



PRESS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

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**Hon. Lawrence K. Marks
Chief Administrative Judge**

www.nycourts.gov/press

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Chief Judge Announces Westchester Initiative to Enhance Remote Access to the Courts, Legal Services to Underserved Communities Amid COVID Pandemic

New Faith-Based Court Access (FCA) Program Enables Unrepresented Litigants to Virtually Access the Westchester County Courts, Free Legal Services from Local Houses of Worship

WHITE PLAINS, NEW YORK—Chief Judge Janet DiFiore today announced an innovative access-to-justice program aimed at low-income Westchester County residents who, because they lack the necessary technology, have been unable to access services in our virtual courts amid COVID-19. The new Faith-Based Court Access (FCA) initiative, led by Ninth Judicial District Administrative Judge Kathie Davidson, is a partnership of the Ninth Judicial District, Westchester County Executive George Latimer’s office and faith leaders throughout the County.

The program is being rolled out on a pilot basis, offering a network of fully equipped, remote access sites in houses of worship located across Westchester County. Reverend Dr. W. Franklyn Richardson, Senior Pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Mount Vernon, has provided the start-up technology for the initial sites through the Grace Development Corporation.

The following services will be offered at each of the pilot sites:

- Access to computers, video cameras, microphones, scanners and printers to enable litigants to participate in court proceedings.
- Access to a private area where litigants can prepare documentation for court proceedings.

- A congregation point person to assist the litigant with the provided technology.
- Access to a telephone and WiFi connections to communicate with service providers for pro bono assistance with court forms.

“Under Judge Davidson’s leadership, Westchester County and the Ninth Judicial District have been at the forefront of the court system’s efforts to ensure that all New Yorkers have meaningful access to the courts and legal assistance they need to secure life’s essentials—a goal that has become even more challenging amid the public health crisis. I want to thank Judge Davidson for spearheading this latest initiative to help narrow the justice gap in Westchester’s underserved communities, and am grateful to County Executive Latimer, Reverend Richardson and our faith leaders countywide for their ongoing support of the courts’ access-to-justice programs. I look forward to the expansion of the FCA model within Westchester County and beyond,” said Chief Judge DiFiore.

“With the launch of this novel initiative, many of Westchester County’s neediest litigants will now be able to consult with a legal services provider online or participate in a virtual court proceeding from the safety of their local house of worship,” said Judge Davidson, also thanking the Ninth Judicial District’s government and community partners for their hard work and collaboration on this vital program.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a tremendous strain on some of our most vulnerable residents. It is my hope that the FCA Initiative will fill a void for those litigants who have been unable to remotely access justice services, providing an avenue for them to participate virtually in court proceedings and file documents through the court system’s electronic portals, all at a location where they feel comfortable and safe. We owe a debt of gratitude to Judge Davidson for her stellar leadership on this initiative,” said County Executive Latimer.

Said Reverend Richardson, “With the many challenges posed by the COVID pandemic, the FCA program will serve as a vital resource to many of our residents grappling with legal issues relating to their housing, health, family safety and other pressing needs, offering a safe environment where they can remotely access court proceedings and critical services. I want to thank Judge Davidson, County Executive Latimer and Crystal Collins of the County Executive’s office for their tireless efforts in helping bring this initiative to fruition.”

The Westchester County FCA pilot program is among several initiatives under way around the State to help bridge the digital divide facing so many of New York's unrepresented litigants.

A list of the initial FCA sites follows:

Grace Baptist Church

52 South 6th Avenue

Mount Vernon, NY

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

914-664-2676

Reverend Bill Mizell, under the leadership of Reverend Dr. W. Franklyn Richardson

Wmm@gracebapt.org

Mount Hope A.M.E. Zion Church

65 Lake Street

White Plains, NY

Tuesday, Thursday 9:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

914-948-6372

Senior Pastor Reverend Dr. Gregory Robeson Smith, Brother David Burton

Mthopeamezionchurch@gmail.com

Pelder01@aol.com

San Andres Episcopal Church

22 Post Street

Yonkers, NY

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

914-963-9563

Pastor Richard Suero, Church Secretary Beatriz Castrillon

sanandresyonkers@gmail.com

Bethesda Baptist Church

71 Lincoln Avenue

New Rochelle, NY

Tuesday, Thursday 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

914-632-6713

Reverend Dr. Paul Weaver

WeaverDirector@gmail.com

Church of the Assumption (Catholic)

131 Union Avenue

Peekskill, NY

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday 9:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

914-737-2071

Father Esteban Sanchez

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