



# PRESS RELEASE

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**New York State  
Unified Court System**

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

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## **Eight New Judges Named to NY Court of Claims**

**New York** – Chief Judge Janet DiFiore and Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence K. Marks are pleased to announce Governor Cuomo’s nominations today of eight new judges to the Court of Claims. The new judges are:

- Joel M. Cohen, partner, Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP. Mr. Cohen is a Thurgood Marshall Award recipient for successfully representing a pro bono client whose conviction and death sentence were vacated.
- John R. Higgitt, a New York State court system referee and principal court attorney, Office of the Administrative Judge, Twelfth Judicial District (Bronx County). Mr. Higgitt has also served as reporter for the New York State Committee on Pattern Jury Instructions and New York State Bench Book Committee, Association of Supreme Court Judges.
- Francis A. Kahn III, principal law clerk, Queens County Surrogate’s Court, and former principal law clerk, New York State Supreme Court, Queens County.
- Hon. Chris Ann Kelley, District Court Judge, Suffolk County. Judge Kelley had been serving in the Court’s DWI Part. She previously sat in the Court’s Domestic Violence Part, presiding over felony and misdemeanor cases.

- David L. Lewis, partner, Lewis & Fiore, Esqs., and New York State Senate Counsel to the Republican Majority.
- James A. McCarty, Jr., a 38-year veteran of the Westchester County District Attorney’s Office, who had been serving as First Deputy District Attorney, Chief Assistant. Mr. McCarty is a former Acting District Attorney (2016).
- Michele S. Rodney, Dean of the School of Criminal Justice, Monroe College, and a former Assistant District Attorney in Bronx County.
- Hon. Lillian Wan, New York City Family Court Judge, Kings County. Judge Wan is a member of the New York State Advisory Committee on Judicial Ethics and frequent presenter on family law-related topics.

Court of Claims judges are appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the State Senate. The term is nine years. Vacancies, other than by expiration of term, are filled for the unexpired term. While there are Court of Claims judges who handle only claims against the State, most are designated as Acting Supreme Court Justices, assigned to trial courts as needed. The annual salary of a Court of Claims judge is \$208,000.

“I am grateful to the Governor and State Judicial Screening Committee for the selection of these highly accomplished individuals. They are a much-needed addition to the New York Courts in the ongoing efforts of the Excellence Initiative to eliminate case backlogs and improve the quality of justice throughout New York. While considerable progress has been made in streamlining operations and reducing case delays, there is much more work ahead if we are to achieve and maintain excellence systemwide. I welcome today’s nominees to their new roles and look forward to their contributions in pursuit of these goals,” Chief Judge DiFiore.

“I am eager to work with these outstanding new and elevated judges – who will be assigned to those courts where the needs are most pressing – and confident that they will serve the people of New York with great distinction,” said Chief Administrative Judge Marks.

The appointments are effective immediately.

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