



PRESS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

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NYS Courts' Equal Justice Initiative Issues Progress Report

NEW YORK—Acting Chief Judge Anthony Cannataro today announced the release of a report updating the achievements of the court system's Equal Justice Initiative, led by Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Justice Initiatives, Hon. Edwina Richardson-Mendelson. "Equal Justice in the New York State Courts: 2022 Year in Review," highlights the court system's statewide efforts over the past year to promote diversity and inclusiveness on the bench and in the courts' workforce and foster a safe, welcoming and bias-free environment, consistent with the recommendations of the Special Adviser on Equal Justice in the Courts, Secretary Jeh Johnson.

Accomplishments, among others, highlighted in today's report include:

- Mandating comprehensive racial bias training for all judges and nonjudicial staff, a continuing series of programs, the first installment of which was completed in October 2022. Over 80 percent of those responding to a post-training survey agreed or strongly agreed that the session improved their understanding of implicit bias, and over 73 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the training will help them treat people more fairly.
- Expanding the resources of the court system's Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI), which works to promote a diverse, inclusive workforce and bias-free work environment. ODI hosted the court system's second annual Diversity Summit in April 2022, with nearly 800 judges and nonjudicial staff attending the virtual program. The summit provided practical tips on how, despite our differences, we can connect with others in a positive way. Other ODI-sponsored programs in 2022 included celebrations of Black history, women's history, Asian American Pacific Islander heritage, LGBTQ+ pride and Native American heritage. ODI also launched an online newsletter, "Mosaic," to build understanding of the need for diversity within the court system and highlight progress in this area.

- Strengthening the resources of the New York State courts' Franklin H. Williams Judicial Commission—which is dedicated to promoting racial and ethnic fairness in the judicial system—enabling the Commission to expand existing programs, such as its Judicial Mentor Program, and develop new materials and initiatives. For instance, the Commission worked with court administrators to create a “Court User Expectations and Responsibilities” poster, designed to foster public trust and promote transparency.
- Increasing awareness of the role of the courts' Inspector General's Office in rooting out bias and discrimination.
- Reforming human resources and interview practices, including making diversity-related interview questions and ratings—formerly used only for managerial positions—a part of all interviews; and expanding data collection and survey methodology to better capture employment-related trends and identify problem areas to promote diversity and inclusiveness in the workforce.
- Working to foster trust between members of the public and court officers. Court officers are now required to wear nameplates; the court system is working with experts to develop a new court officer's manual to include anti-bias materials; the courts' Department of Public Safety and court officers across the State have participated in community events to promote career opportunities, youth development and safety awareness; and the Sixth Judicial District's Court Officer Pilot Project has evolved into a full customer service project involving judges and nonjudicial personnel and a feedback survey, aimed at developing a more welcoming and respectful culture in every courthouse in the District's 10 counties.
- Creating Equal Justice Committees in each of the court system's 13 judicial districts to implement reforms at the local level. The committees are staffed by judges and nonjudicial staff, including court clerks, court officers, court analysts, court attorneys, court interpreters and court reporters. For example, in the Second Judicial District (Brooklyn), the Courts and Communities in Conversation initiative provides a platform for locals to share thoughts on how the court system is perceived and discuss ways to improve relationships between the courts and community; and the Equal Justice Committees in the Tenth Judicial District (Long Island) and Third Judicial District (Capital Region) worked with court system partners and others to produce recruitment videos that aim to promote workforce diversity.
- Developing a bench card for judges, with tips on using LGBTQ+-inclusive language and pronouns. The courts' Richard C. Failla LGBTQ+ Commission, named for the first openly gay person elected to State Supreme Court, worked with the Ninth Judicial District (Hudson Valley region) to create the bench card.
- Advancing jury diversification efforts.

- Expanding Virtual Court Access Network (VCAN) sites, which help bridge the digital divide by providing remote access to courts in safe, convenient community locations such as libraries, houses of worship and community centers. The courts' Office for Justice Initiatives (OJI), led by Judge Richardson-Mendelson, worked with the courts' Division of Technology and the Center for Justice Innovation to launch a VCAN site within the Red Hook Community Justice Center in Brooklyn, where court users can file emergency Family Court petitions or respond to a Civil Court or Housing Court notice. Outside New York City, OJI and the Rural Justice Task Force, working with the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice and the courts' technology division and ADR office, among others, have identified 17 additional VCAN sites.
- Appointing a Statewide Equal Justice Coordinator to serve as a liaison to the courts' Equal Justice Committees and further advance the courts' diversification and anti-bias efforts.

“This report is a testament to the New York State judiciary’s dedication to eradicate systemic bias, diversify the State’s bench and nonjudicial workforce and ensure equal justice to all who come before our courts. I am proud of the hard work of the court system’s judges, nonjudicial staff and partners in advancing these goals, and especially grateful to Judge Richardson-Mendelson for her steadfast leadership of this vast and important undertaking. While we have much work ahead of us, the significant strides detailed in today’s report are highly encouraging, paving the way for future success in this critical area,” said Judge Cannataro.

“It is an honor and a privilege to lead these equal justice endeavors. This is work that requires full participation and unwavering commitment. Though mindful that we have a long way to go, I am heartened by the progress achieved thus far and thankful to the dedicated individuals comprising our implementation committee, which includes judicial leaders, court managers, court personnel, expert consultants and justice system stakeholders,” said Judge Richardson-Mendelson.

The full report is available online at:

www.nycourts.gov/LegacyPDFS/publications/22-Equal-Justice-Review.pdf

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