

# **Law Day 2018: Separation of Powers**

## **Court of Appeals Hall**

**May 1, 2018**

Court Crier: All please rise! The New York State Solicitor General. The President of the New York State Bar Association. The Associate Judges of the New York State Court of Appeals. The Chief Administrative Judge of the Unified Court System, and the Chief Judge of the State of New York. The Law Day Ceremony will now begin!

Chief Judge DiFiore: Please be seated, everyone. And welcome to the Court of Appeals. Welcome to Law Day. What a great privilege it is for us to host this wonderful tradition.

As many of you know, the tradition was begun 60-years ago, in 1958 by then-President Eisenhower, during the height of the Cold War, in order to celebrate our nation's commitment to democracy and the rule of law. The court Senior Associate Judge, Jenny Rivera, and Associate Judges Leslie Stein, Eugene Fahey, Michael Garcia, Rowan Wilson and Paul Feinman. We are honored once again to co-host our Law Day celebration with Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, who is represented here today by the Solicitor General of the State of New York, Barbara Underwood. We are also pleased to have with us Sharon Stern Gerstman, President of the New York State Bar Association, which for those of you who don't know, is the largest voluntary state bar association in the nation.

Also, joining us today are many dignitaries and leaders in government and the judiciary and in the legal profession, and in order to show our appreciation for their taking the time out of their busy schedules to be here with us today, I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge their presence.

We have with us, our presiding justices of the appellate division, Rolando Acosta, Alan Scheinkman, Elizabeth Garry, and Gerald Whalen. We have with us also, former Court of Appeals judges, where are you? Judge Levine and Judge Susan Phillips Read. Former Chief Administrative Judge, Leo Milonas, our many administrative supervising judges from around the state: George Silver and Michael Cocco, our Deputy Chief Administrative Judges. We have with us some friends from the federal government. We have the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New

York, Geoffrey Berman. We have the U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of New York, Grant Jaquith. We have with us the District Attorney of Nassau County, Madeline Singas, Benjamin Tucker, the first Deputy Commissioner of the NYPD. Many of our state and local legislators of the Senate and Assembly — I know I'll get into trouble when I do this — but I did see Helene Weinstein from the Assembly, and David Weprin from the Senate. Thank you for being with us. And many, many present and former members of the judiciary, and I believe that Michael Miller, who is the President-Elect of the State Bar Association is with us as well. Thank you for being here, sir.

So, each year, the American Bar Association selects a theme for Law Day events around the country. This year's theme, Separation of Powers: Framework for Freedom, is timely and certainly one worthy of thoughtful attention and in a moment we'll hear from Solicitor General Underwood on the topic, and State Bar President Gerstman. Following their remarks, Chief Administrative Judge Marks will preside over the presentation of awards to a number of individuals in honor of their singular contribution to our courts and our communities around the state. But first, let us begin by joining Caesar Ferrari, a senior at Ichabod Crane High School in Columbia County, in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Caesar Ferrari: *I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*

Chief Judge DiFiore: Thank you. Well done. At this time, I'll ask Court Officer Sgt. Jessica Hernandez to come forward and lead us in the singing of our National Anthem. Jessica is a court officer in Supreme Court, Bronx County.

Sgt. Hernandez: *O say can you see, by the dawn's early light,  
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming,  
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight,  
O'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming?  
And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,  
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there;  
O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?*

Thank you.

Chief Judge DiFiore: Thank you, Sergeant. And thank you to our Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Justice Initiatives, Judge Edwina Mendelson, for being here as well. Thank you, Judge.

This year's Law Day theme reminds us that the founders of our nation established three separate branches of government in a unique power-sharing arrangement that requires each branch to serve as a check on the power of the others.

As Americans, we are fortunate to live in a nation where the enormous power of our government has been disbursed and balanced in such a way as to foster the freedom, equality and opportunity we need to pursue our dreams, do good works in our communities, and distinguish ourselves as individuals.

But this framework of carefully balanced powers, intended to avoid tyranny and ensure liberty and freedom, is sure to fail if any of those branches is weakened at the expense of the others. And so, we rededicate ourselves to supporting, fostering and encouraging appreciation for the Founding Fathers' absolute brilliance.

