified Court System is treated respectfully and professionally.

The first program in this series, "Antisemitism Today and its Roots," was held on January 13, 2024. This program discussed antisemitism's roots to help participants understand and identify antisemitism. Over one thousand judges and court employees tuned in.

The second program, "Honoring Our Shared Humanity: Understanding Islamophobia," explained Islamophobia and shared strategies to recognize and combat it. Held in two parts in June 2024.

### Poverty Simulation

Poverty Simulations are immersive experiences that provide participants with an opportunity to navigate the difficult choices people experiencing poverty regularly face. On September 25, 2024, the Access to Justice Division (with assistance from members across the Office for Justice Initiatives) conducted a poverty simulation in Erie County for County Court judges. This simulation taught judges and court employees about disparities across different socioeconomic groups. It also provided a forum for participants to discuss challenges low-income New Yorkers face, how those challenges impact their ability to access courts, and how we can better serve these individuals.

### 2024 Summit on Gender-Based Violence

Many New Yorkers who come to our courts have experienced gender-based violence. Their cases require specialized skills to navigate their nuances with sensitivity and care. To promote these skills, the Problem Solving Justice Division hosts an annual summit for judges and court staff.



Jennifer Dunn presenting on the Treatment Service Module at the 2024 Summit on Gender-Based Violence.

This year's summit, held on November 7 – 8, 2024, centered voices of people with lived experience. Attendees watched and discussed excerpts from "And So I Stayed," an award-winning documentary by Natalie Patillo (who attended the conference and spoke about the documentary) and Daniel A. Nelson about domestic violence and the legal system. Attendees also heard from a family who participated in the Chautauqua County Integrated Domestic Violence court about their experience. Members of the Problem Solving Justice Division also presented at the summit.



Lisa Smith, Assistant Deputy Counsel in the Problem Solving Justice Division, played a key role in organizing this summit.

### Districtwide Best Practices Trainings for Problem-Solving Courts

Problem-solving courts feature specially trained judges and staff and focus on treatment and accountability for justice system-involved individuals with the goal of avoiding future entanglement with the justice system. The Problem Solving Justice Division launched a new training series to support problem-solving court judges and staff: Districtwide Best Practices Trainings.

This training series educates judges, court officers, and court staff on evidence-based best practices for problem-solving courts. Each district will gather once a year over the next two years. We held the first of these trainings on February 27, 2025, in Brooklyn. Christine Edwards, the Problem Solving Justice Division's Chief Counsel, conceptualized these trainings and shepherded the concept into reality. These trainings will help the Unified Court System remain a national leader in problem-solving courts. Photo 1. Best Practices with caption: Sky Davis sharing strategies for enhancing participant success in treatment courts



Sky Davis sharing strategies for enhancing participant success in treatment courts.

### Behavioral and Mental Health Issues in the Courts

To better assist individuals with behavioral health challenges, the Problem Solving Justice Division orchestrates trainings to raise awareness among judges, court staff, and other legal professionals interacting with the Unified Court System. For example, Chief Counsel Christine Edwards chaired a program with the Practising Law Institute entitled “Mental Health Issues & the New York State Courts 2024: Mental Health Needs of Distinctive Populations in the Courts.” This program focused on four categories of people with distinctive behavioral health needs: women and girls, young men, veterans, and LGBTQ+ individuals. Participants gained an understanding of these groups’ distinctive needs; how life experience that cause or exacerbate mental health problems can lead to court

involvement; and ways that court operations can cause challenges, be modified to improve case outcomes, and leverage resources to address behavioral health issues.

Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Richardson provided remarks for this program.

Deputy Chief of Staff and Director of the Office for Justice Initiatives’ Youth & Emerging Adult Justice Division Rosemary Martinez-Borges moderated the session entitled “Young Men and the New York State Courts.”

Regional Project Director Sky Davis moderated the session entitled “Veterans Issues in the New York State Treatment Courts.”

### Data Trainings

Knowing the types of cases and individuals that come before the Unified Court System promotes awareness. Problem Solving Justice Division staff facilitated data trainings for judges and court staff throughout the state to encourage using the Unified Court System’s technology infrastructure to track their data, which will help the Unified Court System optimize operations. Problem Solving Justice Division team member Sky Davis conducted a data training session for problem-solving courts in May 2024.

