



NEWS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

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

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Chief Judge Wilson Names New Co-Chair, Members to Richard C. Failla LGBTQ Commission

NEW YORK—Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson today announced a new co-chair and two new members of the Richard C. Failla LGBTQ Commission. Hon. Grace M. Hanlon, Supreme Court Justice, Eighth Judicial District, succeeds Hon. Joanne M. Winslow, Associate Justice, Appellate Division, Fourth Department (retired) as the upstate co-chair and will serve alongside downstate co-chair Hon. Karen Lupuloff, Supervising Judge, Family Court, New York County. Hon. Seth M. Marnin and Hon. Javier E. Vargas, both Court of Claims judges, are appointed as members of the Failla Commission. Justice Winslow will remain as a member of the Commission.

Since its creation in December 2016, the Failla Commission has acted as a forceful advocate for LGBTQ issues and LGBTQ members of the court community, providing a bridge between the judiciary's leadership and LGBTQ individuals in the courts and legal profession. The Failla Commission works with 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 LGBTQ litigants are fairly addressed by the courts. The Failla Commission also collaborates with LGBTQ advocacy organizations, bar associations, and community groups to raise awareness about LGBTQ issues and foster a more equitable, supportive environment for LGBTQ members within the justice system, legal profession, and wider community.

“I am delighted to announce the appointments of these three outstanding jurists to the Failla Commission, whose work is so crucial to the court system’s efforts to ensure equal access to justice and foster a diverse, inclusive work environment. I am confident that Justice Hanlon, together with Judge Lupuloff, will lead the Commission further along that critically important path and am deeply grateful to the Commission’s members for their hard work and commitment toward that end,” said Chief Judge Wilson. “I also want to express my sincere appreciation to Justice Winslow for co-chairing the Failla Commission for nearly six years. During her tenure, she has overseen countless initiatives and dozens of events, highlighted by the successful amendment and strengthening of court system anti-discrimination rules and the establishment of the annual Judge Paul G. Feinman Award. With Justice Winslow staying on as a member of the Commission, we are most fortunate to continue to benefit from her many talents and her unwavering dedication to the pursuit of equal justice.”

Justice Hanlon became the first openly LGBTQ justice elected to the Supreme Court in the Eighth Judicial District in November 2021. Prior to her election to the bench, Justice Hanlon was a confidential law clerk to Chautauqua County Court Judge David Foley and had practiced law in Chautauqua County since 1992. She served as first assistant district attorney for the county and a stint in the Public Defender’s Office. Justice Hanlon is a State University at Buffalo graduate and studied at the University College of London before earning her law degree from the Elisabeth Haub School of Law at Pace University in 1989. She was first appointed as a member of the Failla Commission by former Chief Judge Janet DiFiore in December 2018.

“Since the start of the Failla Commission, the members have worked tirelessly to support the LGBTQ community, to eradicate the shame and fear that members of the community felt, and to develop a positive perception of our community, making it easier to openly be themselves and open doors for career paths that were traditionally not available,” said Justice Hanlon. “It is an honor to be named co-chair of this commission, to continue the work of past chairs, and to continue to allow people like me to celebrate who they are and not hide in the shadows.”

Judge Marnin was nominated by Governor Kathy Hochul and confirmed by the Senate for the New York State Court of Claims in June 2023. He is New York’s first transgender judge and the first transgender man in the country to serve as a judge. Judge Marnin previously served as the director of training and education for the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action at Columbia University. Prior to that role, Judge Marnin was the founder and principal of Workplace Strategies, advising and guiding non-profit organizations on a range of legal issues. Judge Marnin was also the Vice President of Civil Rights at the Anti-Defamation League and litigated employment discrimination cases at Outten & Golden LLP. Judge Marnin earned B.A. and M.A.

degrees from the State University of New York at Albany before graduating from the University of Connecticut School of Law in 2006.

“I am honored to be appointed to serve as a member of the Richard C. Failla LGBTQ Commission,” said Judge Marnin. “As the first out transgender judge in New York, I am proud to join my colleagues, past and present, in promoting equal access to our courts. Increasing the presence and visibility of LGBTQ personnel in the court system and on the bench helps fulfill our ultimate mission: that all persons be treated with respect and dignity when they come before New York’s court system.”

