



# PRESS RELEASE

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**New York State  
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**Hon. Lawrence K. Marks  
Chief Administrative Judge**

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## **Chief Judge DiFiore Names New York Emergency Legal Task Force to Assist Hurricane Harvey Victims and Houston-Area Courts Crippled by the Storm**

**New York** – Chief Judge Janet DiFiore today announced the formation of a task force charged with mobilizing pro bono legal assistance efforts on behalf of Hurricane Harvey victims, as well as providing support to the Texas Judiciary in its recovery efforts.

The New York State Task Force on Legal Assistance Related to Hurricane Harvey comprises an esteemed group of individuals from New York’s legal and court communities with expertise in the range of legal and administrative issues relating to disaster response. John S. Kiernan, President of the New York City Bar and a senior litigation partner at Debevoise & Plimpton LLP, and Sharon Katz, Special Counsel for Pro Bono at Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP, will serve as co-chairs.

The Texas Supreme Court issued an emergency order that temporarily allows out-of-state lawyers to provide assistance to needy clients through any legal aid or pro bono program or bar association that provides services to Hurricane Harvey victims. Lawyers are needed for the full scope of legal services relating to the disaster. Among its top priorities, the Task Force will work with Texas government officials and the Texas legal community to coordinate the pro bono efforts of New York legal volunteers to best address the needs of Texans affected by the storm, who may require help with home insurance claims, FEMA benefits, mortgage matters and other pressing legal issues.

Task Force members will also focus on assisting Houston-area courts crippled by the hurricane in their disaster management efforts, as needed, offering technical assistance in critical areas including restoration of records, telecommunications and information systems.

Additionally, the group will coordinate with Texas court administrators to help meet the increased public safety demands faced by Houston-area courts in the storm's aftermath, standing ready to send a contingent of uniformed officers from New York to fill in for their Texas counterparts who may need time off to sort out their own losses and other hurricane-related issues.

"On behalf of the New York Courts and the New York State Task Force on Legal Assistance Related to Hurricane Harvey, our hearts go out to the hurricane victims. I wish to express my gratitude to Co-Chairs John Kiernan and Sharon Katz and the Task Force members – who bring a wealth of recovery disaster expertise acquired after 9-11 and Hurricane Sandy – for their dedication and support in linking Harvey victims to much-needed legal aid and assisting the Houston-area courts in resuming normal operations," said Chief Judge DiFiore.

"I am eager to work with this distinguished group to see how New York's lawyers can most effectively contribute their tremendous instincts toward volunteering their legal talents in times of disaster to helping victims – including members of the Texas court family – of Hurricane Harvey's devastation," said John Kiernan.

"I want to thank Chief Judge DiFiore for the opportunity to play a stewardship role in carrying out the vital responsibilities of this emergency task force. I look forward to working with John Kiernan and the Task Force members to coordinate efforts to aid hurricane victims in obtaining urgently needed legal assistance and provide Houston-area court officials with technical support, as needed," said Sharon Katz.

In response to other natural disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy, the legal community has often been at the forefront of fundraising efforts. The Task Force will likewise explore ways of mobilizing financial assistance, in addition to legal assistance, to Hurricane Harvey victims. Information on pro bono and volunteer opportunities, as well as financial support, will be forthcoming.

A roster of Task Force members is attached.

## **New York State Task Force on Legal Assistance Related to Hurricane Harvey**

### *Co-Chairs*

John S. Kiernan, Esq.  
President, NYC Bar Association  
Debevoise & Plimpton LLP

Sharon Katz, Esq.  
Special Counsel for Pro Bono  
David Polk & Wardwell LLP

### *Members*

Michael A. Cardozo, Esq.  
Proskauer Rose LLP

Melinda G. Disare, Esq.  
President, Bar Association of Erie County  
Bond, Schoeneck & King PLLC

Robert J. Giuffra Jr., Esq.  
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Dennis Glazer, Esq.

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John H. Gross, Esq.  
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Seymour James, Esq.  
Attorney-in-Chief, Legal Aid Society of NY

Michael Miller, Esq.  
President-Elect, New York State Bar Association

*Participants*

Brenna DeVaney

Pro Bono Counsel, Skadden, Arps, Meagher & Flom LLP and Affiliates

John M. George, Esq.

Chief of Administration, New York State Courts

Lynn M. Kelly, Esq.

Executive Director, City Bar Justice Center

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Pro Bono Counsel, Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer LLP

Nancy Ludmerer, Esq.

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