### Statewide Regional Child Advocacy Training

The Child Welfare & Family Justice Division led a training on medical evaluations for when a child may have experienced physical abuse.

### Shares Information Across the Unified Court System

The Office for Justice Initiatives shares information on topics related to access to justice, equal justice, our problem-solving courts, and diversity, equity, and inclusion as a bridge to belonging in many ways in addition to trainings and programming.

### Raising Awareness About the Our Work

Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Richardson regularly promotes the Office for Justice Initiatives’ work throughout the court system. For example, in January 2025, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Richardson taught new judges at the Judicial Institute’s annual New Judges Seminar series and Administrative and Supervising Judges at the Unified Court System’s Administrative Judges and Supervising Judges Leadership Meeting about the Office for Justice Initiatives’ work.



Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Richardson presents about the Office for Justice Initiatives at the Administrative Judges and Supervising Judges Leadership Meeting.

### Cultural Awareness Broadcasts

To promote awareness and inclusivity, the Office for Justice Initiatives, in collaboration with the Office of Court Administration's Communications Department, broadcasts messages commemorating the Transgender Day of Remembrance, Lunar New Year, Ramadan, and Women's History Month. These messages show that the Office for Justice Initiatives values the diversity within our court system and that everyone belongs here.

*"These broadcasts foster a sense of belonging and recognition, showing that the court system value and respects all backgrounds."*

**Kiran Mukhtar**

Court Analyst, the Office of Diversity & Inclusion

### The Office of Diversity & Inclusion's Resources

In addition to trainings and programming, the Office of Diversity & Inclusion provides informative resources for judges and court employees. These resources include the Diversity Dialogues podcast, an online resource library, and the Mosaic newsletter.

The Office of Diversity & Inclusion released episodes of its podcast [Diversity Dialogues](#), which celebrates the many different perspectives and backgrounds in the Unified Court System. This past year's interview list included the Office for Justice Initiatives' own [Nicole Hylton](#) and [Dr. Aimée Neri Gueye](#).

Throughout 2024, the Office of Diversity & Inclusion updated its resource library. This internal repository contains resources relating to age, disability, gender, Office of Diversity & Inclusion partners, race, and religion and recordings of past trainings.

The Office of Diversity & Inclusion also released new issues of Mosaic, a newsletter that explores topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The Office of Diversity & Inclusion released issues in [February 2024](#) and [December 2024](#).

### Teaches Others About Our Work

Teaching others about the Office for Justice Initiatives' work invites them to join us in our endeavors to make courts open to everyone who enters a courthouse, which in turn promotes justice and other values contained in the Constitution. Here are some examples of how we shared our work beyond the Unified Court System.

#### Youth-in-Court Orientation

This orientation for youths involved in permanency hearings aimed to decrease their anxiety by teaching them about the hearings. This orientation invited youths placed in out-of-home care to tour the courthouse, participate in a panel discussion, and observe or participate in a mock permanency hearing. The Child Welfare & Family Justice Division held this orientation on April 2, 2024, in Monroe.

#### 6th Annual Indian Child Welfare Act Conference

The Child Welfare & Family Justice Division played an instrumental role in organizing the 6th annual Indian Child Welfare Act Conference. This conference fosters a working relationship between the court system and Tribal Nations in land that is now called New York.

Held in June 2024, the conference was entitled "Strengthening Relationships: Working Collaboratively to Uphold ICWA." Attendees strategized ways to share jurisdiction between state courts and Tribal Nation courts, shared updates to case law and legislation, and discussed ways to build a working relationship in a way that centered Tribal Nations' perspectives.

#### Publicizing Our Diversity Milestones

To commemorate Women's History Month and celebrate gender diversity within the Unified Court System, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Richardson and Special Counsel Beck Zucker wrote an article for Women's History Month that was published in the New York Law Journal on March 19, 2025.

#### Virtual Court Access Network Presentation

In September 2024, the Office for Justice Initiatives' Michelle Smith, Rosemary Martinez-Borges, and Lisa Zayas, along with Christine Sisario (the Unified Court System's Director of Technology and Court Research), presented a session on the Unified Court System's Virtual Court Access Network at the Self-Represented Litigation Network Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah.