Judge Vargas was nominated by Governor Kathy Hochul and confirmed by the Senate for the New York State Court of Claims in June 2022. With that appointment, he became the first openly gay man and Latino LGBTQ judge on the Court of Claims. Previously, he served as a judge in New York City Family Court in Kings County, appointed in 2015. He began his judicial career as a Civil Court judge and from 2013 to 2015 was assigned to the Housing Part in Bronx County. Prior to his ascension to the bench, he served the New York State Unified Court System in various capacities for two decades, including as Senior Court Attorney in the New York State Court of Appeals; Principal Law Clerk in State Supreme Court and the Appellate Division, Second Department; and Chief Court Attorney for the New York State Supreme Court, Appellate Term, First Department. Judge Vargas received his undergraduate degree from the State University of New York at Buffalo, his law degree from SUNY Buffalo School of Law, and a Master of Law degree from New York University School of Law in 1993.

“I am sincerely grateful to Chief Judge Wilson and Chief Administrative Judge Zayas for placing their trust in me with this appointment,” said Judge Vargas. “As a young gay man, I encountered limited opportunities in my hometown of Arecibo, Puerto Rico, and decided to come to New York on my own, not only to go to college and pursue better prospects, but also to live my life openly without fear. It’s a tremendous honor being appointed to such an important State Commission. This could only happen only in the United States.”

“It has been one of the greatest honors of my career to have served for almost six years as a co-chair of the Failla Commission,” said Justice Winslow. “I had the great fortune of working closely with three wonderful and talented co-chairs: Hon. Marcy Kahn, Hon. Anthony Cannataro, and Hon. Karen Lupuloff. But with my retirement from the bench last year, the time to pass the torch has arrived, and for now, I will remain on the Commission and do my best to contribute to the important work we do. I can assure you, the Commission is in excellent hands. I also know that Justice Grace Hanlon will be an exceptional addition as co-chair and will continue the tradition of the Commission’s important mission.”

A roster of the Commission members follows.

Richard C. Failla LGBTQ Commission

Co-Chairs

Hon. Grace Hanlon, Justice, Supreme Court, Eighth Judicial District, Mayville

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

Members

Thomas Burrows, Esq., Attorney, New York City

Andrea Conjerti, Esq., Associate, Brown Chiari LLP, Buffalo

Lettie Dickerson, Esq., LGBTQ Rights Staff Attorney, Empire Justice Center, Albany

Hon. Mary Anne Doherty, Supervising Judge, Syracuse City Court

Hon. Elizabeth Garry, Presiding Justice, Appellate Division, Third Department (co-chair emeritus)

Hon. James L. Hyer, Justice, Supreme Court, Ninth Judicial District, White Plains

Hon. Norma Jennings, Supervising Judge, New York County Housing Court

Hon. Marcy L. Kahn, Associate Justice, Appellate Division, First Department (retired) (co-chair emeritus)

Hon. Chris Ann Kelley, Court of Claims Judge and Acting Justice of the Supreme Court, Suffolk County

Hon. Seth Marnin, Judge, Court of Claims, Manhattan

Hon. Angela Mazzarelli, Associate Justice, Appellate Division, First Department (retired)

Hon. Rita Mella, Surrogate, New York County

Meredith R. Miller, Esq., Professor of Law, Touro Law Center

Hon. E. Jeannette Ogden, Associate Justice, Appellate Division, Fourth Department

Ronald Pawelczak, District Executive, Seventh Judicial District

Hon. Franc Perry, Justice, Supreme Court, New York County

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

Susan Sommer, Esq., Attorney, New York City

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

Hon. Richard Tsai, Judge, Civil Court, New York County

Hon. Javier Vargas, Judge, Court of Claims, Manhattan

Michael Violando, Esq., In-House Counsel, Travelers, Albany

Hon. Margaret Walsh, Justice, Supreme Court, Third Judicial District (retired)

Hon. Joanne M. Winslow, Associate Justice, Appellate Division, Fourth Department (retired) (co-chair emeritus)

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