

## Welcome and Opening Remarks

April 11, 2022

Helaine Barnett:

Good afternoon. I'm Helaine Barnett, Chair of the New York State Permanent Commission on Access to Justice. Welcome to our New York Statewide Civil Legal Aid Technology Conference, convened by the Permanent Commission with Cornell Tech and NYSTech.

We have close to 600 attendees registered for this conference today, including directors, technology and legal staff from legal aid providers and community organizations, Chief Information Officers and pro bono coordinators from major New York law firms, professors and students from law schools, attorneys, technology staff and judges from the court system and dozens of other access to justice stakeholders, vendors, and funders.

We look forward to having a very engaging and productive experience this afternoon and tomorrow afternoon as we hear how our presenters have gone from making it work to working better, which is the theme of this year's conference. This is the seventh time we have held this conference and I want to take a few moments to reflect on how far we have come since we first turned an eye toward technology.

Back in 2013, when the Permanent Commission was still known as the Task Force to Expand Legal Services in New York, we recommended that the civil legal services community prioritize technology and cultivate much needed support with their staff, board and funders.

A comprehensive survey of the providers demonstrated a need for greater assessment of technology, increased use of core technology support, improved training, and policies to protect privacy and security. We recommended and held our first technology conference in 2015 with a goal of educating civil legal services leaders across the state about how technology can improve the delivery of legal services.

Early on, we recognized the importance of making this conference an annual event. In 2018, a second technology survey demonstrated that the providers had seen an overall improvement in technology initiatives, but that still more was needed to be done.

When the pandemic began in 2020, legal services programs around the state scrambled to find ways to translate their processes to serve their clients, including those with little digital access. The courts and many organizations shifted to online operations in a matter of weeks. The Permanent Commission's technology working group was forced to abandon our planned in-person technology conference and immediately got started on a series of weekly technology support webinars for the legal services community.

I would like to think that the providers were in a better position to overcome the challenges of remote working and service delivery, in part from the commissions efforts over the years, highlighting the importance of technology to their programs. In October 2020, the Permanent Commission held its first ever virtual technology conference, focusing on the impact of the pandemic on the use of technology. Many presenters shared their creative, albeit often makeshift solutions to the challenges of remote service delivery.

The court system and the providers were making it work. In fact, our struggles provided a breeding ground for innovation. Now two years later, we have shifted our focus from making it work to working better. We have an extraordinary opportunity to enhance access to justice and adopt technology to create long term change and improvement. Now working better, we have seen some permanent changes in how we do business.

Many of these changes will be discussed today and tomorrow. You can attend sessions showcasing improved systems for the delivery of legal services, such as session 1C later today, where the Center for Elder Law and Justice will talk about the web-based applications they created to manage their helpline and mobile legal unit.

Or session 2C tomorrow, where presenters from volunteers for legal services and Simpson Thacher will tell you about the virtual clinical platform they built as an alternative to in-person clinics.

You can also attend session 1A later today where the presenter will discuss advances in court technology and how they improve access to the courts.

Technological advancements have also turned a new focus on digital equity. And we have a number of sessions that will discuss the digital divide and where we should go from here. Session 2A tomorrow will be a moderated discussion about remote court appearances with four New York State judges. During session 2D, panelists will discuss the intersection of the digital divide with racial and language justice.

Favorites in years past, our Rapid Fire Tech plenary later today, which consists of a number of ignite-style presentations, highlighting new technologies. And our plenary tomorrow, which will showcase 25 Apps in 50 Minutes. Due to its popularity, we are also presenting for the fourth time in the past two years session 3D, a moderated discussion on remote work with leaders from several legal aid organizations.

If it sounds like a lot to choose from, you are right. Our two-day conference is our most ambitious agenda to date. Our planning committee received so many innovative session proposals that we have expanded our conference to include three rounds of concurrent breakout sessions that loosely cover four topic tracks, court technology, data, remote service delivery, and technical projects. In each session, attendees will remain muted and invisible, but you will have an opportunity to ask questions in the chat.

If you are conflicted over which breakout sessions to attend, not to worry, because we are recording all the sessions and plan to repost the recordings on the Commission's website after the conference that you can view at your leisure.

In any case, I'm sure you will agree that our planning committee has done a fabulous job. I would like to thank the members of the conference planning committee, each of whom played a pivotal role in helping to frame the conference agenda Quisquella Addison, Tim Baran, Glen Baum, Christine Fecko, Shira Galinsky, John Greiner, Jeff Hogue, Lillian Moy, Sateesh Nori, Chris Schwartz and Joanne Sirotkin.

And a big thank you to Debbie Wright for her leadership of the Permanent Commission technology working group and to associate Dean and Professor Matthew D'Amore, who has been our liaison with Cornell Tech for his valuable input. A special thank you to Rochelle Klemptner, Counsel to the Commission from the Office of Court Administration for her invaluable expertise and knowledge of running online conferences, without whom this conference would not have been possible.