### **The Office for Justice Initiatives’ Judicial Internship Program**

The Office for Justice Initiatives’ Youth & Emerging Adult Division’s Judicial Internship Program offers law school and college students a comprehensive and immersive experience within our office and courts. Each academic semester we host two to three students from John Jay’s Pre-Law Institute Judicial Internship Program. Interns learn from and engage with our office leaders. Our office leaders and various court offices give presentations showcasing professional development opportunities offered by the courts. Additionally, a rich and robust schedule of court observations are built into our program because they are invaluable learning opportunities. To cap off the program, our interns take a field trip to the State Capital for a rich day of civic education, which includes tours of the Court of Appeals and the State Capital.



Deputy Chief of Staff and Youth & Emerging Adult Division Director Rosemary Martinez-Borges the the Office for Justice Initiatives’ interns tour the Court of Appeals to cap off their internship.

Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Richardson regularly promotes the Office for Justice Initiatives’ work throughout the court system and to external groups. Here are a few examples of Judge Richardson championing the Office for Justice Initiatives’ work:

#### **Justice Initiatives Presentation for the New York State Bar Association’s Committee on Veterans**

On November 15, 2024, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Richardson traveled to West Point to lead a continuing legal education program on the Unified Court System’s many justice initiatives. Judge Richardson taught attendees about the Office for Justice Initiatives’ endeavors, emphasizing the Problem Solving Justice Division’s role in supporting Veterans Treatment Courts. Photo 1. Judge Richardson West Point with caption: Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Richardson teaching at West Point.



Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Richardson teaching at West Point.

#### **Judicial Executive Leadership at the National Judicial College**

The National Judicial College, in conjunction with Harvard Law School Executive Education, invited Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Richardson to be a faculty member at their Judicial Executive Leadership program in July 2024. Judge Richardson presented on the Office for Justice Initiatives’ work. Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Richardson also completed the Executive Leadership program, earning a program certificate in advanced leadership skills for judges.

#### **The Antiracist Courtroom at the National Judicial College**

The National Judicial College invited Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Richardson to present at its October 2024 program, “The Antiracist Courtroom & Reducing Disparity Through Nontraditional Diversion,” in Montgomery, Alabama. Judge Richardson taught judicial leaders from around the world about the Unified Court System’s and the Office for Justice Initiatives’ work to promote equal access to justice for everyone entering or working in a New York State court. This program encouraged attendees to commit to making their courts more accessible and inclusive.

### 3. Promotes Collaboration

The Office for Justice Initiatives recognizes that partnering with other entities is crucial to advancing our work and that pursuing our Constitution's promise is a shared responsibility. Indeed, a court system for the many requires working with the many. To that end, the Office for Justice Initiatives works with groups throughout the Unified Court System and New York to promote one judiciary for its many users. This section shares some ways that the Office for Justice Initiatives fosters joint action.

*"To implement true change, we must work together."*

#### **Amanda Trance**

Child Welfare Court Improvement Project Coordinator,  
3rd Judicial District

#### **Strengthens Collective Action**

The Office for Justice Initiatives leads and participates in many groups that promote justice and the rule of law. For example, the Problem Solving Justice Division's Christine Edwards, Jennifer Dunn, Kimberly VanCamp, and Lisa Smith are part of the Unified Court System's Mental Health Task Force. This collaborative group works to improve court responses for court users with mental health needs.

The Judiciary Civil Legal Services grant is a powerful example of intergovernmental coordination to promote the common goal of helping individuals obtain legal services to secure the essentials of life. This grant requires the legislature, executive, and judicial branches to cooperate to provide funding to legal services providers. In addition to funding legal services, the Judiciary Civil Legal Services Division engaged in innovative collaborations regarding employment and community health.

#### **Employment**

The Judiciary Civil Legal Services Division furthered efforts for rideshare providers to be classified as employees, thereby ensuring contribution to New York State's unemployment insurance system and repayment of claims and benefits.

#### **Community Health**

The Judiciary Civil Legal Services Division launched a working group to implement supportive educational approaches in the Bronx for students who experienced trauma. Other work included encouraging sliding scale payment schedules, eliminating asset tests for eligibility, and providing financial assistance notices upon discharge from a hospital.

