



PRESS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

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

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New York State Unified Court System Announces A Newly Structured Communications Department for an Increasingly Diverse Information Age

*Historic Reimagining of Press, Public Affairs and Online
Functions to Be Overseen by Experienced New Director*

NEW YORK—Chief Judge of the State of New York Rowan D. Wilson, Chief Administrative Judge Joseph A. Zayas and First Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Norman St. George today announced a fundamental restructuring of the Unified Court System’s communications operations, designed to ensure that all New Yorkers are aware of the courts’ efforts, commitment and programming to ensure equal justice and access to justice for all. The newly formed Communications Department will be headed by Al Baker, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist with three decades of experience, including working for the Daily News, Newsday and the New York Times. Most recently, Mr. Baker served as the executive director of media relations in the New York Police Department’s Office of Public Information.

The reorganization comes as a crucial part of the new judicial leadership team’s program to establish and strengthen ties between the courts and the populations they serve, through greater transparency, civics education and greater publicity of the many ways, large and small, in which the judicial and non-judicial personnel within the court system work to improve the lives of New Yorkers.

The Communications Department, led by Mr. Baker, will include three strategic new divisions for delivering the judiciary’s message across a wide range of communications platforms—the offices of Public Information, Public Affairs and Web Administration. Working together, these divisions will cultivate public awareness of the work of the courts in a newly integrated communications office.

“A vital part of our plan is to better educate the public about the role of courts, and the work our judges and employees do every day that is far beyond what is required of them, so that the public learns about the courts not just when someone released pretrial is arrested for a new crime, but also when a judge spends her weekends coaching public school students, or runs a summer program for youth of color at her own cost, or when court officers go to a prison on the weekend to play basketball with incarcerated individuals and educate them about life after prison. Our nation’s recent failure at civics education is well-documented. We are not going to be part of that failure; we are going to be part of the solution,” said Chief Judge Wilson. “Al Baker is the perfect person to lead that mission. He is a highly accomplished, respected journalist with decades of experience in journalism, media relations and strategic public relations and, most importantly, an impeccable reputation for telling the truth. I have every confidence that OCA’s new Communications Department, with its broadened scope and multidisciplinary team, will flourish under Al’s guidance and meet the challenge of increasing the public’s understanding of the New York State Courts’ important work and get the good word out about the many initiatives being implemented across the State to enhance access to the courts and court services and improve the quality of justice—and life—for New Yorkers.”

"The state of our judiciary is strong and getting stronger with this new vision for delivering timely, accurate and effective communications to a public that deserves the clearest understanding of our important mission," said Chief Administrative Judge Joseph A. Zayas. "We are excited to name Al Baker to oversee these crucial functions, at this critical time."

“Al has been a voice of integrity in his more than three decades of accomplished experience with the press,” said First Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Norman St. George. “Al’s unique vision and creativity—both as a print journalist and as an ambassador for transparent communications while recently employed as a high-level executive within the criminal justice arena—will greatly expand our continuing obligation of ensuring an informed public.”

Director Baker will begin in his new role on October 12, 2023, embarking on a thorough assessment of the existing communications systems to develop comprehensive lines of communication.

"I am deeply grateful to Chief Judge Wilson, Chief Administrative Judge Zayas, First Deputy Chief Administrative Judge St. George and the entire state Unified Court System for entrusting me with ensuring that our voices can be heard by the broadest possible canvas of dedicated journalists and across our own narrative channels," said Mr. Baker. "From my own newspaper days, to my essential job in the NYPD at a time of national reckoning on race and policing, to my new role in New York's judiciary, the proud theme of my life's trajectory has been public service—and I'm privileged now to bring the cumulative experience of my efforts to bear in service of this integral new mission."

Director Baker, the son of a retired lieutenant in the NYPD's elite Emergency Service Unit, began his journalism career in 1990 and was hired by the New York Daily News in early 1993. His career continued at Newsday, where he was a member of the newspaper's team awarded the Pulitzer Prize for its coverage of the crash of TWA Flight 800 in 1996. He joined the staff of The New York Times in 2000, focusing on criminal justice, state government, and policing in New York and abroad. Director Baker broke seminal stories on a wide array of policing practices such as stop-question-and-frisk, and on policies including the use of force, implicit bias, and counterterrorism and emergency management. He was a founding writer in the newspaper's "Murder in the 4-0" series that explored every homicide in the South Bronx in 2016, during a period of sustained lows in citywide crime. In July 2019, he was hired as the director of media relations for the New York City Police Department and was promoted two years later to the rank of executive director with the expanded portfolio of managing external affairs with the city agency's multiple law enforcement and government partners and other stakeholders. In July 2023, he completed the Harvard Kennedy School program for senior executives in state and local government. He will report to OCA's offices at 25 Beaver Street in Manhattan. He lives with his wife, a nurse practitioner in cardiology at Columbia University Medical Center, and their two school-age children in Rockville Centre, in Nassau County.

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