NEWS RELEASE

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Franklin H. Williams Judicial Commission to Celebrate 35th Anniversary

"Celebrating 35 Years of Good Trouble: Building a Bridge to Justice for All" to Feature Keynote Address by Former U.S. Attorney General Hon. Loretta Lynch, Remarks by Chief Judge Hon. Rowan D. Wilson, and Awards Honoring Leaders Across the Legal Community

NEW YORK CITY—The Franklin H. Williams Judicial Commission will celebrate its 35th anniversary as a permanent commission of the New York State Unified Court System on **Thursday, October 29, 2026**, from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the historic Manhattan Surrogate's Court, located at 31 Chambers Street in New York City. This year's theme, "Celebrating 35 Years of Good Trouble: Building a Bridge to Justice for All," honors the Commission's longstanding commitment to advancing equity and fairness within the courts and the broader community. During the celebration, the Commission will present its Bridge to Justice Awards to individuals and organizations whose work has had a meaningful impact on diversity and equity within the courts and the broader community.

"The theme for this 35th anniversary is 'Celebrating 35 Years of Good Trouble: Building a Bridge to Justice for All.' The phrase 'good trouble,' famously spoken by Congressman John Lewis, resonates deeply with our mission," said the Hon. Shirley Troutman, Associate Judge of the New York State Court of Appeals and co-chair of the Commission. "We chose this theme not only as a tribute to the late congressman, but also as an acknowledgment by the Franklin H. Williams Judicial Commission that it is only by confronting wrongdoing with courage that our state and our country will become what they must: places where equal justice includes everyone."

The Commission is named for Ambassador Franklin H. Williams, a civil rights lawyer who served as assistant counsel to Thurgood Marshall, directed the NAACP's West Coast office, helped develop the Peace Corps, and served as U.S. Ambassador to Ghana. As chair of the New York State Judicial Commission on Minorities, Ambassador Williams oversaw the landmark 1991 report documenting the lack of diversity in the courts and the widespread perception of racial bias within the system. In recognition of the ongoing need to address these issues, the Commission was made a permanent part of the court system and named in his honor.

For 35 years, the Commission has educated and advised court leadership on issues affecting court employees and litigants of color; recommended strategies to increase racial and ethnic diversity in judicial and non-judicial positions; advocated for equitable policies within the courts; and produced programming and reports focused on racial and ethnic fairness in the courts and the legal profession.

"The 35th Anniversary celebration is not only a celebration of the accomplishments of the Franklin H. Williams Commission over these past years, it is a recognition and celebration of Franklin H. Williams, an individual whose work profoundly impacted the Civil Rights Movement, civil rights laws, the legal profession and of course the New York State Court System. Franklin H. Williams' 1991 frank and no-holds-barred report continues to provide the framework for the Commission's mission to achieve racial and ethnic fairness in the

courts and the legal profession. While we are still crossing the Bridge to Justice, and while we recently lost ground and a few bricks in the road were intentionally removed, we will continue on our journey with perseverance, tenacity and unwavering resolve," said the Hon. Troy K. Webber, Associate Justice of the Appellate Division, First Department, and co-chair of the Commission.

New York State Chief Judge Hon. Rowan D. Wilson will offer greetings and introductory remarks, and the Hon. Loretta Lynch, former Attorney General of the United States, will deliver the keynote address. The evening will also feature video reflections from past and present Commission chairs and a Special Recognition presentation honoring The Legal Aid Society, The Council for Unity, as well as the Hon. George B. Daniels, Senior United States District Judge for the Southern District of New York and FHW Commissioner, and the Hon. Robert Johnson, Retired Justice of the New York State Supreme Court.

The Commission will present six awards honoring individuals and organizations whose work reflects its mission:

Pipeline to Equity in Legal Education and the Profession Award — Bernadette Gargano, Esq., Director of Clinical Legal Education at the University at Buffalo School of Law, helped found the federal Pro Se Assistance Program in the Western District of New York, which created embedded clinics providing pro bono services to underrepresented communities, and has been recognized by UB Law's Students of Color Committee for her work promoting excellence among students of color.

Leading the Way Award — Kevin Carter, Court Officer and President of the Guardians Association of the New York State Courts, has been actively serving the court community by volunteering his time and efforts without pay. Since becoming president of the Guardians Association, he has organized educational trips for court employees, planned and served Thanksgiving meals for homeless teens, and hosted a Health and Wellness fair in Brooklyn to benefit the local community.

Trailblazer Award — Miguelina Camilo, Esq., attorney and community leader, who was born in the Dominican Republic and raised in Washington Heights, became the first in her family to graduate from college and went on to a career as a family law attorney, law firm owner, and public servant, including service as a commissioner of the New York City Board of Elections and as president of the Bronx Women's Bar Association.

Hon. Sheila Abdus-Salaam Outstanding Jurist Award — Hon. Fatimat O. Reid, Monroe County Family Court Judge, was elected to the bench in 2018, was the first Black judge to serve on Monroe County Family Court since 1987, and in September 2025 received the inaugural Hon. Shirley Troutman Award for excellence in diversity and inclusion. The award is named for the late Associate Judge Sheila Abdus-Salaam, the first Black woman to serve on the New York State Court of Appeals.

Outstanding Legal Services Award — Suzette M. Melendez, Esq., a teaching professor at Syracuse University College of Law, serves as the Director of the Syracuse Medical Partnership which coordinates collaboration between lawyers and medical providers to address gaps in service and train students in legal advocacy. She has also served as the Director of the Children's Rights and Family Law Clinic since 2003, which provides free legal services to families in need.

Outstanding Young Leader's Award — Daniel Bugingo, Esq., is currently a Legal Fellow at the Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York, where his outstanding work includes developing document-assembly workflows for uncontested divorces and exploring how technology, particularly in areas such as bankruptcy and family law, can expand access to legal services for all.

For more information about the Franklin H. Williams Judicial Commission, please visit our website at www.nycourts.gov/FHW.

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