The Office for Justice Initiatives' Child Welfare & Family Justice Division excels in working with groups throughout the Unified Court System and New York to improve system responses for children and families in the courts. Here are some examples:

#### **Better for Families Conference**

In May 2024, the Child Welfare & Family Justice Division worked with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, the New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports, the New York State Department of Health, and the New York State Office of Mental Health. Participants received information on substance use disorder, risk reduction for families impacted by substance use disorder, services mapping, and strategies for working with child welfare cases involving substance use disorder.

#### **Family Justice Initiative**

Also in May 2024, the Unified Court System, in coordination with the New York State Governor's Office and the Center for Justice Innovation, launched the Family Justice Initiative: Court and Community Collaboration. The Family Justice Initiative seeks to improve our family courts. The Child Welfare & Family Justice Division helped launch the Family Justice Initiative.

#### **Indian Child Welfare Act Roundtables**

Held semi-annually, Indian Child Welfare Act roundtables are a collaboration between the Child Welfare & Family Justice Division, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, and judicial districts. There are three regional roundtables that focus on Indian Child Welfare Act practices. Among various topics, these roundtables discuss the state court's role in promoting safety, permanency, and well-being of children and their families while promoting Tribal Nations' right to govern their own people. Tribal Nation representatives from the 8 federally and 1 state recognized tribal nations attend in addition to judges, judicial district court administrators, and Unified Court System staff.

#### **Strong Starts Court Initiative**

The Child Welfare & Family Justice Division partnered with the Center for Justice Innovation to expand the Strong Starts Court Initiative to Erie County. The Strong Starts Court Initiative model provides a court-based clinician, monthly case conferences, quarterly leadership meetings, quarterly trainings, and quarterly steering committee meetings to promote a shift from an adversarial approach to a collaborative approach in addressing the needs of families. Participants receive customized service plans and access to a network of community-based service providers that promote family stability.

## Celebrates Our Justice Partners and Communities

Celebrating those who help us in our mission—including our own staff—encourages more to join us. We are proud of our staff who were recognized for their efforts and elated to celebrate our partners.

### 2024 Botein Award

The Office for Justice Initiatives' Chief of Staff Michelle Smith received the Bernard Botein Award in recognition of her outstanding commitment to advancing justice in the Unified Court System.



Presiding Justice of the Appellate Division, First Department Dianne T. Renwick with Botein Award winner Michelle Smith.



The Office for Justice Initiatives celebrates Michelle Smith (from left to right): Rosemary Martinez-Borges, Lisa Zayas, Sky Davis, Michelle Smith, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Richardson, and Tony Walters.

### Pro Bono Awards Night

The Office for Justice Initiatives does not conduct its work alone. Many organizations come together to provide pro bono legal services so that all New Yorkers can secure life essentials. On October 22, 2024, the Access to Justice Division co-sponsored its annual Pro Bono Awards Night, with the New York Bar Association and the New York County Lawyer's Association, to honor New York's pro bono legal community and their efforts to further access to justice. We were honored by Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson's presence and welcoming remarks.



Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson and the Office for Justice Initiatives staff at the 2024 Pro Bono Awards Night.

### Sherry Lintz Award

In March 2025, Tabatha Sellick received the New York Association of Treatment Court Professional's Sherry Lintz Award in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the 5th Judicial District's problem-solving courts. While this award predates her time with the Office for Justice Initiatives, we are thrilled that she is now part of our team!

### Law Day Art Contest

Each year, the Access to Justice Division partners with the Historical Society of the New York Courts to host an art contest for high school students across the state. The contest encourages the students to transform Law Day's theme into art, which promotes creative engagement with the judiciary and the rule of law. The Law Day Art Contest is a way for high school students to share their perspectives on the rule of law and democracy in America and celebrates their unique perspectives. See this year's winners at the end of the report.

## Coordinates Justice Efforts

To maximize the impact of our collaborative efforts in pursuit of the Constitution’s promise, we coordinate our efforts in multiple ways.

### Equal Justice Calendar

Launched in early 2025, the Equal Justice Calendar is an internal tool that judges and court staff can use to see upcoming equal justice events. Managed by the Office of Diversity & Inclusion, this calendar will help foster a court system that is welcoming, respectful, and reflective of all working in or entering our courts.

