



NEWS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

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

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Diverse, Statewide Panel Formed to Examine Issues Confronting New York’s Family Justice System, Develop Strategies to Best Serve the Needs of Children and Families Appearing in Family Court

NEW YORK—With renewed focus on the crucial role of New York’s family justice system, Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson, and Chief Administrative Judge Joseph A. Zayas today announced the formation of a landmark panel charged with forging collaborative study of the panoply of justice issues impacting families, youth, and children across the state.

“The time is now, to effectively, efficiently—and compassionately—address the justice needs of New York’s children and families in distress,” said Chief Judge Wilson. “We have no time to waste in this endeavor.”

The state’s family courts, presiding over some of the most intimate personal issues individuals can face, have been beset by longstanding challenges and heightened scrutiny. The new panel is a centerpiece in the Unified Court System’s reassessment of the best approach to a broad range of complex and persistent issues impacting families who litigate in New York’s courts. It comes at a time when the court system has added Family Court judgeships and implemented new technologies and operational tools to aid a system that remains overburdened and under-resourced. The panel’s aim, simply stated, is to promote equity, access, transparency, and understanding within the family justice system statewide.

“Our family courts and justice system handle urgent matters involving deep-rooted, systemic issues said Chief Administrative Judge Zayas. “We are striving to do better in responding to the essential needs of New York’s children and families in crisis.”

The newly appointed Permanent Commission on Justice for Families will be led by Statewide Coordinating Judge for Family Court Matters Richard Rivera, New York City Family Court Administrative Judge Anne-Marie Jolly, and Dawne A. Mitchell, Chief Attorney of The Legal Aid Society’s Juvenile Rights Practice. Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Justice Initiatives Edwina G. Richardson will serve as Chair

Emerita of the Commission, and distinguished attorney and children's advocate Louise Feld as an Executive Director.

The Commission, which represents the full array of family justice system professionals and partners, will conduct a careful study of the family justice system's many moving parts, seeking new and creative ways to better address existing systemic challenges. To this end, its members will be assigned to working groups based on their experience and expertise, identifying the most pressing issues and responding to emerging needs. The groups will then collaborate, reporting their findings and recommendations to Chief Judge Wilson and the court system's judicial leadership team.

"This premier advisory group, encompassing the broadest spectrum of expertise, backgrounds, and lived experiences within the family justice arena, will enable us to take a 360-degree view of New York's family justice system," said First Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Norman St. George. "It will foster cooperation among the various family justice system partners and stakeholders and generate novel ideas that lead to reforms to more effectively address the needs of at-risk children, youth, and families across New York's 62 counties."

Added Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Edwina Richardson: "The safety and well-being of our communities is only as good as that of our children and families. As a civil society, it is our duty to protect the integrity, health, and stability of our children and families—regardless of background or need."

"As Statewide Coordinating Judge for Family Court Matters, I have listened to the voices of key partners, including those with lived experience, who have been directly impacted by our justice system," said Judge Rivera. "This is a pivotal moment to partner with dedicated experts and advocates in tackling these challenges."

"Chief Judge Wilson and Chief Administrative Judge Zayas have taken a critical and significant step in support of New York's children and families with the creation of the Permanent Commission on Justice for Families," said Judge Jolly. "This foundational collaboration between the court and the bar has the potential to drive meaningful change in the delivery of legal and adjudicative services, fostering innovative solutions and much-needed reforms."

"Despite recent improvements, the New York State Family Court system remains significantly overburdened and in critical need of additional resources to adequately address the unique legal needs of children and families statewide," said Dawne Mitchell of The Legal Aid Society. "The establishment of this landmark commission marks the start of a concerted effort to explore innovative and effective strategies for addressing the systemic challenges that persist within Family Court."

A roster of the Commission members is attached.



Hon. Richard Rivera



Hon. Anne-Marie Jolly



Dawne Mitchell