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Hon. Ann Pfau

Chief Administrative Judge



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Task Force to Support Chief Judge's Efforts to Ensure Adequate Legal Representation in Civil Proceedings Involving Fundamental Human Needs

NEW YORK – Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman today announced the creation of the Task Force to Expand Access to Civil Legal Services in New York, which will serve as the centerpiece of his efforts to establish a comprehensive approach to providing counsel to low-income New Yorkers in civil cases. The new Task Force, chaired by Helaine M. Barnett, former head of the Civil Division of the New York City Legal Aid Society and recently retired president of the Legal Services Corporation in Washington, D.C., includes statewide representatives from the courts, civil legal services and pro bono providers, bar associations, government, law schools, and business and not-for-profit organizations. In supporting Chief Judge Lippman's efforts to ensure adequate legal representation in civil legal proceedings involving fundamental human needs, the Task Force's broad-based mission will include identifying permanent civil legal service funding streams, improving delivery of those services and guiding the courts' ongoing efforts to remove barriers to justice for all New Yorkers.

The work of the Task Force will support annual public hearings that are scheduled to begin in the fall in each of the four Appellate Departments aimed at assessing the extent and nature of unmet civil legal service needs statewide. The findings of these hearings, which will be presided over by the Chief Judge and include the Presiding Justice of the Judicial Department, the Chief Administrative Judge, and the President of the New York State Bar Association, will form the basis of recommendations of state funding for civil legal services. In addition, the Task Force will conduct its own studies, collecting and analyzing data in this area, and research programs and strategies that have proven successful, working closely with the judiciary's Access to Justice Program, headed by Hon. Fern Fisher, and with civil legal service providers, foundations, law schools and pro bono programs, to coordinate and enhance existing services in New York.

Chief Judge Lippman said, "No issue is more fundamental to the courts' constitutional mission than ensuring equal justice for all. The availability of affordable legal representation for low-income New Yorkers is indispensable to our ability to carry out that mission. As Chief Judge, I am wholly committed to working with the entire legal community and the other branches of government to make meaningful legal representation a reality for all New Yorkers, regardless of their station in life. The statewide public hearings this fall, together with the work of this superb Task Force, will be absolutely essential to our ability to achieve this critical goal. In undertaking this multifaceted collaborative effort, New York will be the first state in the country to have the entire leadership of the Judicial branch and the state's bar make an unequivocal commitment to providing civil legal representation to the poor in matters where they need it most. This is an important step toward the creation of sustainable funding for civil legal services and the realization of meaningful access to justice in New York State."

Ms. Barnett added, "It is so important that the Chief Judge of the State of New York has chosen to focus on equal access to justice and to highlight the need to expand access to civil legal services to those most vulnerable in our state, particularly in these difficult economic times when it is more critical than ever. Our first order of business will be to help set the agenda for the statewide hearings to document unaddressed civil legal needs for people and families threatened with issues such as foreclosure, eviction, loss of child custody and physical abuse. Providing funding for these services for low-income New Yorkers can greatly improve the chances of keeping or securing basic necessities, which are the keys to safety, stability and self sufficiency, and help build stronger and stable communities. This newly created Task Force will focus on ways to expand civil legal representation and equal justice under the law for all New Yorkers."

More than two million New Yorkers each year navigate the state's civil justice system without counsel, many with cases in fundamental areas such as housing, personal and family safety and employment. The deep recession has increased the need for civil legal aid while diminishing available funds for these crucial services. Most notably, the Interest on Lawyers Account program – a critical funding source for many civil legal services providers throughout the state – has eroded from \$31 million to less than \$8 million.

A list of members of the Task Force to Expand Access to Civil Legal Services in New York is attached.

CHIEF JUDGE JONATHAN LIPPMAN'S APPOINTMENTS TO THE TASK FORCE TO EXPAND CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES IN NEW YORK

CHAIR

Helaine M. Barnett, President, Legal Services Corporation (2004-2009)

EX-OFFICIO

Director, NYS Courts Access to Justice Program (Hon. Fern Fisher, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for New York City Courts)

Chair, Assembly Judiciary Committee (Assemblymember Helene E. Weinstein)

Chair, Senate Judiciary Committee (Senator John Sampson)

MEMBERS

Hon. Rolando T. Acosta, Associate Justice, Appellate Division, First Department

Steven Banks, Attorney in Chief, Legal Aid Society

Hon. Carmen Beauchamp Ciparick, Senior Associate Judge, Court of Appeals

Robert N. Convissar, Immediate Past President, Bar Association of Erie County, Buffalo

Mark G. Cunha, Chair, Legal Services NYC; Partner, Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP, New York City

Stephen M. Cutler, General Counsel, JP Morgan Chase & Co.

Matthew Diller, Dean, Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law

Camille Siano Enders, Women's Bar Association of the State of New York; NYS Workers Compensation Board Office of Appeals, Albany

Anne Erickson, President & CEO, Empire Justice Center

Barbara Finkelstein, Executive Director, Legal Services of Hudson Valley

Kevin Finnegan, Political Director, 1199 SEIU (United Healthcare Workers East)

Alexander D. Forger, Oak Spring Farms, LLC., New York City

Emily F. Franchina, Immediate Past President, Nassau County Bar Association; Partner, Franchina & Giordano PC, Garden City

Sheila Gaddis, Executive Director, Volunteer Legal Services Project of Monroe County Inc.; Partner, Hiscock & Barclay LLP, Rochester

Michael E. Getnick, Immediate Past President, New York State Bar Association; Partner, Getnick Livingston Atkinson & Priore, LLP, Utica

Robert J. Giuffra, Jr., Partner, Sullivan & Cromwell, New York City

Taa Grays, President, Network of Bar Leaders; Assistant General Counsel & Chief of Staff, Metlife, New York City

Denise Kronstadt, Deputy Executive Director, Fund for Modern Courts

C. Bruce Lawrence, Partner, Boylan, Brown, Code, Vigdor & Wilson, LLP, Rochester

Hon. George H. Lowe, Co-Chair, New York State Bar Association President's Committee on Access to Justice; U.S. Magistrate Judge, U.S. District Court for the Northern District of New York, Syracuse

Hon. E. Leo Milonas, Partner, Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP, New York City

Lillian Moy, Executive Director, Legal Aid Society of Northeastern NY

Christopher O'Malley, Executive Director, The IOLA Fund of the State of New York

Bettina B. Plevan, Proskauer Rose LLP, New York City

Michael Rothenberg, Executive Director, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI)

Robert C. Sheehan, Of Counsel, Skadden Arps, New York City

Lori Slutsky, President, The New York Community Trust

Deborah L. Wright, United Auto Workers, Local 2325

Task Force Staffing

COUNSEL:

Marcia Levy, Special Counsel for Pro Bono and Director of Professional Development, Sullivan & Cromwell

STAFF COUNSEL:

Mary C. Mone, Counsel to the Chief Judge

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