And in a time when it appears that there are many issues dividing Americans, we should be able to agree without compromise on one thing; on the need for fair, accessible, and well-functioning courts that provide timely and affordable justice. Indeed, the true administration of justice is the firmest pillar of good government, and that is the vision and objective of everything we do in the New York State Courts.

As Chief Judge, the public's confidence in the work we do is always paramount in my mind. It is the stimulus of our Excellence Initiative and for all of our efforts to deliver the high-quality justice services that the people of the State of New York have rightly come to expect and deserve.

For it is only when the people we serve respect and value our work that we position ourselves and this institution we represent to withstand the criticism that inevitably comes with our central role as the arbiter of society's most contentious disputes. And so on this Law Day 2018, it is our pledge to continue the pursuit of excellence in our courts, in order to earn the public's trust and respect, and carry out our constitutional mandate of delivering justice and deciding cases and controversies as a strong, independent, equal and non-political branch of government.

And now I would like to call upon our keynote speaker, the Solicitor General of the State of New York, Barbara Underwood.

Barbara Underwood: Chief Judge DiFiore, Associate Judges and former judges of the Court of Appeals, Chief Administrative Judge Marks, State Bar President Gerstman and distinguished members of the bench and bar. Attorney General Eric Schneiderman regrets that he couldn't join us today and I'm honored to be here in his place.

This year the ABA chose separation of powers as the theme for Law Day celebrations, the principle that the Constitution divides federal power among the three branches of government. One purpose of that separation is to assign to each branch the task they do best; make policy or implement it or resolve disputes. But probably the most important purpose of separation of powers is to separate power — to divide it, to slow down abrupt changes of direction by requiring government action to satisfy the demands of all three branches. This is part of the system of checks and balances that is fundamental to our Constitution. The idea was to push government toward moderation and consensus, and sometimes it works.

I want to talk about the other great structural principle by which the Constitution divides power, and that's Federalism—the principle that the Constitution also divides government power between the states and the federal government. As Justice Kennedy famously said, “The Constitution split the atom of sovereignty between the states and the federal government.” And like separation of powers, federalism, too, by dividing power, acts as a break on abrupt changes of direction because states may resist federal initiatives. And by the same token, the federal government may supersede or preempt state initiatives.

Federalism, "states' rights," another name for it, acquired a bad name in the civil rights era, when many states were resisting the efforts of the federal government to desegregate schools and housing, and in doing so, they invoked what they called their sovereign right to resist. But in recent times, the efforts of states to resist the national government have turned up on both sides of the political, really all sides of the political spectrum.

State law enforcement officers over the last decade have sought to participate in the enforcement of federal immigration law, either more vigorously or less vigorously than the federal government would like. State courts have construed their state constitutions to be more protective of constitutional rights than the federal Constitution. This can involve all kinds of rights which pull, of course, against other rights: free speech, the right against unreasonable searches, and also religious freedom, sometimes including the right to engage on religious grounds in otherwise prohibited discrimination.

And my topic today, State Attorneys General have been suing the federal government to challenge laws, regulations and enforcement policies. Until about 10 years ago, it was not very common for states to sue the federal government. A search for some examples produced only a few. In 1970, Oregon and Texas sued to challenge a federal law lowering the voting age to 18. A fractured Supreme Court held that Congress could do that for federal elections, but not for state elections, because state elections were to be regulated by the states.

In 1984, South Dakota sued the federal Secretary of Transportation to challenge a law that reduced grants of federal highway construction funds to states that set the drinking age lower than 21. The court upheld the statute in an important opinion requiring and finding a sufficient relationship between banning youthful drinking and highway safety. And we're seeing litigation today about conditions on grants that will harken back to and develop the meaning of that principle.

And in 1990, New York sued the United States to challenge a federal law about the disposal of radioactive waste. The federal law required states to take title to waste that hadn't otherwise been properly disposed of and assume responsibility for it and the court held that the statute improperly directed state officers to enforce federal law, and that was impermissible commandeering. And that issue, too, has seen new life today.