Of course, we would not have a conference today without the 50+ presenters volunteering their time and expertise, and the New York state court system personnel who are assisting with the virtual platform. Since this conference is virtual, we opened up registration beyond New York, and we're able to reach a much broader audience.

Not only do our attendees today provide legal services to residents in 60 of New York's 62 counties, but out of state attendees hail from 30 states, plus the district of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Canada and 13 other countries. We also have 400 first time attendees, which is quite wonderful. Well, it is now time to really get started with this year's conference.

We are privileged to have as our featured speaker, the Chief Judge of the State of New York, Hon. Janet DiFiore. In 2020, the pandemic brought incredible challenges to the courts to remain open and continue to safely provide meaningful access to justice. Under judge DiFiore's superb leadership, the court system moved to virtual operations in a matter of weeks.

Judge DiFiore has remained steadfast in her ongoing support that virtual proceedings will remain a permanent and prominent feature of how the courts do business in the future. There can be no question that she is overseeing the greatest advancements in court technology to date, which have forever changed the manner in which we interact with the courts.

New York is so fortunate to have her at the helm with her extraordinary energy, her creative thinking, and her commitment to the role of the judiciary to ensure access to justice for all. It is with great admiration and gratitude that I ask you to join me in welcoming the extraordinary Chief Judge of the State of New York.

Hon. Janet DiFiore:

Welcome to our annual access to justice technology conference, one of the four signature events convened each year by the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice, along with our statewide public hearing, the law school conference and the statewide stakeholder meeting. Allow me to start my remarks today by expressing my sincere thanks to the members of the Commission led of course, by Helaine Barnett, our tireless, incomparable, and quite frankly, visionary Chair.

So thank you. Special thanks to the members of the technology working group and the Commission staff for teaming up with our outstanding partners at Cornell Tech to organize this excellent two-day agenda, an agenda that's focused on how we move forward and take full advantage of the innovative short-term solutions that were developed in response to the pandemic.

And most importantly, how we transform those temporary measures into permanent improvements in how we provide legal services and access to courts for low-income New Yorkers now and in the future. So thank you for participating in this, our seventh annual technology conference, the second to be conducted virtually in response to the pandemic.

And while a virtual conference model would never have been our preferred format before March 2020, what we have learned is that the virtual conference format has increased our attendance and participation by stakeholders and partners. And it's enabled us to expand our reach to dozens of jurisdictions outside New York state, underscoring the theme of today's conference, how we've gone from making it work to working better.

This year's conference confirms that old adage, that in every crisis there is opportunity. And while the pandemic certainly brought a great deal of pain, worry and disruption to our lives and took a toll on our court system, it also presented us with opportunities to innovate and improve our services.

A prime example of that was the way in which the court system moved quickly from an in-person to a virtual operating model in just a few short weeks in order to safely provide access to justice services at a time when the virus was spreading rapidly and threatening lives and the possibility of overwhelming our healthcare system.

And of course, without in any way diminishing the magnitude of the digital divide, which we have been sensitive to and are all working hard to bridge, our virtual model proved to be a remarkable achievement, providing safe, convenient, mostly efficient, and certainly cost effective access to the courts for countless lawyers and litigants in the midst of an unprecedented pandemic.

And even now with our judges and court staff focused on restoring full scale court operations, including in-person trials, hearings, and proceedings, there's no doubt that virtual proceedings will remain a permanent and prominent feature of court operations going forward. The pandemic served as a powerful

impetus for positive innovation as all of us in this business face the same challenge, how to ensure access to services at a time when in-person operations were necessarily restricted for reasons of public health.

With necessity being the mother of invention, our legal service and pro bono providers figured out how to leverage the power of remote technology and devised innovative solutions that enabled clients to obtain emergency and essential services in our courts and administrative agencies.

No easy tasks, but their resourceful efforts laid the foundation for how we can integrate and operationalize new technological functions into our legal service delivery model in order to expand our capacity and improve our performance.

And to guide us in pursuing these vital goals, we are fortunate to have in place this Commission and the leadership and direction the Commission provides to help us set the right priorities, identify the key issues and assemble the leading experts as we look to capitalize on our new technology skills and tools and permanently improve the ways in which we provide court access and civil legal aid to people of modest means.

Today's conference agenda is key. It's key to advancing our efforts as we focus on the expansion of important court technologies, for example, e-filing and electronic delivery of court documents, technologies that were worth their weight in gold during the pandemic, both enabling lawyers and litigants to remotely initiate cases, file papers and review court files while allowing us to dramatically reduce foot traffic in our busy and crowded court facilities in order to reduce the spread of the virus.

And now here we are, we're exploring ways to expand and do more with e-filing. It's also exceedingly important that you've been, and that you remain laser focused on the strengths and the weaknesses of the virtual platforms that develop during the pandemic.

With more than two years of experience under our belts, this is the right time to now reflect on the challenges that have been presented, the lessons we've learned, and the changes and improvements we know need to be made to ensure that there is meaningful access to virtual justice, services for all new Yorkers, including, and especially for those who find themselves on the wrong side of the digital divide for the variety of reasons we are all now familiar with.

