

Remarks of Chief Judge Janet DiFiore LAW SCHOOL ACCESS TO JUSTICE CONFERENCE

June 8, 2022

Welcome to our 2022 Law School Access to Justice Conference. At this year's Conference, we timely address how we are "Moving Forward in the Covid Era: Identifying and Addressing the Structural Challenges of Poverty, Inequality and Injustice."

I want to start by thanking our co-sponsors: the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice, chaired by the incomparable, Helaine Barnett; and Albany Law School, our valued partner in justice, led by its terrific President and Dean, Alicia Ouellette.

Now in its 10th year, this Law School Conference is quite unique. New York is the only state in the nation where an annual conference of this kind is convened to focus on the role of law schools in delivering pro bono legal services to help close the justice gap for people and communities of limited means.

And it is a testament to the commitment, engagement and support of the judiciary, the bar, the legal services community, our partners in government, and, of course, New York's 15 law schools, that this Conference has succeeded beyond all of our expectations,

producing innovative programs and partnerships that, year over year, have consistently increased our capacity to provide life-changing legal aid and assistance to the most vulnerable individuals and families in our state.

And this year's Conference, focused on how we can address the structural inequities that have been intensified by the combined public health and economic crisis of the last 27 months, promises to be one of the most impactful ever.

We are fortunate to have an extraordinary roster of presenters and access to justice leaders participating in this year's Conference, headlined, of course, by Associate United States Attorney General, Vanita Gupta. Thank you, Associate Attorney General Gupta, for your inspiring call to action, and for recognizing and highlighting the profound impact that our law schools and law students have had in providing front-line civil legal services during the COVID era.

And I do want to underscore and emphasize the importance of the presence of the many attendees participating in today's Conference. You have responded to the call to action by coming together to strategize creative solutions for how we can leverage the resources of our law schools and the knowledge and skills of our law students to help dismantle the systemic inequities and disparities that

have grown worse in the wake of the pandemic, including: poverty, housing insecurity, inadequate access to health care and so many other inequities and disparities that serve as barriers to justice for people in low-income communities in New York and across the nation. Just extraordinary.

Finally, I want to thank the Deans, the administrators and the faculty of all 15 law schools in our state for your demonstrated leadership and commitment to institutionalizing law student pro bono, and for the exceptional work that you perform each and every day to educate, train and inspire the next generation of lawyers: to embrace the professional and moral obligation of service to others; to pursue justice and equity in their communities; and to help balance the scales of justice for those who bear the burdens of poverty and inequality.

Kudos to Helaine Barnett, the Commission's members, and the dedicated staff, including Lauren Kanfer, for once again focusing our collective attention on exactly the right issues, at exactly the right time.

And a special thank you to Fordham Law School Dean Matthew Diller, for all of the time and thoughtful attention that he devotes to this Law School Conference every year.

Please know that I look forward to the findings and recommendations that will emerge from today's proceedings, and to continuing the work that we are doing together to help ensure meaningful and equitable access to justice for every New Yorker -- no matter who they are or where they come from in life.

Thank you, again, and I hope that you enjoy the conference.