

PRESS RELEASE

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New York State Justice Task Force

Review of Racial Disparity in New York’s Criminal Justice System

Since its establishment in 2009, the New York State Justice Task Force (the “Task Force”) has worked to promote fairness, effectiveness, and efficiency in the criminal justice system; to eradicate harms caused by wrongful convictions; to further public safety; and to recommend judicial and legislative reforms to advance those causes throughout the State of New York. Eliminating racial disparity in the criminal justice system is core to furthering this mission.

At the direction of Chief Judge Janet DiFiore last year, the Task Force turned its attention to analyzing the disparate treatment of defendants based on race in New York’s criminal justice system at all key stages of the process—from arrest through sentencing. As a body consisting of judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, law enforcement officials, victim advocates, and others across the criminal justice system, our goal is to propose broader reforms to effectively address these disparities and ensure a more just system for all New Yorkers.

This subject matter is complex and wide-ranging. The importance of tackling it head-on cannot be understated, particularly at this critical juncture. Recent events, including the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and the public protests that have followed, draw into sharp focus the importance of the Task Force’s mission and the tremendous amount of work ahead.

To that end, today Chief Judge DiFiore announced that the Honorable Paul G. Feinman, Associate Judge, New York State Court of Appeals, will join Task Force Co-Chairs the Honorable Carmen Beauchamp Ciparick (Ret.) and the Honorable Mark Dwyer in leading this critical review. They are assisted in this effort by Davis Polk & Wardwell, led by Angela Burgess, which serves as pro-bono counsel to the Task Force.

“I commend the Task Force for its leadership in taking on some of the most difficult and pressing issues facing New York’s criminal justice system. Institutional racism is perhaps the most important and most complex issue the Task Force has ever had to consider. It requires a careful, meaningful examination of racial disparity at each phase in the process. I can think of no group of people better qualified for this critical undertaking and am so pleased that my Court of Appeals colleague, Associate Judge Paul Feinman, has accepted an appointment to lead the Task Force in this and other efforts as it carries out its important mission. I have utmost confidence that the Task Force will rise to the challenge and conduct a thoughtful and thorough analysis of these issues, as it has done with every prior topic it has been tasked with analyzing. I very much look forward to receiving the Task Force’s conclusions and recommendations, as we work together to advance the cause of justice, and am thankful to Davis Polk & Wardwell for its valuable assistance to that end,” said Chief Judge DiFiore.

As the Task Force continues our analysis and formulates proposals for reform, we understand the vital importance of our mission to Chief Judge DiFiore and the people of our State. We look forward to further contributing to this important conversation in the months ahead.