

July 24, 2023

**Supreme Court of the State of New York
Appellate Division, First Judicial Department**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Presiding Justice Announces the Appointment of Co-chairs
of the Committee on Character and Fitness**

Today, Presiding Justice Dianne T. Renwick announced the appointment of Hon. Betty Weinberg Ellerin and Hon. Angela M. Mazzarelli as the new co-chairs of the Committee on Character and Fitness for the First Judicial Department, effective June 27, 2023. Justices Ellerin and Mazzarelli were appointed upon a unanimous vote of the Court.

In their capacity as co-chairs of the Committee on Character and Fitness, Justices Ellerin and Mazzarelli will oversee the work of the Committee, which is charged with examining applicants to the bar in the Bronx and Manhattan to ensure that they possess the requisite character and fitness to enter the profession of practicing attorneys.

Both Justices Ellerin and Mazzarelli, the first women to chair the Committee on Character and Fitness, bring a wealth of knowledge, wisdom, and perspective to their positions as co-chairs of the Committee.

Justice Ellerin served as an Associate Justice of the Appellate Division, First Department from 1985 to 1998 and from 2000 to 2005, and as Presiding Justice from 1999 to 2000 (when she was required to step down due to constitutional age limits). She was the first woman ever to serve on the Court, either as an Associate Justice or as Presiding Justice. Prior to her appointment to the Appellate Division, Justice Ellerin was the first woman appointed as Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for the Courts of the City of New York. She was also a founding member and director of the Women's Bar Association of the State of New York. Justice Ellerin joined the law firm of Alston & Bird as Senior Counsel after retiring from the bench and has served as Vice-chair of the Committee on Character and Fitness since 2006.

Justice Mazzarelli was an Associate Justice of the Appellate Division, First Department from 1994 to 2022. Only the second woman ever appointed to the Court, she is the third longest serving Appellate Division justice and longest serving female Appellate Division justice in New York State. Justice Mazzarelli chaired the Court's internal Committee on Admissions, which oversees the process by which the Court admits attorneys who have been vetted by the Committee on Character and Fitness. She also served on the

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statewide Advisory Committee on Bar Admissions for more than 20 years and on the New York State Commission on Judicial Conduct from 2017 to 2022. Prior to her appointment to the Appellate Division, Justice Mazzairelli served as a judge of the Civil Court of the City of New York, as an Acting Justice of the New York State Supreme Court (sitting in the Criminal Term), and as an elected Justice of the New York Supreme Court (sitting in the Civil Term).

Presiding Justice Dianne T. Renwick said, “I am delighted that Justices Ellerin and Mazzairelli have agreed to serve as co-chairs of the Committee on Character and Fitness. I admire these eminent jurists, who have contributed so much to the role of women in the law and to jurisprudence in New York. Their expertise and sound judgment will be invaluable in guiding the Committee as it evaluates applicants who seek to join our noble profession.

“In addition, the entire Court extends its gratitude to Peter James Johnson, Jr., who chaired the Committee for a remarkable 25 years. In his quarter-century of service, Mr. Johnson oversaw significant changes to the makeup of the Committee so that it more closely reflects the diverse community of applicants to the bar. The Court and the legal community owe him a debt of gratitude. We thank him for his leadership and years of service.”