



PRESS RELEASE

New York State
Unified Court System

Contact:
David Bookstaver
Communications Director
Arlene Hackel, Deputy Director
(212) 428-2500

Hon. A. Gail Prudenti
Chief Administrative Judge

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Chief Judge Names Members of Committee Charged With Examining How Non-Lawyer Advocates Can Help Narrow New York's Justice Gap

NEW YORK – Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman today announced the members of an advisory group charged with examining the role that appropriately trained and qualified non-lawyer advocates can play in bridging New York's justice gap. Led by Roger Maldonado, a partner at the law firm of Balber Pickard Maldonado & Van Der Tuin, and Fern Schair, Chair of the Feerick Center for Social Justice at Fordham Law School, the Committee on Non-Lawyers and the Justice Gap will seek input from all interested stakeholders, making recommendations for an appropriate system to expand the role of non-lawyer advocates in the delivery of legal services, and devising a pilot program to allow those who cannot afford an attorney to receive low-cost guidance in simpler civil matters by qualified non-lawyers.

The committee, which includes statewide representatives from the courts, legal service providers, the bar, law schools, community-based service providers, and other stakeholders, will focus its efforts in the areas of housing, elder law and consumer credit. Among the issues the committee will evaluate are training requirements and other qualifications for non-lawyer advocates, the scope of work non-lawyer advocates will be able to perform as well as measures to protect consumers who use their services.

“The availability of affordable, meaningful legal representation is a critical priority, fundamental to the Judiciary’s core mission of ensuring equal justice under the law,” said Chief Judge Lippman. “Regrettably, even with the millions of pro bono service hours so generously provided each year by members of New York’s legal profession, we simply cannot keep pace—particularly in these uncertain economic times—with the growing need for civil legal assistance among New Yorkers of modest means in matters involving their most basic needs. The Committee on Non-Lawyers and the Justice Gap, under the capable stewardship of Roger Maldonado and Fern Schair, will carefully examine the role that appropriately trained and qualified non-lawyer advocates can play in providing urgently needed assistance on behalf of our most vulnerable New Yorkers. I have every confidence that their work will result in innovative solutions that will bring the ideal of equal justice much closer to reality in New York.”

“I want to thank Judge Lippman for the opportunity to be part of this important undertaking to enhance access to justice by exploring the utilization of trained non-lawyer advocates to provide help to low- and moderate-income New Yorkers on simpler, discrete legal matters involving life’s essentials. It is a privilege to help spearhead the efforts of the talented individuals comprising the committee as we work to forge positive solutions to ensure meaningful assistance for all New Yorkers, regardless of economic status,” said Fern Schair.

“I am honored that Chief Judge Lippman has asked me to help lead the Committee on Non-Lawyers and the Justice Gap in its efforts to address the crisis in civil legal services we currently face in New York State. I look forward to working with Judge Lippman, my esteemed co-chair, Fern Schair, and the distinguished members of the committee to devise thoughtful, practical approaches to help narrow the gap between the unfilled need for civil legal services and the resources available to provide representation for the poor and those of modest means throughout our state,” said Roger Maldonado.

The idea for the Committee on Non-Lawyers and the Justice Gap grew out of testimony at last year’s public hearings on civil legal services—held by the Chief Judge annually since 2010 to assess the extent and nature of New York’s unmet civil legal services needs—and the recommendations of Judge Lippman’s Task Force to Expand Access to Civil Legal Services in New York, as outlined in its November 2012 report.

Last year, the task force established a Working Group on Non-Lawyer Involvement to evaluate the potential role of non-lawyer advocates in addressing New York’s justice gap,

finding that a variety of non-lawyer entities offer advocacy assistance to low-income New Yorkers who have current or potential legal problems, with many of these entities providing help to prevent a problem from developing into a full-blown legal matter in court.

The Committee on Non-Lawyers and the Justice Gap, whose creation was first announced by Judge Lippman in his State of the Judiciary address in February, will expand upon the efforts of the task force's Working Group on Non-Lawyer Involvement, submitting its preliminary recommendations for pilot projects to the Chief Judge by November 2013.

A membership roster of the Committee on Non-Lawyers and the Justice Gap follows.

Committee on Non-Lawyers and the Justice Gap

Chairs

Roger Maldonado, Balber Pickard Maldonado & Van Der Tuin PC
Fern Schair, Chair, Advisory Board of the Feerick Center for Social Justice, Fordham University School of Law

Members

Penelope Andrews, Esq., Dean and President, Albany Law School
Steve Banks, Attorney-in-Chief, The Legal Aid Society
Helaine M. Barnett, Chair, Chief Judge's Task Force to Expand Access to Civil Legal Services in New York
Mary Bleiberg, Executive Director, Community Impact Institute, Fedcap
Anne Erickson, President & CEO, Empire Justice Center
Jonathan E. Goldin, General Counsel, Goldin Associates, LLC
Natalie Gomez-Velez, Professor, CUNY School of Law
Dennis R. Hawkins, Executive Director, Fund for Modern Courts
Jameelah J. Hayes, Legal Director, Legal Information for Families Today
John S. Kiernan, Debevoise & Plimpton LLP
James B. Kobak, Jr., Hughes Hubbard & Reed LLP
Lewis Papenfuse, Co-Executive Director, Worker Justice Center of New York
Raun J. Rasmussen, Executive Director, Legal Services NYC
Hon. Jenny Rivera, New York State Court of Appeals
Jerold Ruderman, Wilson Elser Moskowitz Edelman & Dicker LLP
Samuel W. Seymour, Sullivan & Cromwell LLP
Jeremy Travis, President, John Jay College of Criminal Justice
David Udell, Executive Director, National Center for Access to Justice
Nancy Wackstein, Executive Director, United Neighborhood Houses
Richard Zorza, Zorza Associates

Counsel to the Committee

Daniel O. Blau
Debevoise & Plimpton LLP

Charlotte E. Davidson
Counsel to the Chief Judge

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