

FACULTY BIOGRAPHIES



Honorable Betty Weinberg Ellerin

"She may be petite, but pound for pound (or in her case, ounce for ounce), Betty Weinberg Ellerin packs more legal punch in her tiny frame than most legal titans who swagger through the hallways of New York's greatest law firms." (Carla T. Main, War Stories 2007, NYLJ Magazine, September 2007, p. 30.)

Upon her appointment as Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for the Courts of the City of New York in 1982, Judge Betty Ellerin said, "E.R.A. may be foundering elsewhere in the country, but equal rights for minorities and women is alive and kicking in New York." She, better than anyone would know this, having experienced a number of "firsts"

for women in New York State.

Betty Weinberg Ellerin was born in the Bronx. After graduating as valedictorian from James Monroe High School in 1946, she went on to Indiana University. After her freshman year, she transferred to New York University under its combined college law program, receiving her B.A. in 1950, and her LL.B. in 1952, after which she joined a maritime law firm in New York City.

In 1955, Justice Ellerin began her career with the courts, serving as Law Secretary to various judges over the next 21 years, during which time she was the first woman elected as president of the Law Secretaries and Law Assistants Association. After her election to the Civil Court, she was assigned to sit in the New York County Criminal Court. She became an Acting Supreme Court Justice in 1978 and was elected as a Justice of the Supreme Court in November 1979. After serving successfully as Judge in Charge of a complex of judges assigned to deal with thousands of cases involving the City of New York, many of which were over 20 years old, in 1982 Chief Judge Lawrence Cooke appointed her as Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for the New York City Courts, with administrative responsibility for the operation of all trial courts within the City. She was the first woman appointed to that position.

In 1985, Governor Mario Cuomo appointed her as an Associate Justice of the Appellate Division, First Department -- again, the first woman appointed to that position. She celebrated another "first" when Governor George Pataki appointed her as the first female Presiding Justice of the Appellate Division, First Department. Although in that position for only one year because of mandatory age limits, Justice Ellerin remained as an Additional Justice until her retirement from the bench in 2005.

In 2006, she joined the law firm of Alston & Bird as Senior Counsel to the Litigation and Trial Practice Group. At the same time, she continued her activities in many bar groups and court committees. She is currently Co-Chair of the New York State Judicial Committee on Women in the Courts; former (two term) Chair of the New York State Continuing Legal Education Board; Vice Chair of the Committee on Character and Fitness of the Appellate Division, First Department; Honorary Vice Chair of the Advisory Committee on Judicial Ethics; a founder and director of the Women's Bar Association of the State of New York; past President of the New York Women's Bar Association; past President of the National Association of Women Judges and was a Chair of its National Task Force on Gender Bias in the Courts for many years. Justice Ellerin is a Trustee Associate of New York University. She is also a panelist with JAMS (Judicial Arbitration and Mediation).

Over the years, Justice Ellerin has received a plethora of professional awards, including the Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award from the American Bar Association Commission on Women in the Profession, the New York Law Journal Lifetime Achievement

Award, the Ruth G. Shapiro Award from the New York State Bar Association, the New York State Trial Lawyers Association Law Day Award, the Louis J. Capozzoli Gavel Award, the Edith I. Spivak Award from the New York County Lawyers Association, the National Association of Women Judges Judge of the Year Award in 2011. The Women's Bar of the State of New York established the Betty Weinberg Ellerin Mentoring Award on the occasion of its 25th Anniversary and bestowed the inaugural award on her in recognition of her continued support and assistance in advancing the careers of innumerable women judges and lawyers. Justice Ellerin has long been a proponent of children's centers in courthouses. In 2021, the Office of Court Administration honored Justice Ellerin by naming the newly restored children's center at the 111 Centre Street Courthouse for her. In addition to various other awards from the University, in 2022, she received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the NYU Alumni Association.



[Patricia Fersch](#) is the founding partner of Fersch LLC. She is a graduate of New York University and New York Law School and was admitted to the practice of law in the State of New York and the Southern and Eastern Districts of United States Federal Court in 1994. Immediately after law school, Ms. Fersch opened the Patricia Ann Fersch Family Law Center in 1994. In 2019, she founded Fersch LLC with partners, Maxine Donskoi and Meryl Hoeft.

Throughout her 29-year career in Matrimonial and Family law, she has successfully completed thousands of cases involving families caught in the turmoil of family law conflicts. Ms. Fersch is known for handling high-conflict divorce and custody matters, and frequently represents clients in complicated cases in the Family and Supreme Courts. Ms. Fersch also handled a number of international and high-profile divorce and family court matters.

Ms. Fersch is dedicated to public service and has been honored for same throughout her career.

In 2007, Ms. Fersch participated in an externship program with New York Law School and New York Supreme Court, in which she supervised students assisting pro se litigants with uncontested divorces. She was a recipient of the 2006 Partner in Justice Award from MFJ Legal Services Inc. Ms. Fersch was awarded the 2010 Partner in Justice Award.

