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New York State to form first judicial LGBT Commission



Chief Judge Janet DiFiore announced the creation of an LGBT Commission within the New York state court system. Photo courtesy of the Office of Court Administration.

Chief Judge Janet DiFiore and Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence Marks Announce Landmark Commission

By Rob Abruzzese, Legal Editor
Brooklyn Daily Eagle

Chief Judge Janet DiFiore and Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence K. Marks formed a judicial LGBT Commission, making New York state the first state in the country with a commission of this kind for the LGBT community, the judges announced on Wednesday.

"I am heartened by the historic gains made by LGBT members throughout society, among them LGBT persons within the Unified Court System, who are now well represented in our judicial and non-judicial ranks," said DiFiore. "Yet for their many advances in American society in recent years, LGBT members continue all too often to face discrimination, bullying and hate-motivated violence."

The commission, per the press release, will serve as an advocate for LGBT issues and LGBT members of the court community. It will also serve as a liaison between the judiciary and LGBT individuals in the court system and legal profession. It will also collaborate with LGBT advocacy organizations, bar association and community groups.

Justice Marcy L. Kahn, associate justice of the Appellate Division, First Department, and Justice Elizabeth A. Garry, associate justice of the Appellate Division, Third Department, have been selected to run the commission.

"While it is the function of the courts to adjudicate such matters and protect our individual liberties as guaranteed by the Constitution, the LGBT Commission was created to go beyond the courts' adjudicative role — to work in an administrative capacity to foster the progress of LGBT persons in the courts and broader community," DiFiore said. "I have every confidence that the commission, under the able guidance of Judges Kahn and Garry, will lead us forward on that path."

The LGBT Commission is modeled on the court system's Franklin H. Williams Commission on Minorities, which has advised the court on issues of race and diversity.

"As a fully institutionalized organization within the court system, the LGBT Commission will serve to advance the courts' outreach and advocacy efforts on behalf of the LGBT community, including our topmost priorities to enhance judicial diversity and bring more LGBT members into our non-judicial workforce," said Marks. "Chief Judge DiFiore and I look forward to working with Judges Kahn and Garry, the Commission members and the court system's justice partners as we seek to attain these goals."

Hon. Paula Hepner, retired Brooklyn judge from Kings County Family Court, and Hon. Franc Perry, also of the Kings County Family Court, will be members of the commission. Marc Levine, president of the Gay/Straight Alliance of the New York State Justice System, will serve as executive director.

"I can't imagine anything better than this for the LGBT community," Levine said. "Obviously we are very grateful to our chief judge and chief administrative judge. I reached out to Chief Judge DiFiore after her appointment and I knew right away that she would be good for the LGBT community, but she is obviously better than expected."

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