

**Helaine M. Barnett, Chair, New York State Permanent Commission on Access to Justice:**

Good afternoon. Welcome to the 11th Annual Law School Conference convened by the New York State Permanent Commission on Access to Justice. We are delighted that Buffalo University's School of Law is serving as this year's virtual host and extend our deep appreciation to Dean Aviva Abramovsky and Professor Kim Diana Connolly, our 2023 conference planning committee co-chair, for their incredible work on this event. I am pleased to recognize Professor Connolly for her dedication to the conference and her participation in every conference over the past decade. We also express our sincere thanks to Elisa Lackey and Kristina Lively for their expert technical support and assistance. Our distinguished Commission member and Chair of the Law School Involvement Working Group, Dean Matthew Diller, suggested that we convene the conference in March to increase law student participation. As you can see from the agenda and the online biographies of our candidates, we have student speakers on almost every panel.

We also have former and current pro bono scholars in attendance and of the 364 registrants, more law student participation than at any previous conference. I am also pleased to recognize Buffalo law students who are joining from a central location at their school. Dean Diller's astute leadership and keen insights shape our conferences and account for their longevity and success.

It has long been the goal of the Law School Conference to showcase the access to justice initiatives across New York's 15 Law Schools and support the collaborations that engage law students in service to communities in need. This year's panels, work group sessions are primarily focused on cultivating civil legal justice leaders to address the structural challenges of poverty, injustice and inequality. We are honored that Steven Banks, a former Commission member and true civil justice leader, will moderate our roundtable discussion with an esteemed panel. And we are privileged that the noted scholar, Professor William Quigley, whose iconic article, Letter to a Law Student Interested in Social Justice, inspired this year's conference theme joins us today to share his perspectives.

The roundtable will be followed by a plenary session that will address the challenges, opportunity and ethics surrounding artificial intelligence as a tool to expand access to justice. Based on comments following last year's conference, that attendees are faced with hard choices in selecting from concurrent work group sessions, we are trying a new format. Our roundtable will be followed by a plenary panel that will address the critical role of artificial intelligence in our civil legal service delivery network and in legal education. We are extremely grateful to Professor Ray Brescia for coordinating and leading this plenary discussion with an expert panel that will consider the challenges, opportunities and ethics in the context of AI. Thanks to Buffalo Law School for arranging professionalism and ethics, CLE credit for the roundtable and plenary session.

As in our past conferences, you will have the opportunity to join a work group and contribute your views on how all of us can work to cultivate the next generation of civil legal justice leaders. The work from today's conference will inform our recommendations to the Chief Judge on further efforts to expand access to justice. I am so pleased that Acting Chief Judge Anthony Cannataro has recorded a welcome for us that we will hear shortly. Following that, Dean Abramovsky will deliver her welcome and invite the roundtable to the virtual stage.

Upon conclusion of Professor Brescia's plenary panel, please join your work group from the Zoom link on the conference website, which can be found in the chat. When the work group sessions end, we will reconvene using the main Zoom link for the 4:30 PM closing session. I want to express our sincere thanks to all of our speakers and panelists for the considerable time, care and thoughtfulness in preparing for the conference and of course, a very special thank you to Lauren Kanfer, Counsel to the Commission for her invaluable assistance without whom we all know this conference will not be possible. And now I am pleased to share Acting Chief Judge Cannataro's virtual welcome.

**Acting Chief Judge Anthony Cannataro:**

Welcome to our 2023 Law School Access to Justice Conference. I want to start by thanking the sponsors of today's program, a sincere thank you to Helaine M. Barnett, Chair of the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice and the commission staff for organizing this conference, and for their dedicated work to support access to justice for all New Yorkers. We are also very grateful to the University at Buffalo School of Law, Dean Aviva Abramovsky for partnering with the Commission to convene today's conference. 2023 marks the 11th year that New York's 15 law schools have come together to explore the myriad ways in which our law schools can contribute to the collective effort to expand access to essential legal services for low-income New Yorkers. Today's conference will focus on cultivating civil legal justice leaders, which is fitting because this annual conference itself demonstrates our strong commitment to training, preparing and encouraging new generations of lawyers to take up the challenge of access to justice.

By collaborating with bar associations, legal service providers, law firms and the judiciary on access to justice, New York's law schools send a clear message to our future legal leaders that equal access to justice is a top priority, and that closing the access to justice gap is a responsibility shared by all in the legal community. Today's focus on the crucial need for strong legal leadership in the civil context is also particularly timely. With over \$100 million allocated annually, New York is a leader in funding civil legal services and devising pioneering programs that produce measurable results. We have achieved much progress in expanding access to justice, and this is attributable in no small part to the work of the Permanent Commission and initiatives such as this conference that maintain a spotlight on equal justice issues and produce practical recommendations for moving forward, and over the last few years, our courts have undertaken several creative measures of their own to expand access to justice. As just one example, we have invested in virtual networks, in libraries, faith centers and community organizations to provide court users safe and private digital access to e-filing and other court resources.

