



# **NEWS RELEASE**

**New York State  
Unified Court System**

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

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## **Chief Judge Wilson Appoints Co-Chair to the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice**

**NEW YORK**—Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson today announced the appointment of Professor Janet Sabel as Co-Chair to the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice, to join Co-Chairs Hon. Christina Ryba and Hon. Shahabuddeen A. Ally in leading this eminent group of jurists, legal practitioners, academics and others in its mission to narrow New York’s justice gap. Professor Sabel will fill a vacancy left by the retirement of distinguished attorney and Commission founder Helaine Barnett, who will remain a member of the Commission and its Chair Emerita.

“Ensuring access to legal services not only improves outcomes for those in dire need but also saves taxpayer dollars by averting myriad social ills. I cannot overstate the importance of the Commission’s work in building a more robust and equitable New York,” said Chief Judge Wilson. “With decades of experience in creating and spearheading initiatives to enhance the delivery of justice to underserved communities in housing, family, health and other essential matters, Janet Sabel is an ideal person to help lead this crucial mission. I am exceedingly grateful that she has agreed to serve as Co-Chair and am entirely confident that her advocacy and guidance will further the Commission’s progress towards the goal of access to civil justice for all.”

“Professor Sabel has devoted her life to public service and advocacy on behalf of our most vulnerable New Yorkers, whether in her current role at NYU School of Law, where she heads the school’s Center on Civil Justice’s Access to Justice Initiative, during her decades-long tenure at The Legal Aid Society, in her key posts at the Office of the New York State Attorney General, or as a longstanding member of the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice, among other efforts. She brings tremendous passion, energy, and expertise to her new role on the Commission and I am eager to work with her in that capacity,” said Chief Administrative Judge Joseph A. Zayas.

“Janet Sabel is a distinguished member of New York’s legal community, known both for her brilliant mind and tireless efforts on behalf of New York’s underrepresented communities. A lifelong champion of equal justice, she will be a tremendous addition to the Commission’s leadership team. I look forward to working with her and Co-Chairs Ryba and Ally in our ongoing pursuit to eliminate barriers to justice for all New Yorkers, regardless of need,” said First Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Norman St. George.

“The Permanent Commission on Access to Justice has played a critical role in supporting the New York State Courts to close the justice gap, ensuring that low-income and marginalized communities have meaningful access to the courts. I am honored to join Judges Ally and Ryba as Co-Chairs, following the lead and vision of the founding chair of the Commission, Helaine Barnett,” said Professor Sabel.

Janet Sabel is an adjunct professor of law and the Founding Director of the Access to Justice Initiative at New York University Law School’s Center on Civil Justice, an ambitious effort to assist state courts in building strong, sustainable programs and policies to address the needs of self-represented persons and enhance access to the courts in housing, family, consumer debt, and small claims matters. She has worked for nearly 40 years as an advocate for social and economic justice, including decades of service with The Legal Aid Society. During her tenure, she represented low-income New Yorkers in individual and class action litigation and led numerous initiatives, most recently as the Executive Director and Attorney in Chief. She also served the New York State Office of the Attorney General for eight years, holding key posts, including Executive Deputy Attorney General for Social Justice and Chief Deputy Attorney General. Early in her career, she worked as a law clerk for Hon. Frank M. Coffin of the U.S. Court of Appeals First Circuit. Professor Sabel is a graduate of Harvard College and earned her law degree from New York University School of Law, where she was a Root Tilden scholar (public interest law). She is the recipient of numerous awards for her public service and leadership and has been a member of the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice since 2004.

In tribute to outgoing Commission founder Helaine Barnett, Chief Judge Wilson said, “We owe the Commission’s status as a permanent entity to Helaine Barnett, whose perseverance, creativity, and lifelong commitment to meaningful legal assistance for vulnerable New Yorkers has led to numerous reforms and initiatives to help close the civil justice gap in New York and the nation, impacting many thousands of lives for the better.”

The appointment is effective immediately.

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