And then about a decade ago ... but those were few and far between ... there are a few more ... but not very many. About a decade ago, the states began suing the federal government at a rapid clip. And the challenges came from both sides. Some states, including New York, challenged the EPA's refusal to regulate greenhouse gasses and global warming. And then, after the EPA started regulating greenhouse gasses, other states sued the EPA arguing that it had exceeded its authority. In fact, the EPA, the Federal Environmental Protection Agency, has faced state challenges from states from both sides for many, many environmental regulations addressing everything from toxic waste to clean water to the penalties for high polluting auto design.

Immigration issues have also resulted in state challenges from both sides. Some states sued the federal government, from their view, improperly deferring enforcement for certain undocumented immigrants and then after federal policies changed, other states, including New York, sued claiming the federal government had improperly revoked its prior program of deferred enforcement. This is all the litigation about DACA, the program for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.

And the Affordable Care Act has likewise triggered challenges from both sides. Florida and 25 states sued to challenge the validity of the ACA, while other states, including New York have intervened in litigation to defend it and sued to challenge the recent efforts to withdraw federal subsidies. And there are many more examples.

In fact, one A.G., no longer in office, and not from this part of the country, has been widely quoted as saying that, "As A.G., I go into the office, I sue the federal government, and I go home."

Disputes between the states and between the states and the federal government aren't new, of course. They go back to before the Civil War when northern states, some northern states, found ways to avoid enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act.

But the increasing number of lawsuits brought by states is new and, not surprisingly, there's been some substantial criticism of this trend. The critics say, when one sovereign sues another and the judiciary must resolve the dispute, it politicizes the judiciary. Or they say disputes between sovereigns should be resolved through the political process, not through litigation. And they say that the flood of lawsuits by states is burdening the courts. It won't surprise you because of my job that I think they're wrong.

The cases brought by the states would in most cases be brought anyway by affected individuals and organizations. In fact, the state cases are often parallel to and related to cases that are brought by private litigants. So, the cases brought by states are not actually adding cases to the court dockets, and they're not bringing issues that wouldn't get there anyway. Those politically sensitive issues will go before the courts in any case. We live in a litigious society, and it's not just the Attorneys General who are doing the litigating.

And the states bring something important to the table in these lawsuits because the laws in question affect not only individuals but they actually affect the states themselves in the performance of their functions. So, the burdens and benefits of federal immigration policy fall heavily on the states.

The states pay for the costly services and other assistance that immigrants require and they benefit from the presence of immigrants as students and employees in their universities and hospitals and as taxpayers. So too the burdens and benefits of many federal environmental policies are felt locally. The states depend, for a sound economy, on the businesses that bear the cost of environmental regulation. They also operate parks and beaches and highways and hospitals that benefit from environmental regulation.

And of course, the states are hugely affected by changes in the massive federal health insurance programs: Medicaid, Medicare and the insurance exchanges under the Affordable Care Act. Because while the federal government pays a portion of the cost, the states pay a substantial share and the states and localities operate the hospitals, emergency rooms and other backup systems that will provide care when other mechanisms fail.

Individuals are directly affected by changes in these federal programs, of course. And states are sometimes simply asserting the interest of their

residents. But states have a unique contribution to make as states in these lawsuits. They're affected in ways that are distinct from the claims of individuals and organizations. When courts adjudicate challenges to these programs, or to changes in them ... and they will be adjudicating them ... the courts should know about these systemic impacts on the states as well as about the claims that individuals make.

In short, the increase in lawsuits by the states against the federal government is not a new and alarming trend. It's just one more way that the division of power between states and the federal government operates as part of the system of checks and balances. And like other checks and balances, it tends to push policy-making toward the center, toward a possible consensus. It might even help us rediscover the lost art of compromise.

Thank you.

Chief Judge DiFiore: We are hopeful. Our next speaker is Sharon Stern Gerstman, the president of the New York State Bar. Thank you, Sharon

Sharon Stern Gerstman:

Thank you, Chief Judge DiFiore. Distinguished members of the judiciary, distinguished members of the legislative branch, and the executive branch, fellow attorneys and citizens. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this Law Day celebration.

Law Day helps us to bring into sharp focus the importance of the rule of law in our government and in everyday lives of our citizens. There is often a constitutional theme, so appropriate because the Constitution is so frequently in the news and the subject of lively debate.