Finally, I hope that you're all enthused and excited by the many innovations that will be on display during the Rapid Fire Tech and the 25 Apps in 50 Minutes demonstrations highlighting the latest tech tools available to help improve the quality and efficiency of remote work and virtual services.

So in closing, kudos to the Permanent Commission for putting together a rich and comprehensive agenda and for assembling a most impressive roster of expert presenters. Thank you to each one of them for generously contributing their time and expertise. As we look back over the past seven years, I think you

will all agree that each one of our technology conferences has been a real milestone event.

And each one has contributed to the momentum and the progress we've made setting in motion new ideas and new strategies that have contributed to the provision of high quality legal assistance and representation to the greatest number of people in their time of need.

And so I have every confidence that this year's technology conference will be yet another milestone in our efforts to continually improve and refine our work done in service to, and for the benefit of low-income New Yorkers. Thank you all for your commitment and for your unwavering dedication to closing the justice gap here in our state and across the country. Best wishes to all of you for a very productive conference.

Helaine Barnett:

Thank you, Chief Judge, for those special and inspiring remarks. I would now like to introduce Dean Greg Morrisett from Cornell Tech, our conference partner. Greg Morrisett was appointed the Jack and Rilla Neafsey Dean and Vice Provost of Cornell Tech on August 1, 2019.

As Dean, he has launched new impactful programs like Break Through Tech, a national effort to recruit and support women hoping to enter tech careers. And Cornell Tech's Urban Tech Hub, which is a new program focused on making clients-. I'm sorry, focused on making cities more resilient, connected, and equitable.

When confronted with the COVID-19 pandemic early in his term, Dean Morrisett's leadership, the Cornell Tech campus stepped up to serve the Roosevelt Island and wider New York City community using its maker lab to 3D print hundreds of protective reusable face masks for healthcare workers across the city, engaging volunteer Cornell Tech students as tech support for local seniors on Roosevelt Island to help them adjust to virtual life.

And pivoting Cornell Tech's K to 12 program, which works to bring computer science learning to public schools, to develop online classes for the schools it serves. And he has continued this commitment to serving the community. And has launched a new PiTech, Cornell Tech's initiative for public interest tech, which he will speak more about in a moment.

Dean Morrisett was Dean of computing and information sciences at Cornell University from 2015 to 2019, and previously held the Allen B. Cutting Chair in Computer Science at Harvard University from 2004 to 2015, where he also served as Associate Dean for Computer Science and Electronic Engineering. Please join me in welcoming and thanking Dean Morrisett.

Dean Greg Morrisett:

Thank you, Chair Barnett. It's a pleasure to be here and it's a privilege to welcome you all to the 2022 Statewide Civil Legal Aid Technology Conference. I'd also like to extend my thanks to Judge Janet DiFiore for her remarks and joining us here from the Court of Appeals for the State of New York. Cornell Tech is very honored and proud to partner with the Permanent Commission on this particular event.

A statewide conference that connects technology and law for social good is perfectly aligned with our mission here at Cornell Tech, which is to create the leaders in the technologies for the digital age, with an emphasis on economic and societal benefits. Cornell Tech was founded to bring together faculty, business and law leaders, tech entrepreneurs, and students from across a broad range of disciplines to produce results that meet the needs of our time. And while law is only one part of what we do, we have a front row seat to many areas where law and tech interact. And we talked about this before at the conference, for example, our clinic in tech abuse, where our researchers partnered with advocates for victims of intimate partner abuse, to educate providers and victims about how technology can be used for stalking and abuse, and then to advocate for laws to help protect those victims.

Through other courses that we teach, we introduce students directly how legal technology can be used to help those in need. For example, this year, our students have developed expert systems applications for the California department of fair employment and housing. And our partner Cornell law school up in Ithaca and its legal information institute was a pioneer in this area paving the way for public access to legal information.

So as mentioned earlier, I'd like to tell you a little bit about one of our newest initiatives, something we call PiTech, which is short for public interest tech. We decided PiTech sounded better than PIT. So we stuck with the PiTech nomenclature. With PiTech we're pursuing engagement opportunities that apply technology expertise in service of public needs and incorporating public objectives explicitly into the pursuit of technical innovation.

Through PiTech studio, we're helping students learn product development and business models that accelerate positive social change. Students across disciplines from engineering and information science to business and law, they work together to apply tools and frameworks for launching and scaling products, services, and organizations that serve the public interest.

Also as part of PiTech, we offer impact fellowships that support technical researchers seeking to contribute to the public interest by actively engaging with social issues that can be addressed or complicated by technology. Our summer PhD impact fellowship provides doctoral students with direct financial support as they embed within a community, an NGO foundation or public sector organization. You can learn more about these initiatives and more about us more generally at [Pi.tech.cornell.edu](https://pi.tech.cornell.edu). That's [Pi.tech.cornell.edu](https://pi.tech.cornell.edu).