



# **NEWS RELEASE**

**New York State  
Unified Court System**

**Hon. Joseph A. Zayas  
Chief Administrative Judge**

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## **Chief Judge Wilson, Chief Administrative Judge Zayas Announce New Leadership Team for Landmark State Judicial Task Force on Mental Illness**

**NEW YORK**—Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson and Chief Administrative Judge Joseph A. Zayas today announced the installation of a new leadership team for a landmark statewide judicial task force charged with implementing reforms to more effectively address the behavioral health issues of justice-involved individuals. Hon. Matthew D’Emic, Administrative Judge for Criminal Matters, Kings County Supreme Court, will lead the New York State Judicial Task Force on Mental Illness with co-chair, Hon. Jacqueline Sisson, Canandaigua City Court judge and acting Ontario Family and County Court judge. In addition, all members of the Task Force’s panel are now in place, representing a diverse and deeply experienced group of judges, lawyers, mental health experts and others from around the State (membership roster follows).

The new Task Force assignments are in line with the work of the Conferences of Chief Justices and State Court Administrators’ (CCJ/COSCA) National Judicial Task Force to Examine State Courts’ Response to Mental Illness, which issued its report after a multi-year effort by over 40 judges, courts and national behavioral health experts. The report and its expansive recommendations emphasize the unique role that state courts and judicial leaders can play as conveners, with community and governmental partners, to close the gap between the behavioral health and justice systems in addressing the needs of justice-involved individuals with mental illness. The State’s new mental health task force, which was originally envisioned by former Acting Chief Judge Anthony Cannataro, will examine the current landscape and advance improvements to the justice system’s responses to children, youth and adults with behavioral health disorders as well as the need to more effectively address the criminal justice system’s treatment of those with serious mental illness and co-occurring disorders. Judges

D'Emic and Sisson are uniquely positioned in their respective roles to carry out this mission. Judge D'Emic has been the presiding judge of the State's first mental health court in Brooklyn and also served on the national task force. Judge Sisson is a presiding judge of a mental health treatment court in northern New York.

"The vast majority of our nation's incarcerated individuals suffer from mental illness, have a substance use disorder or both. The prevalence of mental illness cannot be overstated, nor can its enormous impact on every aspect of our court system, including our criminal, civil and family courts. The mandate of the New York State Judicial Task Force on Mental Illness is crucial to our efforts to develop more humane, effective approaches in addressing the needs of justice-involved individuals, children and families affected by mental illness, trauma and substance abuse, by replacing carceral approaches in cases where those are both expensive and ineffective," said Chief Judge Wilson. "I am delighted that Judge D'Emic, who served on the national task force on mental illness, will continue this important work and, with co-chair, Judge Sisson, will spearhead our extensive, statewide undertaking as we seek to effect systemic reforms, from improving diversion to treatment practices, to developing comprehensive training for judges and non-judicial personnel, to building stronger bridges with the courts' partner agencies as well as between our local courts and communities throughout the State. I eagerly await the findings and advances to be brought about by the hard work and dedication of this sophisticated group and am grateful for the support of our many justice partners toward that end."

"The mission of the New York State Judicial Task Force on Mental Illness strongly aligns with the New York State Courts' unwavering commitment to developing best practices that incorporate a variety of treatment and support services for justice-involved individuals who suffer from mental health issues to improve case outcomes in criminal, civil and family matters," said Chief Administrative Judge Zayas. "We have over 300 problem-solving courts operating throughout New York, including 42 Mental Health Courts, overseen by Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Justice Initiatives Edwina G. Richardson-Mendelson and Statewide Coordinating Judge for Problem-Solving Courts Toko Serita. These courts are already working toward collaborative solutions with other government agencies, community organizations and mental health experts, among other stakeholders. The Task Force, under the deft stewardship of Judges D'Emic and Sisson, will serve to support and further these non-traditional approaches as we seek the best path forward in improving the safety, delivery of justice and quality of life in our urban, suburban and rural communities statewide."

"I am grateful to Chief Judge Wilson and Chief Administrative Judge Zayas for the opportunity to advance ways to serve those with serious mental illness, and their families, always recognizing that justice must look higher than its reach," said Judge D'Emic.

“I am incredibly honored to co-chair this important statewide judicial task force with Judge D’Emic. This Task Force is charged with implementing critically important reforms that we know impact a majority of justice-involved individuals. We will work to carry out the national task force’s recommendations and with the dedication and hard work of our exceptional task force members, find innovative and effective ways for our courts to better respond to mental illness. As a presiding Mental Health Treatment Court judge in upstate New York, I have seen firsthand the need for the initiatives to be undertaken by this Task Force and the potential benefits to the individuals, families and communities in which they reside. I would like to thank Chief Judge Wilson and Chief Administrative Judge Zayas for selecting me to assist in this innovative and critical mission,” said Judge Sisson.