The focus of Law Day, as well as the focus of the discourse in the media, is more likely to be on an aspect of the Bill of Rights, perhaps Freedom of Speech or other First Amendment rights, or the Right to Bear Arms under the Second Amendment. Indeed, last year the focus was on the Fourteenth Amendment, often called the glue that holds the Bill of Rights together. As you've heard from other speakers, this year the focus is on the separation of powers. The first three articles of the Constitution with respect to the three branches of federal government and the fourth article with respect to those rights in the state that you heard our Solicitor General speaking about.

It is rare that these Articles, the mainstay of the Constitution itself, are analyzed in judicial decisions. We often forget their importance to not only the foundation of our government but to its day-to-day operations.

It's fitting that we focus on the now because the lack of understanding of their meeting and purpose by our citizens is evident and it poses a potential threat to our democracy. Any discussion of the separations of powers entails tension.

Sometimes that tension plays an important role.

We understand that the powers designated for the legislative, executive and judicial branches are a system of checks and balances. Viewed together, we might envision what I learned in grade school, is a Venn diagram of purposely overlapping roles that push and pull among the various branches. That built-in tension is healthy for our government, but only if it's recognized and accepted by all three of the branches, that they are equal. And that means mutual respect for the powers of each against the other. It not only negates the idea that any one is supreme, it also negates the rock, paper, scissors analogy; no one branch should ever be looked at as superior in its relationship to another branch.

At the time that the country's founders were taking pen to paper to create this document, other approaches were debated vigorously. Comments inundated newspapers of the day and a public debate with opportunity for voicing perspectives was healthy then and so is today. Whether the topic focuses on governing structure, a law or a regulation, the reasoning why this approach was so necessary appeared in a series of essays submitted for newspaper publication at the time.

One particular essay opened with a key question: "To what expedient then should we finally resort for maintaining and practice the necessary partition of power among several departments as laid down in our Constitution?"

The essay observed that: "The greatest security against a gradual concentration of the several powers in the same department consist of giving those who administer each department the necessary Constitutional means and personal motives to resist encroachments of the other." He stated that the need for this approach simply: "It may be a reflection on human nature that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature?"

This, of course, is the writing of James Madison in what became known as Federalist Paper Number 51. It stands the test of time and we can conjure up examples of how the system of checks and balances has been challenged and has served us well since the essay's publication in 1788.



But let's talk about a different type of tension. Not the constructive kind, consciously woven into the Constitution. I'm speaking of the impact of a tax on the very power given to the judicial branch in the Constitution. An insinuation that by exercising its Constitutional power, the Judicial Branch, with judges in particular, are overstepping their authority. These volleys are often taken following, what some consider, unpopular decisions. They are not only attacks on judicial independence, they're attacks on the powers given to the Judiciary in the Constitution itself.

Let me be clear, the New York State Bar Association has long expressed that it is perfectly fair to criticize judicial rulings on the merits, or to chastise judicial conduct that bears directly on integrity or impartiality. And we have often been called upon to speak out against personal attacks on a judge because of a disagreement with a decision in a particular case.

We point out in response, that there can be appeals of case decisions and that behavior of a judge, if inappropriate, is subject to sanction by the Commission on Judicial Conduct. It would be simple to say that unwarranted criticism of the Judiciary stems from a lack of awareness of the role of judges in applying the Constitution and enacts law and in hearing matters even-handedly.

There is no question that is part of the problem and the State Bar will continue to increase understanding of the vital function of our courts, a judge's role, judicial independence, and the checks and balances within the Constitution. It is also important for us to explain the effect that lack of judicial independence would have on an individual party to a case and to our quality of life as citizens.

The cases heard by this honorable court in this beautiful building began as concerns involving everyday individuals in everyday situations. Each decision made in court impacts individuals, or group of individuals, in a real way. They have the right and comfort in knowing there's no outside influence by government officials on the judges presiding over their cases. But current criticism of the judicial branch has gone beyond mere criticism of a judge for an unpopular ruling. Particularly disturbing are attacks on the Judiciary that are initiated by public officials, including those who have the power of judicial appointment.

