

Franklin H. Williams Judicial Commission

New York State Report 2013-2014

The Franklin H. Williams Judicial Commission seeks to sensitize and educate all levels of court personnel, judges, and the larger legal community on issues of race and ethnic sensitivity and to increase diversity in the court system and the legal profession.

Implicit Bias Initiatives

This year, the Commission continued its educational initiative by presenting a class for new judges at the New York State Judicial Institute on implicit bias and cultural sensitivity in the courtroom. The new judges also received the booklet, “Cultural Awareness Tips for Judges and Court Personnel”, a booklet developed and published by the Commission. We endeavor to empower judges with the tools to make the courtroom fair and respectful for litigants of all ethnicities and races.

Last year, the Commission hosted a seminar for court administrators and personnel on implicit bias entitled, “Implicit Bias and the Justice System.” Maya Wiley, Esq., president and founder of the Center for Social Inclusion, addressed the vital subject of implicit bias and its possible impact in the courts. Continuing Legal Education credits was provided at the seminar.

Meetings and Problem Solving with Decision Makers

In its continuing dialogue with decision makers, the Commission met with the Chief Judge and Chief Administrative Judge for its annual meeting, as well as its annual meeting with the New York State Governor’s counsel, Mylan Denerstein. The meeting with Ms. Denerstein was an opportunity to discuss judicial appointments that Governor Andrew Cuomo will make to the Appellate Divisions (courts statewide), the Court of Appeals, the

Court of Claims and to the judicial screening panels.

In our request to increase attorneys employed at the appellate levels within the court system, the Commission held meetings with the Dean Penelope Andrews of Albany Law School to discuss a pilot program to improve the writing skills of law students

Celebrate and Acknowledge Diversity in the Courts

The Commission and Columbia Law School Association co-hosted a reception honoring the recent appointments of Judge Sandra Rivera and Judge Sheila Abdus-Salaam to the New York State Court of Appeals, New York State's highest Court. Judge Sandra Rivera is the second Latina female to serve on the Court of Appeals and Judge Abdus-Salaam is the first African-American female judge to serve on the Court of Appeals.

“Everything You Need to Know About Becoming a Judge” Seminars

The Commission has begun a statewide initiative to host seminars on the path to becoming a judge in districts that show a lack of diversity on the bench. This year, the Commission co-sponsored two seminars on “Everything You Need to Know About Becoming a Judge”, one in Rochester, NY, and the other in Buffalo, NY. The Commission plans to host additional seminars in Albany, Syracuse, and White Plains, NY.

In collaboration with the local bar associations, a planning committee was formed to develop a half day program which provided continuing legal education credits.

The seminars included panel discussions on election law and ethics, securing the nomination in State Supreme Court, making the ballot in city, county and family court, and the appointive process to the New York State Court of Claims, and federal bench. The panelists included Commissioners from the Board of Elections, the leaders of local

political parties, bar leaders, and local state and federal jurists. The seminars closed with a reception allowing the opportunity for further networking for potential judicial candidates. The Rochester seminar is featured in our latest newsletter. For more information about the Commission, newsletters and our programs, visit www.nycourts.gov/ip/ethnic-fairness/