### Working Groups

Multiple divisions in the Office for Justice Initiatives facilitate working groups (sometimes called collaboratives) aimed at improving outcomes in our courts. These group meetings embody the spirit of this year’s Law Day theme by bringing many together to advocate for a shared vision: improving court outcomes for all, which reinforces the rule of law in our democracy.

For example, the Child Welfare & Family Justice Division coordinates 32 local, multidisciplinary collaboratives that focus on child welfare issues in the following counties: Albany, Allegheny, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Chemung, Columbia, Dutchess, Erie, Genesee, Fulton, Livingston, Monroe, Nassau, Niagara, Oneida, Onondaga, Orleans, Oswego, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Saratoga, Schenectady, Seneca, St. Lawrence, Steuben, Suffolk, Sullivan, Westchester, Wyoming, and Yates. The St. Regis Mohawk Tribe also has a collaborative. They engage stakeholders to identify and address issues, which creates a shared movement of care and commitment for all interacting with the courts.

*“Learning collaboratives align perfectly with E Pluribus Unum, since we are all working together locally to create a more trauma informed, responsive, and just Family Court.”*

**Tracy Lyons**

Court Improvement Project Coordinator, 9th Judicial District

Additionally, Problem Solving Justice Division Director Steven Helfont helps facilitate regular meetings of the Unified Court System’s Foreclosure Working Group, which provides judges and court staff who handle foreclosure matters with a forum to discuss their work.

## Lived Experience Advisory Group

The Lived Experience Advisory Group consists of former foster youth and parents who have been impacted by the child welfare system, parent advocates, child advocates, child welfare agency representatives, and court staff. They come together to share their experiences.

*“Despite the individual differences of the participants, they have been able to come together to identify shared goals as one voice.”*

**Trista Borra**

Director, Child Welfare & Family Justice Division

On May 21, 2024, the Child Welfare & Family Justice Division and the Lived Experience Advisory Group promoted Foster Care Awareness Month with a multidisciplinary program that taught participants about best practices and trauma-informed care to help children, parents, and families involved in the court system.

The Child Welfare & Family Justice Division and the Lived Experience Advisory Group held another program entitled “Prioritizing Kinship Care & Family Integrity” on September 30, 2024. This program celebrated National Kinship Care Awareness Month by teaching participants about “kin-first” culture, rights and legal options, and parent and youth experiences.

## Justice Coordinators

Justice Coordinators epitomize the Unified Court System's and the Office for Justice Initiatives' recognition that access to equal justice is achieved through collaborative efforts that promote awareness, education, and inclusivity. We work closely with the Justice Coordinators to promote equal access to justice initiatives and programs.



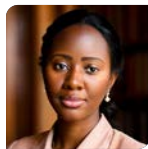
*"Together we are a collective force. Despite our differences, we are all in pursuit of access to and equal justice under the law."*

**Chynna Cummings**  
NYC Civil Court, Citywide



*"The work of the Office for Justice Initiatives is like an invitation where all are invited to the same party – a celebration of friends, family, fairness and FREEDOM!"*

**Robert West**  
NYC Criminal Court, Citywide



*"This year's theme reflects the idea of unity and equal justice under the law, which is central to the Office for Justice Initiatives' commitment to improving access for all people."*

**Latoya K. Phillip**  
1st, 12th Judicial District, Supreme, Civil, and Criminal Terms, Surrogate's Court, County Clerks



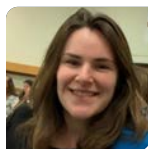
*"We are dedicated to making sure everyone has access to justice, no matter their background or situation. We work to keep the Constitution's promise by promoting fairness and unity within the courts. We have the power to make a difference one person, one day at a time."*

**Darren Edwards-Hoy**  
NYC Family Court, Citywide



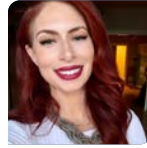
*"We are committed to lawful to the rule of law positively impacting our communities."*

**Marcel Hinds**  
2nd, 11th, and 13th Judicial Districts, Supreme, Civil, and Criminal Terms, Surrogate's Court, County Clerks



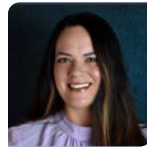
*"The constitution's promise isn't fulfilled by words alone. It is built each time we reach across differences to ensure dignity, belonging, and justice for all."*