Judges D’Emic and Sisson will guide the Task Force members, working at the community level and with the court system’s various partners to map out resources, identify gaps and more effectively respond to the needs of justice-involved New Yorkers with mental illness; the objective is to treat individuals holistically, providing them with the tools and resources they need to succeed in their lives. The New York State Judicial Task Force on Mental Illness encourages person-centered justice by promoting the involvement of peers and incorporating the voices of people with lived experience.

A roster of the Task Force members follows.

## **Judicial Task Force on Mental Illness**

### **Co-Chairs**

Hon. Matthew J. D’Emic, *Administrative Judge for Criminal Matters, Kings Court Supreme Court*

Hon. Jacqueline Sisson, *Canandaigua City Court and Acting Ontario Family and County Court Judge*

### **Members**

Hon. Tamiko Amaker, *Administrative Judge, New York City Criminal Court*

Hon. Ross P. Andrews, *Judge, Syracuse City Court*

Alexander Sasha Bardey, M.D., *President, Fifth Avenue Forensics and Director of Forensic Psychiatry, Nassau County Department of Health, Chemical Dependency and Intellectual Disabilities*

Kristila Brace, Psy.D., *Bureau of Health Promotion for Justice-Impacted Populations, NYC Dept. of Health and Mental Hygiene*

Alison Burke, *Vice President, Regulatory and Professional Affairs, Greater NY Hospital Assn.*

Hon. F. Scott Carrigan, *Acting County Court Judge, Suffolk County*

Christine Edwards, Esq., *Chief Counsel, OCA Office for Justice Initiatives, Division of Policy and Planning*

Virginia Fineran, Ph.D., *Clinical Director, Mental Health, Correctional Health Services, Rikers Island, NYC Health and Hospitals*

Carol Fisler, Esq., *Consultant, Criminal Justice and Mental Health Collaborations*

Tricia George, *Director, Diversion Center, Division of Forensic Services, NYS Office of Mental Health*

Hon. Doris M. Gonzalez, *Administrative Judge for Civil Matters, Bronx County Supreme Court*

Peter D. Guarino, LCSW, *Deputy Directory, Ontario County Mental Health Center*  
Hon. David J. Gugerty, *Supreme Court Justice, Nassau County*  
Patricia Hernandez, LCSW, *Director, Metro Region, Corporation for Supportive Housing*  
Hon. Marcia Hirsch, *Acting Supreme Court Justice, Queens County*  
David Kelly, Esq., *Chief, Mental Health Unit, Kings County District Attorney's Office*  
Colleen A. King, Esq., *Supervising Attorney, Mental Health Team, Brooklyn Defender Services*  
Leanne Lapp, Esq., *Ontario County Public Defender*  
Li-Wen Lee, M.D., *Associate Commissioner, Division of Forensic Services, NYS Office of Mental Health*  
Joan Levenson, Esq., *Special Counsel to the Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for NYC Courts*  
Deanna Logan, Esq., *Director, NYC Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice*  
Ann-Marie Louison, LCSW, *Chief Impact Officer, CASES*  
Hon. Janet Malone, *Supreme Court Justice, Westchester County*  
Hon. Juan Merchan, *Acting Supreme Court Justice, New York County*  
Hon. Anne E. Minihan, *Administrative Judge, Ninth Judicial District*  
Hon. Valentina Morales, *Judge, New York City Criminal Court*  
Ruth O'Sullivan, LCSW, *Project and Clinical Director, Brooklyn Mental Health Court*  
Hon. Seth Peacock, *Presiding Judge, Ithaca Wellness and Recovery Court*  
Hon. James Ritts, *Ontario County District Attorney*  
Merrill Rotter, M.D., *Senior Forensic Advisor to the Commissioner, NYS Office of Mental Health*  
Hon. Keri E. Savona, *Ulster County Family Court Judge and Acting Supreme Court Justice, Coordinating Judge of Specialty Courts for the Third Judicial District*  
Hon. Toko Serita, *Acting Supreme Court Justice and Statewide Coordinating Judge for Problem-Solving Courts, OCA Office for Justice Initiatives, Division of Policy and Planning*  
Hon. Carol Sharpe, *Supreme Court Justice, New York County*  
Sheila Shea, Esq., *Director, Mental Hygiene Legal Services, Third Judicial Dept.*  
Hon. Madeline Singas, *Associate Judge, NYS Court of Appeals*  
Lisa C. Smith, Esq., *Chief Counsel for Family Violence Matters, OCA Office for Justice Initiatives, Division of Policy and Planning*  
Brian Stettin, *Senior Advisor on Severe Mental Illness, NYC Mayor's Office*  
Chief Theresa Tobin, Ph.D., *Chief of Interagency Operations, NYPD*  
Hon. Kelly Vacco, *Supreme Court Justice, Eighth Judicial District*  
Kimberly VanCamp, *Mental Health Court Coordinator, Seventh Judicial District and Project Director, Monroe County Supreme and County Courts*  
Hon. John Zhuo Wang, *Presiding Judge, Midtown Community Court*  
Patricia Warth, Esq., *Director, NYS Office of Indigent Legal Services*

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