These attacks often ignore or even deny the very power given to the Judiciary in Article 3. They often accuse the Judiciary of overstepping its authority and ignoring the other branches of government. We know that that is not true. We've read countless judicial decisions that show deference to the Legislative and Executive branches and state that the change in law desired by the litigants must come from the legislative branch. And so often Congress or our state legislature takes the cue and

does so. Judges know and respect the separation of powers. Many the attacks on them demonstrate that the attackers do not.

While attacks or attempts to work around the judicial roles have existed for generations, today's social media is at everyone's fingertips. Coupled by a trend by some people to say what may be expedient to a viewpoint or goal without consideration of impact. That does no service to the dignity or effective operation of the government framework so carefully crafted by our founders. Proposals that would impede judicial independence or seek to curb judicial roles have been identified in 16 states so far this year. For example, we saw lawmakers' impeachment proposal of the majority of judges of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, who struck down the state's congressional map as violating the state's Constitution and requiring a redrawing of what was considered gerrymandering.

On the federal level, this past fall, there was a proposal to set quotas for immigration judges. As I stated in the State Bar's response, proposed quotas for judges performance evaluations undermine the rule of law and unjustly threaten legal rights and access to justice of those facing immigration issues.

It is not a matter of judges having broad shoulders to handle unwanted criticism. We must remember that such a task serves to question the responsibility of the judge and the judiciary as a whole. Frankly it erodes public respect and public confidence in the co-equal branch of the government. It undermines our separation of powers.

In 2015, I had the honor of participating in the American Bar Association's programs in London coinciding with the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta. This included an unforgettable discussion with lawyers from around the globe about the critical importance of the rule of law, and the need for an independent judiciary to safeguard it.

A lawyer from Zimbabwe, who has courageously worked for human rights observed that it's not whether leaders get to their positions through a democratic process, which is most important for freedom, but what those leaders do with the power once in office. Do they acknowledge that the law exists apart from them? Do they respect and express respect for the rule of law, and the processes set forth in the Constitution? If they believe certain changes in law are needed, do they work within that process? If they don't, they threaten the very core of our democracy.

We must demand of our leaders that they respect the Constitution and the separation of powers for, as Madison said, that is essential to the preservation of liberty.

Thank you.

Chief Judge DiFiore: Thank you, President Gerstman and on behalf of the entire New York State Court System, we thank the State Bar for its work and support of the rule of law and in defense of the independence of the judicial branch of government. So, thank you.

And now the presentation of the awards, which we will be led through by Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence Marks. Judge Marks, would you take the podium and introduce us to the many recipients today who have committed positive contributions to the courts and to our communities throughout New York State?

Chief Administrative Judge Marks:

Thank you, Chief Judge. And again, this year, it's a privilege for me to be able to present the very prestigious Judith S. Kaye Service Awards, and in prior years, I've lamented the fact that it's difficult because we have so many outstanding employees in the court system, it's very difficult to be able to identify four or five for this prestigious award. But we don't have that problem this year. As you will see, our difficulty this year may be getting to the end of this portion of the Law Day program. So, let's begin by acknowledging four of our 2018 Judith S. Kaye Service Award recipients in the category of Community Service.

Siobhan O'Grady, Court Attorney Rockland County Family Court, for offering her time and talents to numerous service organizations.

David Dellehunt, Court Attorney Referee, who also serves as Special Council for Town and Village Courts in the 3rd Judicial District and as a Village Justice in Kinderhook, New York, for his volunteer work on local recreation commissions and as a coach and mentor to local youth.

Sergeant La-Shonda Shaw, White Plains City Court, for her generosity in bringing Christmas joy to underprivileged children and helping them succeed in school.

Kathleen Gray, Support Magistrate, Orleans and Genesee Family Courts, for her dedicated service to a group that rescues girls from the streets of India, providing them shelter, medical care and vocational skills.

Congratulations to each of you. We are grateful for your generous service to those in need.

Now our first set of honorees in the Heroism category. We had three teams of court officers who responded to courthouse medical emergencies; two in Erie County Family Court and a third in Bronx County Surrogates Court.

