



NEWS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

**Hon. Joseph A. Zayas
Chief Administrative Judge**

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Rule Changes Will Enhance Judicial Visitation Program, Deepening Understanding and Strengthening Connections

NEW YORK—The Unified Court System today announced significant amendments to Part 17 of the Rules of the Chief Judge, that will require judges serving in criminal and family courts to conduct at least one visit per year to a prison, jail, or other detention facility, starting January 1, 2028. This positions New York as the first state in the nation to mandate immersive yearly visits by all trial court judges responsible for sentencing or detention decisions. The reimagined Part 17 aims to deepen judicial insight into incarceration conditions, and to enhance visibility and promote stronger understanding and communication among corrections systems, incarcerated individuals, and the judiciary.

Under the new Part 17, judicial visits to facilities will include opportunities for meaningful time in key areas such as intake, housing, work education, recreation, visitation, dining, and medical and mental health facilities. Judges will also have an opportunity to meet with incarcerated individuals, employees, administrators, and service providers. Additionally, visits will rotate among facility types, including state prisons, local jails, and youth and women’s facilities — in accordance with judicial assignments, as delineated in the amended rules — and, to the extent practicable, across regions of the State.

“This rule keeps judges better connected to what transpires after sentencing. It deepens a judge’s firsthand understanding of prison conditions and the broad impact of incarceration on individuals, families, and communities, as well as the opportunities available during incarceration,” said Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson. “The revised rule embodies the principle that judges are not distant arbiters but engaged stewards of justice, whose thoughtful determinations are grounded in reality. By doing so, it promotes confidence in the judiciary, not merely in those who are incarcerated or their families, but also in the public at large. Justice may be depicted as blind but should not blind itself to reality.”

“The new Part 17 seeks to create an impactful program of engagement between judges and incarcerated individuals, as well as the employees, administrators, and service providers working in New York’s jails and prisons,” said Chief Administrative Judge Joseph A. Zayas. “Through consistent, immersive visits, judges will be kept abreast of facility conditions and challenges and, in turn, promote transparency and public trust in our courts and criminal justice system.”

“This new annual requirement seamlessly aligns with the court system’s problem-solving ethos, affirming our steadfast commitment to a continuously evolving judicial system that is deeply informed, transparent, and equitable,” said First Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Norman St. George.

The amendments to Part 17 follow years of in-depth study by the court system’s Advisory Committee on Criminal Law and Procedure, an effort led by Committee Chair Judge Daniel P. Conviser and Committee member Michael B. Mushlin, Professor Emeritus at Pace University: School of Law.

The Committee’s proposal for a new Part 17 was circulated for public comment in September 2025. Nearly 150 comments were received from a wide variety of individuals and organizations, including present and former judges, medical professionals, academics, currently and formerly incarcerated individuals and organizations advocating for them, defense counsel, prosecutors, other practicing attorneys, correctional facility professionals, clergy, social work and mental health professionals, international experts, and everyday citizens. The overwhelming majority expressed strong support for this program of enhanced judicial visitation.

“Regular, structured prison visits are vital in equipping judges with greater insight into the day-to-day reality of being incarcerated. The evolved approach mandated by this new rule will serve to foster empathy, increase visibility, and support reform and improvement of the overall criminal justice system,” said Judge Conviser.

“The new Part 17 will give judges greater insight into the conditions they sentence people to — insight that supports better decision making, greater transparency, and a justice system that acknowledges the humanity of all those who interact with it. The impact of these visits is unmistakable for both judges and the incarcerated individuals they meet,” said Professor Mushlin.

The Administrative Board of the Courts, which comprises Chief Judge Wilson and the four Presiding Justices of the New York State Supreme Court’s Appellate Division, approved the amendments to Part 17 in May 2026, which were then approved by the Court of Appeals and promulgated.

The new Part 17 (<https://www.nycourts.gov/rules/part-17-judicial-education-and-training#section-202926>) will take effect January 1, 2028, to allow sufficient time for successful implementation, which will include a new judicial orientation and education program and significant logistical planning. To this end, the court system will establish an advisory task force, bringing together trial court judges, judicial associations, court administrators, correctional and detention facility representatives, and experts from relevant fields related to corrections and the rights of incarcerated persons.

“We look forward to the convening and recommendations of this vital new task force, which will serve to ensure the successful implementation of these substantive changes. UCS would like to thank the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision and Commissioner Daniel E. Martuscello III for their openness to the new rule. We are excited about this collaboration as we work to launch a reimagined program of judicial visitation over the next 18 months,” added Chief Administrative Judge Zayas.