



NEWS ADVISORY

**New York State
Unified Court System**

**Hon. Richard E. Sise
Presiding Judge**

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NY Court of Claims Launches Pilot Program to Promote Access to Justice for Underserved Populations

ALBANY, NEW YORK—New York State Court of Claims Presiding Judge Richard E. Sise today announced a first-of-its-kind Attorney Referral Service Pilot Program aimed at connecting lawyers with unrepresented claimants pursuing civil claims against the State. The initiative seeks to expand access to legal representation for incarcerated and indigent individuals whose claims often face procedural hurdles without counsel.

The pilot will initially cover claims filed on or after January 1, 2023 by individuals incarcerated at Coxsackie, Greene, or Washington Correctional Facilities. Eligible cases include allegations of medical malpractice, negligence, and assault. The Court anticipates expanding the service to all indigent pro se claimants by fall 2026.

The program stems from the Court’s Equal Justice in the Courts initiative — established in 2022 to improve access to justice for unrepresented litigants — with Judge Sise noting that lack of legal representation has frequently led to dismissals that might otherwise have proceeded to trial.

“I would like to thank our partners and stakeholders in this project, the Attorney General, Department of Corrections and Community Supervision as well as the New York State Bar Association, working along with the Court for the past two years to bring this worthy program to fruition. I also wish to thank the attorneys who have agreed to serve, providing their expert guidance, counsel, and advocacy in assisting claimants with the prosecution of their claims,” said Judge Sise. “Together we all ensure that regardless of income or background, individuals who have claims against the State of New York are heard. This program promotes and provides equality and access to justice, which necessarily maintains trust in our legal system.”

Attorney General Letitia James and DOCCS Commissioner Daniel F. Martuscello III lauded the newly launched initiative.

“Every person should be able to access legal representation regardless of their income or background. The Attorney Referral Service program is an important step to ensuring that more New Yorkers have access to legal representation so that their cases can be fairly heard and adjudicated. As a former public defender and as Attorney General, I have always been committed to fair access to justice, and I commend the Court of Claims for this initiative,” said Attorney General Letitia James.

“Quality representation is essential to ensuring fairness and equal access to justice in our legal system. This pilot program between DOCCS and the New York State Court of Claims will bridge a longstanding gap in representation for incarcerated individuals who represent themselves in court. This will help incarcerated claimants effectively seek just remedies and establish a meaningful mechanism for accountability and transparency for DOCCS,” said DOCCS Commissioner Daniel F. Martuscello III.

The New York State Bar Association commended the Court on the launch of the pilot program, highlighting its role in promoting fairness, accountability, and access to justice for underserved populations.

The Court continues to recruit lawyers for the Attorney Referral Service program; attorneys may join on a fee basis or serve pro bono.

For more information regarding the New York State Court of Claims Attorney Referral Service program, please see [Judge Sise- Attorney Referral Service YouTube 1080p.mp4](#) or [Attorney Referral Program | NYCOURTS.GOV](#).

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