



NEWS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

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

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Chief Administrative Judge Zayas Announces New Appointments to the Advisory Committee on Judicial Ethics

NEW YORK—Chief Administrative Judge Joseph A. Zayas today designated Hon. Debra L. Givens as co-chair of the Advisory Committee on Judicial Ethics. She will serve alongside Appellate Division, Second Department Associate Justice Lillian Wan in leading the Committee, which provides ethics advice to judges, justices, and quasi-judicial officials of the New York State Unified Court System in accordance with the Rules Governing Judicial Conduct. Judge Givens will succeed Hon. Margaret Walsh as co-chair, following her long and distinguished tenure at the helm of the Committee.

Judge Zayas also named Hon. Kevin R. Bryant and Hon. Donna M. Siwek as Committee members. Justice Bryant will fill the membership seat vacated by Judge Walsh, and Justice Siwek will replace Hon. Margaret Vacca, who was recently named to a federal judgeship in the Western District of New York.

The appointments were made in consultation with the Administrative Board of the Courts, comprised of the Presiding Justices of the Appellate Division's four Judicial Departments, and with the approval of Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson.

“Judge Givens is a highly respected expert on judicial ethics—and has lectured extensively on the topic—and will be a tremendous asset to Co-Chair Wan and the Committee members. Additionally, Justices Bryant and Siwek bring varied judicial and legal experience, along with sound judgment, to their new roles as Committee members,” said Chief Judge Wilson. “We are most fortunate to have these eminent jurists now serving the Committee, whose support is crucial to the Unified Court System’s mission.”

“I am delighted to announce the appointments of three such exemplary members of the New York State bench to the Committee,” said Chief Administrative Judge Zayas. “I am confident that Justice Givens will lead the Committee with great discernment and integrity. I also look forward to the valuable contributions of Justices Bryant and Siwek as members of the Committee which, providing critical guidance to our judges, justices,

and quasi-judicial officials systemwide, is pivotal in our efforts to ensure the fair administration of justice and promote public trust and confidence in the New York State Courts.”

“I previously served as a member of the Committee from 2007 to 2017 and have remained since then as faculty to the Committee. I have always loved the work, and I am excited and proud to have been asked to return in the capacity of co-chair. I look forward to assisting in the continuation of the Committee’s mission to provide a valuable service to judges statewide,” said Judge Givens.

“I am very honored and grateful to Chief Judge Wilson, Chief Administrative Judge Zayas, and the Administrative Board for the opportunity to serve on the Advisory Committee on Judicial Ethics. I look forward to working with the Committee members in providing guidance to support and promote public trust,” said Justice Bryant.

“I am thrilled to have been appointed by Chief Administrative Judge Zayas to this committee because the committee’s work plays a critical role in maintaining public confidence in the judiciary and ensuring the proper administration of justice. I am very much looking forward to working with the committee members whose diverse perspectives and expertise I highly respect,” said Judge Siwek.

Judge Givens was appointed to the New York State Court of Claims in June 2021 and designated an acting Supreme Court Justice. She was reappointed to the Court in June 2024 and presides over felony cases as well as civil matters. She previously served as a Buffalo City Court judge and as an acting County Court judge and an acting Family Court judge. Prior to taking the bench, she was a support magistrate in Erie County Family Court, where she handled child support, paternity, and other matters. Before joining the court system, she managed a high-volume, solo law practice, with a focus on matrimonial, family, and real estate matters. She began her legal career as an associate at the firm of Lipsitz, Green, Fahringer, Roll, Salisbury & Cambria. Judge Givens earned her undergraduate and law degrees from the State University of New York at Buffalo. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Minority Bar Foundation’s 2021 Trailblazer Award and the Minority Bar Association’s 2021 Excellence Award, among many other honors.

Justice Bryant has served as a Supreme Court Justice in the Third Judicial District since 2022, handling mostly civil matters. Before being elected to the State Supreme Court bench, he was the City of Kingston’s Corporation Counsel, serving as the primary legal adviser to the mayor, Common Council, and the City’s commissions, departments, and offices. Prior to that, he managed a solo law practice for nearly two decades, representing litigants in both civil and criminal matters. Previously, he served as an assistant public defender in Ulster County and before that as an Ulster County assistant district attorney. He is a graduate of State University of New York at New Paltz and Albany Law School. Justice Bryant served on the Appellate Division, Third Department’s Committee on Character and Fitness from 2006 to 2011, and on its Grievance Committee from 2015 to 2018.

Justice Siwek has served the New York State Supreme Court bench in the Eighth Judicial District since 2001, sitting in Buffalo. She was the District's Supervising Judge of Civil Cases from 2006 to 2010 and is a member of the District's Judicial Hearing Officer Selection Committee and the Wyoming County Jury Board. Prior to her ascension to the bench, she served the Unified Court System as a law clerk to then Supreme Court Justice David J. Mahoney. Before joining the court system, she worked as an associate at the law firm of Farrell & Quackenbush. She earned her B.A. from St. Lawrence University and her J.D. from State University of New York at Buffalo School of Law. She is Past President of the Eighth Judicial District's State Supreme Court Justices Association and sits on the Zoological Society of Buffalo's Board of Directors, among other affiliations. She has been honored by the New York State Trial Lawyers Association of Western New York with its Justice of the Year award and by the Advocates Club of Western New York Polish-American Lawyers with its Distinguished Leadership Award, in addition to other accolades.

In recognition of outgoing Committee Co-Chair Margaret Walsh and Committee member Meredith Vacca, Judge Zayas said, "I am deeply grateful to Justice Walsh for her 12 years of dedicated service to the Committee, including her adept leadership of the advisory panel over the past eight years. I also want to thank Judge Vacca for her membership on the committee since 2023 and am pleased that she will continue to serve New Yorkers in her new capacity on the federal bench."

The appointments are effective immediately.

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