In a number of these community-based hubs, litigants can appear virtually before court clerks or for court appearances, making participation in the legal process more convenient and less expensive for court users who lack technological resources or who have trouble reaching the courthouse, whether due to work, disability, a lack of transportation or childcare complications. In this and many other ways, we are making a concerted effort to bring our courts to the people and to narrow the access to justice gap. Despite our progress, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound toll on the financial, emotional, physical and mental health of our citizenry. The

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United States Census Bureau reports that income inequality increased between 2020 and 2021 for the first time in almost a decade. An analysis by our state controller indicates that poverty rates in New York have increased since 2019 with almost 2.7 million or 13.9% of New Yorkers living in poverty.

Undeniably low-income New Yorkers and disadvantaged populations still have an enormous need for civil legal representation, especially in our essentials of life courts adjudicating housing disputes and sensitive legal matters involving children and families. Individuals appearing before these courts are frequently grappling with urgent matters that can have incredibly significant impacts on their lives, such as eviction, custody disputes, mental illness and access to healthcare, as well as exposure to intra familial violence. Accessible and affordable legal representation in these proceedings is imperative to protect individual rights, enhance public confidence in our courts and ensure our justice system in fact remains just. Sadly, New York is currently experiencing significant attorney shortages in our housing courts, our family courts and our assigned counsel programs. We know that these fields of law often involve emotionally taxing matters, heavy caseloads and disproportionate compensation, but work in these practice areas is also incredibly meaningful and exceptionally rewarding as it quite often has life-changing impacts for litigants and for our communities.

As Justice Thurgood Marshall reminded us, in recognizing the humanity of our fellow beings, we pay ourselves the highest tribute. We in the legal community must work together to spread this message to ameliorate the structural challenges that public interest attorneys face and to further strengthen the pipeline to public interest law. Today's sessions addressing these issues promise to be informative and thought-provoking. We have an impressive array of panelists representing law firm, pro bono practices, national legal advocacy organizations, government agencies, and of course, distinguished professors and directors from law schools around the state. I thank Professor William P. Quigley in advance for what I am sure will be an inspiring and memorable Call to Action, and I also thank Dean Matthew Diller of Fordham Law for all the time and effort that he devotes to this conference each year. Thank you again to everyone for your participation and for your ongoing dedication to closing the access to justice gap. I very much look forward to reviewing the new ideas, findings and recommendations that will emerge from today's caucus. Best wishes for an illuminating and productive conference.

Dean Aviva Abramovsky:

Good afternoon, and welcome from Buffalo. I am pleased and honored to be here today as the Dean of the University at Buffalo School of Law, the State of New York's Law School, and to have this opportunity to partner with the Commission on this important conference. I understand that this conference has been going on for a dozen years now, and I know that we have had faculty presence every single year because it means so much, and that's because at UB School of Law, access to justice is at the heart of everything we do. It's central to our mission. As a public law school, we know that we have a moral responsibility to address disparities in our community and to work with our community partners to solve problems and promote positive change. I am very proud of the work we do to live up to these responsibilities. Access to justice is of course, at the core of the work done by our exceptional clinical programs, clinics which tackle issues ranging from environmental advocacy to civil rights and from criminal

justice to domestic violence. Our clinics fight to reduce prison sentences for domestic abuse survivors. They help domestic violence victims seek orders of protection. They advocate for transparency and police accountability. They work on global efforts to raise recognition of wetland ecosystems and so much more, and of course, they provide exceptional training for that next generation of great lawyers. What we do here at UB reflects the values of the state of New York, and we are grateful to be a part of it and to partner with so many of you. We are opening the door to the legal system, but we're also hoping to open the doors to the University at Buffalo for further partnership.

For example, our students go all over. Just a few weeks ago, we had a Puerto Rico Recovery Assistance Legal Clinic where our students made their sixth service learning trip to the island to address the most urgent legal and policy needs. Beyond our clinics, our students are also embedded in the offices of legal service providers in Western New York and beyond, through robust partnerships, externships, fellowships and the Pro Bono Scholars program. But of course, we're always looking for more partners. Last year alone, our students provided more than 41,000 hours of pro bono service through the clinic's externship practicum, pro bono programs. We are very proud of them. Some of them are here on this webinar, and I am speaking to you and for you and thank you for your incredible work. The impact of those experiences for both our students and the communities they serve is life changing, and it often leads to a lifetime of service.

Many of our graduates go on to work in the government or public inter sectors, often in leadership roles. They take what they learn here and use it for the betterment of our society, and those who pursue private practice careers also remain loyal to their law school and its mission. Its mission to access to justice. I am so grateful for their generous support that allows us to continue to expand this work and to continue being a leader in this state. I'd like also to take a minute to acknowledge the leadership of Professor and Vice Dean Kim Diana Connolly, the Director of our clinical programs, as well as Elisa Lackey, our Senior Managing Director who did an outstanding job collaborating with the commission on all the logistics for this event. Again, thank you for the honor of inviting me to speak. Thank you for recognizing the importance of public law and access to justice. Thank you for being here with me in Buffalo. It really is an honor, and it is now my pleasure to get things started by introducing our first session.