



PRESS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

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

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Chief Judge Holds Public Hearing on New York’s Justice Gap

Albany, New York – Chief Judge Janet DiFiore today at the Court of Appeals led a public hearing on the civil justice needs of New Yorkers, underscoring the significant progress made in recent years to provide meaningful legal assistance to low-income New Yorkers in matters involving life’s essentials, as well as the challenges ahead in closing the State’s justice gap.

Judge DiFiore was joined on the hearing panel by Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence K. Marks; the four Presiding Justices of the Appellate Divisions: Hon. Rolando T. Acosta, First Department; Hon. Alan D. Scheinkman, Second Department; Hon. Elizabeth A. Garry, Third Department; and Hon. Gerald J. Whalen, Fourth Department; and New York State Bar Association President Michael Miller.

Opening the public forum, the Chief Judge told attendees the purpose of the gathering “is to hear directly from a broad range of knowledgeable presenters of the nature and extent of the unmet civil justice needs of low-income New Yorkers, the real-life impact of civil legal services on those actually served ... the broader impact on the State’s economy ... and to identify the challenges ahead and strategies we need to close the justice gap.”

To that end, Judge DiFiore advised focusing on regional and community-based collaboration, maximizing the power of technology, being creative in the use of trained non-lawyers, and implementing bold partnerships with bar associations, law schools and not-for-profits. “And of course, we must remain focused on our Excellence Initiative, making sure that

our courts are meeting their constitutional obligation to provide timely, efficient and affordable justice to all New Yorkers,” she added.

Presenters from various regions of New York State—among them, judges, corporate executives, legal aid attorneys and their clients—appeared in person to offer live testimony on the value of accessible, publicly funded civil legal services for low-income New Yorkers facing legal problems affecting their housing, family stability, personal safety, immigration status, health and other basic needs. Written accounts demonstrating the socioeconomic benefits of such services on individuals, communities, the justice system and the State were also submitted for the hearing.

Public hearings on New York’s access gap in our civil justice system have been conducted annually since 2011, with the New York State Permanent Commission on Access to Justice—which works to expand access to civil legal services for low-income New Yorkers—providing critical support in preparation for the hearings.

Over the past decade, New York has earned leadership status on access-to-justice issues. For the third consecutive year, the State’s Judiciary allocated \$100 million of its annual budget for direct grants to civil legal service providers—the highest amount nationally—via its Civil Legal Services Program. This figure, which includes a \$15 million allocation to the New York State Interest on Lawyer Account Fund (IOLA), meets the annual funding goal proposed by the Commission. This year’s grants will be distributed among 83 providers statewide and allocated based on the proportion of the population in a county living at or below 200 percent of the poverty line. To date, the program has provided effective legal assistance to hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers in need.

Today’s hearing, coupled with the Commission’s research and work year-round, will form the basis for the Annual Report of the Chief Judge. The report, to be submitted to the Governor and Legislature on December 1, 2018, will include the Commission’s latest findings on the progress being made to narrow New York’s justice gap; the barriers to justice that remain; and recommendations aimed at building and sustaining a fair, accessible civil justice system for all New Yorkers.

More information about today’s hearing and the New York State Permanent Commission on Access to Justice is available at:

<http://ww2.nycourts.gov/accesstojusticecommission/index.shtml>

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