Starting with Erie County Family Court, court officers Theresa Baggott, Keith Gannon and Michael Gefert, sprang into action, providing emergency aid to a man who appeared to be having a seizure as he waited in the Court's petition processing office on the morning of October 25th. These officers administered CPR among other measures before the paramedics arrived and continued to assist the man until he was transported to the hospital for further care.

Officer Gannon was also part of the team, along with officers Robert Marrale, Jeffrey McMullen and Victor Sorrento, who worked to save a life in Erie County Family Court on November 16th, when a man at the magnetometer station complained of dizziness, going into cardiac arrest a few minutes later. They provided immediate aid, with the man regaining his pulse and breathing by the time an ambulance arrived to transport him to the hospital.

Next, from Bronx County Surrogates Court, we acknowledge Captain Anthony Manzi and court officers Darrold Alexander, Jose Reyes and Julio Toro for their spontaneous, coordinated actions on February 2nd, when a man exiting one of the courtrooms began clutching his chest and went into cardiac arrest. The team, after quickly learning that this court visitor wore a pacemaker, administered CPR and carried out other first aid procedures until EMS arrived on the scene.

Last year, the court system introduced a state-wide program to train court officers and other personnel in the proper administration of Narcan, which instantaneously reverses an opioid overdose. I am so pleased to inform you that multiple lives have been saved thanks to this program and the actions of the following officers in courts across the state. In Bronx County Criminal Court this past October 27th, officers Rodney Goitia and Mario Vera prevented an overdose fatality.

In Nassau County this past November 3rd, while in route to the county's district court in Hempstead, Majors Kevin Anderson and Karen Mulvey, Sergeants Michelle Barrett and Michael Fauci, and court officer Mark Pullo, were flagged down by bystanders to help a victim of an overdose.

Also, on November 3rd in Suffolk County's Cohalan Court Complex in Central Islip, Lieutenant Daniel Freisem and Sergeant James Martinez reversed an opioid overdose. Sergeant Martinez saved another victim at the same location on November 30th, and just a few weeks ago, on April 9th, he prevented an overdose fatality at the Suffolk District Court. Sergeant Martinez has saved three lives in a five-month period.

And in Syracuse City Court on March 20th, Sergeants Jonathan Raab and Vicki Stephens and officers Cahal Carroll, Kimberly Freedman and Ebony Ramos prevented an overdose fatality.

We proudly recognize all of these officers with the Judith S. Kaye Service Award for heroism, for their extraordinary role in providing a renewed chance at life to individuals suffering from a substance abuse disorder.

Another of this year's award recipients for heroism is Manhattan Supreme Court Senior Court Clerk, Matthew Homenick. Matthew was driving on the George Washington Bridge last May 19th when he saw a man who appeared suicidal. Matthew safely stopped his car and rushed out to pull the man to safety, as another motorist called 9-1-1. His determination and bravery helped rescue a life that day and we proudly honor him with a Judith S. Kaye Service Award.

Also, an honoree in the heroism category is Court Officer Aleus Philius of Bronx Criminal Court. On March 3rd while off-duty, Aleus observed three men in a gunfight in Brooklyn. Taking cover behind a parked car, and while assisting frightened bystanders, Aleus called 9-1-1, providing the operator the location and a description of each suspect, all as bullets flew by. With one suspect down and shooting finally over, Aleus approached the wounded suspect. Finding him unresponsive, Aleus secured the suspects gun until the NYPD arrived. The information Aleus provided led to prosecution of the surviving suspects. For his fearless actions, we proudly present him with the Judith S. Kaye award for heroism.

Last May 10th, an intense fire broke out at the Kings County Criminal Courthouse. Everyone was safely evacuated, thanks to the decisive actions of 10 court employees, who risked their own lives, suffering smoke inhalation and requiring medical treatment. I am happy to inform you that they are all doing well, and today we honor them with the Judith S. Kaye Service Award for heroism. I invite up Richmond County Supreme Court Chief Clerk, Kenneth Fay, who is the former Burroughs Chief Clerk at Kings County Criminal Court, and court officer Thomas Hickey, to join me.