In 2007, Ms. Fersch and Ms. Judy White started the Matrimonial Pro Bono Project providing experienced legal counsel to deserving litigants in New York County Supreme Court divorce financial matters. The project is in partnership with the NYWBA and New York Law School.

Both Ms. Fersch and Ms. White remain as the co-chairwoman of the Matrimonial Pro Bono Law Project, sponsored by NYWBA. Ms. Fersch was the recipient of the 2015 Hanna S. Cohn Pro Bono Award from the Women's Bar Association of the State of New York for her work in co-founding the Matrimonial Pro Bono Project in New York and Kings Counties. Ms. Fersch was selected to the New York County Supreme Matrimonial Advisory Committee.

In 2019, Ms. Fersch was awarded the FamilyKind Service Award. Every year from 2014 through 2024, Ms. Fersch was selected to the New York Super Lawyers.

Ms. Fersch currently serves as the Chairperson of FamilyKind Board, not for profit, from January 2021 ongoing. Ms. Fersch is a member of the NYS Judicial Committee on Women in the Courts under Justice Betty Weinberg Ellerin and co-chair of the committee undergoing recommendations for why women are not believed in court.

Ms. Fersch earned her B.A. from New York University and her J.D. New York Law School. In addition to the New York Bar, she is admitted to the U.S. District Court Southern District of New York and the U.S. District Court Eastern District of New York.



[Catherine A. Christian](#) is a highly **experienced trial lawyer** with more than 30 years of public service in the Manhattan District Attorney's Office and as a prominent leader within the New York legal community.

Ms. Christian began her legal career in the Manhattan District Attorney's Office under the legendary Robert M. Morgenthau. Her experience includes several decades of trial and investigative experience, including felony and homicide jury trials, at the Manhattan District Attorney's Office and the Office of the NYC Special Narcotics Prosecutor. In these offices, she held various leadership positions, including Special Assistant District Attorney for External Affairs, Senior Trial Counsel, Director of Legal Staff Training, and Chief of the Elder Abuse Unit, where she supervised the investigation and prosecution of thousands of cases involving crimes against elderly victims.

As an Assistant District Attorney, Ms. Christian also supervised investigations and prosecutions of financial fraud, conducted long-term wiretap investigations of multi-defendant international criminal organizations, and reviewed **convictions** where there were credible claims of innocence or wrongful conviction. She has also served as Assistant Counsel for the New York State Commission of Investigation where she investigated corruption, fraud, and mismanagement by public officials. She briefly left public service to work in private practice as a trial attorney where she obtained criminal jury trial acquittals.

As president of the [New York County Lawyers Association](#) (NYCLA), a bar association of over 8,000 lawyers, Ms. Christian administered a multimillion-dollar annual budget and expanded the bar association's pro bono program. She was the first African American, the youngest person, and the second woman inducted as president of NYCLA since its founding in 1908.

She is a member of the Appellate Division First Department's Attorney Grievance Committee and Character and Fitness Committee. She has held numerous leadership positions in the New York City and New York State Bar Associations as well as the American Bar Association and New York Women's Bar Association.

Ms. Christian is an MSNBC and NBC News legal analyst. She co-chaired the [New York State Bar Association's](#) Task Force on the Modernization of Criminal Practice, which issued a [Report](#) recommending ways to modernize criminal law practice in New York to improve safety, fairness, equality, access to justice, and technological efficiency in the administration of criminal justice.

Ms. Christian earned her B.A. with High Honors in Political Science from Hofstra University, J.D. from Dickinson School of Law, and a Harvard University Kennedy School of Government Executive Education Certificate, Mastering Negotiation Program. She's admitted in New York, U.S. Supreme Court, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces, U.S. Court of Federal Claims, U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, and U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York. She served as Principal Law Clerk to the Honorable Rosalyn Richter, Supervising Judge Bronx Criminal Court.



[Chitra Raghavan, PhD](#), is a clinical psychologist in New York City specializing in assessment of *sex trafficking, domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, sexual assault* and any other abusive interactions, and the *traumatic outcomes* these situations engender.

Dr. Raghavan is currently a tenured full professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. She is also the Deputy Director of the Forensic Mental Health Counseling Program and the Coordinator for the Victimology Studies in Forensic Psychology.

In 2014, Dr. Raghavan was named as one of “New York’s New Abolitionists” by the New York State Anti-Trafficking Coalition for her work to promote human rights for women and fight human trafficking. Dr. Raghavan earned her B.A. in French Language and Literature and Psychology at Smith College and her Ph.D. in Community and Clinical Psychology at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. She completed her Postdoctoral Fellowship at Yale University School of Medicine and served as a Research Scientist at The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse(CASA), Columbia University. She is licensed in the State of New York.