**Laura Sperazza**  
4th Judicial District



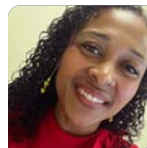
*"E pluribus unum – We are in this together, united by the value we place in our differences."*

**Hillary Warner**  
5th Judicial District

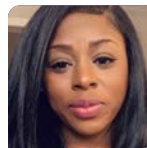


*"Justice must be fair, accessible, and equitable for all – regardless of background, identity, or circumstance."*

**Christina Olevano**  
6th Judicial District

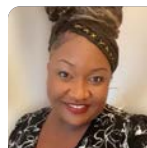


**Angelique E. Pedraza**  
7th Judicial District



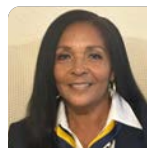
*"The beauty of our nation thrives in its multitude of voices and visions."*

**Danielle Maurice**  
8th Judicial District



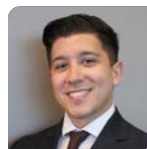
*"Unity in diversity is the heartbeat of democracy - many voices, one purpose: justice."*

**Esther Louis-Juste**  
9th Judicial District



*"By uniting diverse community groups and ensuring equitable access to legal and community resources, we actively contribute to a more unified, just society."*

**Angela Maynor**  
10th Judicial District (Nassau)



*"The Constitution promises us Justice, but it is our collective duty to ensure it"*

**Joseph Benedetto**  
10th Judicial District (Suffolk)

## 4. Promotes Innovation

Translating principles written in the Constitution into justice for a modern society requires innovation. In the Office for Justice Initiatives, we embrace new ideas and continuously advocate for systemic improvements that help us fulfill the Constitution's promises. By doing so, we work towards a more just and inclusive court system for all.

### Facilitates Innovation

One way that we promote innovation is by encouraging judges and court staff to use evidence-based best practice standards. We also encourage courts to consider themselves to be, as Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson envisioned in his 2023 State of the Judiciary, problem solvers rather than just deciding right versus wrong. Some of our work mentioned above, such as the Districtwide Best Practices trainings, exemplify this work. Here are some additional examples.

#### Child Permanency Mediation

Child Permanency Mediation maximizes opportunities for effective, holistic resolutions by giving all parties a voice. This innovative approach intends to improve the courts' responsiveness to families impacted by substance use disorder to increase opportunities to keep families together during treatment or expedite reunification. This past year, the Child Welfare & Family Justice Division and members of the Unified Court System's Division of Alternative Dispute Resolution trained a new class of child permanency mediators in Suffolk County. Participants learned about federal and state guidelines, the New York State Family Court Act Article 10, implicit bias, neutrality and ethics, and skills to facilitate large group mediation.

*"Child Permanency Mediation aligns with the ideals of fairness, equality, and unity found in the Constitution, supporting both emotional and cognitive balance during the challenging and often divisive process of family court."*

#### Sue Shafer

Court Improvement Project Coordinator,  
Child Welfare & Family Justice Division

#### Opioid Intervention Court Center of Excellence

The Office for Justice Initiatives' Problem Solving Justice Division launched its [Opioid Intervention Court Center of Excellence](#). Opioid Intervention Courts are a problem-solving court model designed to address the opioid epidemic and prevent deaths from overdose. These courts save lives by rapidly connecting participants to evidence-based treatment and recovery support services. The Opioid Intervention Court Center of Excellence is a resource tool that courts can refer to when considering opening one of these courts or looking for additional

information. Opioid Court Project Director Susan McCafferty helped launch this innovative resource.

### Creates Spaces for Innovation

The Office for Justice Initiatives also helps judges and court staff establish spaces where they can pursue innovative ways to deliver justice. These spaces encourage judges and court staff to view our courts as solvers of problems. Through innovation, we hope that our courts will improve services for our communities, which in turn will enhance trust in the Unified Court System and the rule of law.

#### Expanding Problem-Solving Courts

The Problem Solving Justice Division supports problem-solving courts throughout New York State, which includes helping new problem-solving courts open. This past year, the Problem Solving Justice Division helped problem-solving courts open Veterans Treatment courts in Orange, Cattaraugus, Cortland, Chenango and Genesee counties, and a Mental Health court in Niagara County.