Now I'd like to single out the rest of these outstanding individuals who responded to the fire in Brooklyn. First Deputy Chief Clerk Antonio Diaz,

Sergeants Thomas Cirola, John Harte and Joseph Scafidi, and officers Shaqwan Gardner, Anthony Morgan, and Edward Rossiello, and Darien Wagner. You are in the aisle.

We now come to our remaining Community Service Award recipients.

One of the worst natural disasters on record—Hurricane Maria— left tremendous destruction in its wake. With the people of Puerto Rico enduring unthinkable hardship last year, Chief Judge DiFiore formed the New York State Taskforce on Legal Assistance related to hurricanes, to coordinate pro-bono efforts to assist hurricane victims with FEMA applications and other legal matters.

In addition to the strong response of New York's legal community, dozens of our non-judicial employees actively participated in relief operations. I would like to commend the Hispanic Court Officers Society, the Latino Court Officers Society and the Supreme Court Officers Association for their roles in organizing supply drives, collecting, transporting and distributing essential items to hurricane victims, as well as toys to children for Three Kings Day.

Let's begin with Orange County's Major Bryan Negron, President of the Hispanic Court Officers Society, and Court Officer and Society Board Member, Elaine Bacci of Richmond County for their work in coordinating the Society's relief efforts, including assisting in collecting much needed items. For their tremendous efforts, we proudly honor them with the Judith S. Kaye Service Award for Community Service.

Next, we recognize Court Officer Norman Pragle from Erie County Court. Upon learning of the need to transport crucial supplies on the island itself, he used his annual leave to fly to Puerto Rico. While there, he helped clear downed trees and other debris, and spent several days repairing damaged roofs. We are humbled by his selfless deeds and delighted to present him with the Judith S. Kaye Service Award for Community Service.

Now I'd like to pay tribute to the leadership of the Latino Court Officers Society.

These uniformed officers traveled to Puerto Rico to distribute toys to children in the hope of making their holiday season a little brighter. They are Sergeant and Latino Court Officers Society President Jessica Hernandez, Bronx Hall of Justice, who just sang the National Anthem, Sergeant and Society First Vice President Erica Prosper, from the Court Officers Academy, Sergeant and Society Second Vice President Rafael Nieves, Bronx County Criminal Court, Court Officer and Society Financial Secretary, Ishaira Garcia, and Court Officer Anthony Vazquez,

Second Vice President Supreme Court Officers Association and founder of the Latino Court Officers Society. I'm delighted to honor each of you with the Judith S. Kaye service award for Community Service.

And now I'll be singling out by name and county, the additional court employees for their significant charitable efforts on behalf of the children and families adversely impacted by Hurricane Maria.

From Bronx County, Senior Court Clerk Yvette Cruz, Lieutenant Pedro Cosme, Sergeant Julio Lebron. Court Officers Robert Calero, Mark Hirschman, Ravil Lopez, Jomayra Medina and Aleus Philius. Court Officer Trainees Schiniqua Diaz and Maria Vinas.

From Kings County, Court Officers Felix Fernandez, Sharifa John and Daniel Vega. From New York County, Senior Court Clerk Angelina Perez, and Lieutenant Steve Vera.

From Queens County, Supreme Court Officer, Thomas Quinn, and Court Officer Dennis Duque.

From Richmond County, Staten Island Criminal Court Borough Chief Clerk Ada Molina.

From the Third Judicial District, Captain Anthony Rodriguez. From Dutchess County, Captain Alvin Benson and Sergeant Joseph Beck. From Orange County, Sergeants Max Heinz and Erica Jordan, and Court Officer Rafael Cordero.

From Rensselaer County, Lieutenant John DeRidder. From Rockland County, Sergeant Tania Perez. From Saratoga County, Court Officers Efrain Bonilla and Paul Giacalone. From Suffolk County, Court Officers Jenessa Cuadros and Jessica Williams. From Ulster County, Captain Marcus Durham, and from Washington County, Court Officer Monique Cruz.

Let's give a round of applause to all of these outstanding people.

Okay, and as I said at the outset, the difficulty this year would be making it to the end, and I think we actually made it so that concludes our Law Day program this year.

Thank you to everyone for being here and we hope to see many of you at the luncheon today over at the State Bar Association.

Thank you.

