



# PRESS RELEASE

---

**New York State  
Unified Court System**

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

**Contact:  
Lucian Chalfen,  
Public Information Director  
Arlene Hackel, Deputy Director  
(212) 428-2500**

**[www.nycourts.gov/press](http://www.nycourts.gov/press)**

**Date: May 1, 2020**

## **Chief Judge Janet DiFiore, State Attorney General Letitia James and State Bar President Henry Greenberg Host Virtual Law Day Ceremony**

**NEW YORK**—In keeping with a 30-year Court of Appeals’ tradition as we continue to navigate these extraordinary times, Chief Judge Janet DiFiore today joined State Attorney General Letitia James and State Bar President Henry Greenberg to commemorate our nation’s rule of law—but with a difference—celebrating Law Day virtually rather than in-person. To maintain physical distancing, each separately recorded a message for the virtual Law Day ceremony which, also in keeping with tradition, kicks off with the Pledge of Allegiance, led by New York City Criminal Court Senior Court Clerk Regan Williams, followed by our national anthem, sung by Sergeant Jessica Hernandez of Bronx County Supreme-Criminal Court, both recorded in front of the iconic 60 Centre Street courthouse in lower Manhattan.

In her welcoming remarks, Chief Judge DiFiore stressed the significance of the Court’s annual Law Day event, particularly this year, and paid tribute to Attorney General James and State Bar President Greenberg for their support. “After speaking with our Attorney General and State Bar President, we agreed, without hesitation, that Law Day had to be celebrated. Our message to the public ... must be clear and unwavering: our justice system remains strong and resilient; our respective institutions are working together to ensure access to justice; and we are supporting and upholding the rule of law, standing together against the disruption of the moment,” she said.

This year's Law Day theme, "Your Vote, Your Voice, Our Democracy: the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment at 100," calls for reflection on the historic contributions of the pioneers of the women's suffrage movement.

Though the Chief Judge proudly pointed out that the movement that led to the passage of the amendment granting women the right to vote, led by trailblazers like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, began in upstate New York with the 1848 Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention, she lamented, "While the pioneers of women's suffrage would certainly be pleased with the progress of women in society ... they would undoubtedly be surprised, even disappointed, at the electorate's woeful lack of civic knowledge and the low voter turnout we experience, year after year, across our nation."

Judge DiFiore noted that last Law Day, she and State Bar President Greenberg pledged to hold a joint convocation in which lawyers and judges would collaborate with local educators across the State to strengthen civic knowledge and engagement among our young people. Regrettably, the COVID-19 emergency forced the postponement of the gathering. "But I assure you that as soon as it is safe and practicable for us to do so, we will fulfill our commitment and implement our planned program to ... engage our students on civics and improve their understanding of the courts, the justice system, the rule of law and the power we have as voters to guide our own destiny," she added.

The Chief Judge also called upon members of the legal profession to ensure that our election laws and rules are updated and that, amid the pandemic, every American can safely cast their vote. "As members of the Bar, we each swore an oath to uphold the Constitution ... It is up to us to lead the way in preserving and defending our cherished right to vote; helping New Yorkers recover from the economic damage of this devastating virus; and working collaboratively ... to keep our courts open while protecting the health and safety of our judges, court staff, lawyers, litigants and the tens of thousands of individuals who, until recently, physically came through our courthouses every single day—and whose legal needs are sure to intensify in the aftermath of this crisis," said Judge DiFiore, thanking all those who have worked to keep the courts up and running, provide legal services to those in need and help each other as we move forward to a "new normal."

"On Law Day, we come together to celebrate the rule of law—the set of guidelines that allow us to navigate our country and its people through times of turbulence and triumph, of conflicts between right and wrong, times of progress and peril," said Attorney General

James. “In the midst of this crisis, we have a higher responsibility than ever to ensure that the rule of law and the rights of the people we serve are upheld. My office has heeded this call and worked tirelessly to protect the rights of all New Yorkers. The integrity and efficacy of our justice system is paramount to our democracy and I thank Chief Judge DiFiore for her leadership in ensuring our system continues to function properly and fairly during this critical time.”

“No profession is more resilient than the law. It would be unthinkable, therefore, to forgo or postpone Law Day—our national day of celebration of the rule of law. How fitting it is as well that this year’s Law Day theme commemorates the 100th anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment’s ratification, which guaranteed all women the right to vote. Elections are America’s foundational concept: the means by which we govern ourselves freely. In the midst of the pandemic, voters must not be forced to choose between disease or democracy, between risking their health or exercising a civic duty. We must take steps to ensure that all of us can vote safely and securely this November. As we struggle with fear and uncertainty, this much is clear: giving up on democracy is not an option,” said State Bar President Greenberg.

While the annual celebration typically concludes with a ceremony honoring court employees across the State for notable contributions to their courts and communities, this Law Day the court system was unable to conduct its awards presentation. Instead, the Chief Judge closed with a show of gratitude for the remarkable efforts, amid the COVID-19 crisis, of the court system’s judges and nonjudicial staff. “I want to take this opportunity to express our special appreciation for the extraordinary work of our nonjudicial staff, including the chief clerks, court clerks, court officers, technology staff and many other dedicated court professionals who worked countless hours, under very difficult conditions, to create a virtual court system almost overnight—a system that has enabled us to deliver justice services all across the state, without putting the public, or our judges and staff, at risk of harm,” she said, also lauding the court system’s judges for their leadership and diligence—and Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence K. Marks for his steady guidance—in ensuring the continuity of the courts’ vital services during this highly-challenging period.

To view/listen to the Law Day 2020 ceremony, go to <https://vimeo.com/410331971>.

For a transcript, go to: <https://www.nycourts.gov/whatsnew/pdf/LawDay2020.pdf>.

# # #