*"Every effort we make is dedicated to serving individuals in our communities and fostering a more perfect union."*

#### Jennifer Dunn

Court Analyst, Problem Solving Justice Division

#### Drug Court Assessment Tool

The Problem Solving Justice Division played an instrumental role in rolling out a new drug court screening tool known as DCAT (drug court assessment tool). The Problem Solving Justice Division team members Dennis Reilly, Kim Schwarz, Sky Davis, and Jennifer Dunn trained problem-solving court coordinators and case managers on how to use this tool to maximize court responses and capacity to assist individuals.

#### Trauma Informed Care

Led by the Child Welfare & Family Justice Division, this project increases trauma-informed judicial decision making and lawyering to promote public trust and confidence. It also enhances experiences for court users and court staff. In 2024, Saratoga and Steuben Counties began working on this project.

#### Racial Healing Circles

These groups create spaces for participants to build relationships, repair harm, and foster understanding. Erie County Family Court partnered with Native American Community Services of Erie and Niagara Counties to offer this service to judges and court employees. Participants reported learning about the importance of listening and practicing compassion to develop a better understanding of how to support court users with empathy and care.

# 2025 Law Day Art Contest Winners



## E Pluribus Unum: A Tapestry of Democracy

Elise Kwon

Tappan Zee High School  
Rockland County (9th Judicial District)

### Artist's Description:

My artwork is inspired by the idea that America is a nation woven together by its people, laws, and shared responsibilities. I used to have a quilt from when I was younger that was woven together by my grandparents and had lots of different types of fabric from my childhood (old clothes, blankets...). That's where I got the idea to create a quilt, showing how in America there are different communities, beliefs, and civic duties that come together to form our country (just like how individual and unique fabric patches come together to form a cohesive design). Each section of the quilt represents a part of our democracy. For example, there are patches to represent our government, civic engagement, our rights, justice, and national unity - depicting the Constitution's promise of how there is 'Out of Many, One.' Every stitch in a quilt holds meaning and keeps the entire piece together, which is why different people from a variety of backgrounds/identities are working together to stitch the quilt. This is meant to show that every person's role in democracy matters and that despite our individual differences, we remain as one nation.



## United We Stand

Wendy Coleman

Watkins Glen High School  
Schuyler County (6th Judicial District)

### Artist's Description:

My artwork is inspired by how although each of us are unique and from different cultural backgrounds, religions and ethnicities, we are all united as one people under the constitution and are brought together to embrace our individuality and live among each other united under one nation and one dream.



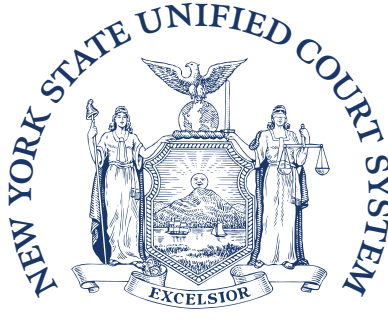
## Unity

Zoe Allen

Columbia High School  
Rensselaer County (3rd Judicial District)

### Artist's Description:

Within the piece, 'Unity', a direct interpretation of the theme, 'Out of many, one' is shown. As the artist, this theme inspired me to use my friends, family, fellow classmates and teachers as a reference to create an illusion of an American flag as they all come together into one group. This interpretation speaks to the notion that all of these New York citizens and American individuals have options out of many nations as to where they would like to live and grow. Everyone depicted within the painting has chosen America, and on a smaller scale, New York, for this important decision. This work also serves as an example of the vibrant community my family, school and state has created, and the honor that comes with being part of this community.



## Office for Justice Initiatives

Thank you for reading the Office for Justice Initiatives' 2025 Law Day report. In the Office for Justice Initiatives, we know that pursuing the Constitution's promise is an ongoing project. We will stride ever upward (Excelsior!) in our quest to provide meaningful access to equal justice for all New Yorkers guided by the ideals and promises in the Constitution.

While our work adapts to meet the times and evolving needs of New Yorkers, we remain committed to providing meaningful rule of law in all New York State courts. We invite you to join us as we continue to promote the Constitution's promise in the Unified Court System.

(646) 386-3200

[DCAJ-OJI@nycourts.gov](mailto:DCAJ-OJI@nycourts.gov)

[www.nycourts.gov/oji](http://www.nycourts.gov/oji)



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