



PRESS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

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

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Chief Judge, Chief Administrative Judge Form New LGBT Commission

New York – Chief Judge Janet DiFiore and Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence K. Marks today announced the appointment of a new commission to highlight and address issues of concern to LGBT members within the justice system and legal profession. The LGBT Commission will act as a forceful advocate for LGBT issues and LGBT members of the court community, providing a bridge between the Judiciary’s leadership and LGBT individuals in the courts and legal profession. The Commission, whose members include judges and lawyers from around the state, will be led by Hon. Marcy Kahn, Associate Justice of the Appellate Division, First Department, and Hon. Elizabeth Garry, Associate Justice of the Appellate Division, Third Department. The new commission will be staffed by Marc Levine, who has worked on LGBT issues in the court system for a number of years.

The LGBT Commission will work with Chief Judge DiFiore, Chief Administrative Judge Marks and other court officials to promote equal participation in and access to the courts and legal profession by all persons regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression – from initiatives to enhance judicial and workforce diversity to efforts to help ensure that issues facing LGBT litigants are fairly addressed by the courts. The Commission will also collaborate with LGBT advocacy organizations, bar associations and community groups to raise awareness about LGBT issues and foster a more equitable, supportive environment for LGBT members within the justice system, legal profession and greater community.

The LGBT Commission is modeled on the court system's highly successful Franklin H. Williams Commission on Minorities, which acts as a liaison between the Judiciary's top management and persons of color in the court system, sponsoring programs for judges and non-judicial employees on issues of race and diversity within the courts and providing judicial mentors for attorneys of color who are interested in becoming judges, among other activities.

"I am heartened by the historic gains made by LGBT members throughout society, among them LGBT persons within the Unified Court System, who are now well represented in our judicial and non-judicial ranks. Yet for their many advances in American society in recent years, LGBT members continue all too often to face discrimination, bullying and hate-motivated violence," said Chief Judge DiFiore. "While it is the function of the courts to adjudicate such matters and protect our individual liberties as guaranteed by the Constitution, the LGBT Commission was created to go beyond the courts' adjudicative role – to work in an administrative capacity to foster the progress of LGBT persons in the courts and broader community. I have every confidence that the Commission, under the able guidance of Judges Kahn and Garry, will lead us forward on that path."

"As a fully institutionalized organization within the court system, the LGBT Commission will serve to advance the courts' outreach and advocacy efforts on behalf of the LGBT community, including our topmost priorities to enhance judicial diversity and bring more LGBT members into our non-judicial workforce. Chief Judge DiFiore and I look forward to working with Judges Kahn and Garry, the Commission members and the court system's justice partners as we seek to attain these goals," said Chief Administrative Judge Marks.

A roster of the LGBT Commission members follows.

Co-chairs

Hon. Marcy Kahn, Associate Justice
Appellate Division, First Department

Hon. Elizabeth Garry, Associate Justice
Appellate Division, Third Department

Members

Thomas Burrows, Esq., Attorney, Legal Aid Society, New York City

Margaret Canby, Esq., Partner, Blank Rome, LLP

Hon. Anthony Cannataro, Supervising Judge, Civil Court, New York County

Hon. Mary Anne Doherty, Judge, Syracuse City Court

Hon. Paul Feinman, Associate Justice, Appellate Division, First Department

Hon. Paula Hepner, Judge, Kings County Family Court (retired)

Hon. Karen Lupuloff, Supervising Judge, Family Court, New York County

Hon. Rita Mella, Surrogate, New York County

Meredith R. Miller, Esq., President, LGBT Bar Association of Greater New York

Hon. E. Jeannette Ogden, Justice, Supreme Court, Erie County

Ronald Pawelczak, District Executive, Seventh Judicial District

Hon. Franc Perry, Judge, Family Court, Kings County

Hon. Jill Polk, Judge, Family Court, Schenectady County

Hon. Rosalyn Richter, Associate Justice, Appellate Division, First Department

Melissa Sklarz, Development Director, Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund

Susan Sommer, Esq., Senior Counsel, Lambda Legal

Hon. Michael Sonberg, Acting Justice, Supreme Court, New York County

Richard Tsai, Esq., Court Attorney, Appellate Division, First Department

Michael Violando, Esq., Partner, Sullivan, Keenan, Oliver & Violando

Hon. Margaret Walsh, Judge, Family Court, Albany County

Hon. Joanne Winslow, Justice, Supreme Court, Monroe County

Marc Levine, Executive Director

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