



NEWS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

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

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Chief Judge Wilson Appoints Judicial Co-Chairs to The Permanent Commission on Access to Justice

NEW YORK—Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson today announced the appointment of Hon. Christina Ryba and Hon. Shahabuddeen A. Ally as Judicial Co-Chairs to the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice, which works to address the travails of unrepresented litigants in the New York State Courts and the vast unmet civil legal needs of low-income New Yorkers. In their capacity as Judicial Co-Chairs, Justice Ryba and Judge Ally will join Commission founder Helaine Barnett in leading this distinguished group of jurists, legal practitioners, academics, and others in advancing efforts to help bridge New York’s justice gap.

“The work of the Commission is integral to the Court System’s mission. Beyond a core principle of the rule of law, access to justice is an essential lifeline, whether for the tenant facing eviction or the person embroiled in litigation with predatory lenders, among the many others throughout our State in dire need of civil legal representation and assistance,” said Chief Judge Wilson. “Thus, I am delighted to name these two highly accomplished, dedicated members of New York’s bench as the Commission’s new Judicial Co-Chairs. In addition to their respective reputations for fairness, integrity, and hard work, Justice Ryba and Judge Ally are deeply committed to enhancing access to justice for all New Yorkers as evidenced by their career paths, professional affiliations, and high level of civic engagement. I have every confidence that, working alongside Ms. Barnett, they will build on the Commission’s successes, leading it further ahead in our crucial endeavor to eliminate socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, language, geographic, and other barriers to equal justice. I am also immensely grateful to the many judges who expressed interest in serving as co-chairs, all of whom were highly qualified. Their interest demonstrates the widespread commitment within our courts to the provision of equal access to justice for all New Yorkers.”

“I am extremely pleased that Justice Ryba and Judge Ally will be joining Helaine Barnett in leading the Commission in its important, ongoing work to increase access to justice,” said Chief Administrative Judge Joseph A. Zayas. “As longstanding champions of efforts to expand civil legal services and assistance for vulnerable New Yorkers, they are ideal choices to take on these critical roles as the Commission’s stewards.”

“Justice Ryba and Judge Ally are natural leaders and strong communicators with a talent for building partnerships and creative problem-solving—skills and qualities that will serve the Commission well,” said First Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Norman St. George. “I look forward to the gains to be made by the Commission, under their and Ms. Barnett’s able leadership, in advancing equal justice.”

“We are fortunate to have two such esteemed judges, both deeply committed to the Commission’s cause, as our new Judicial Co-Chairs. Justice Ryba and Judge Ally bring tremendous expertise and passion to their new roles, adding to the broad diversity of the Commission members’ experiences and backgrounds,” said Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Justice Initiatives Edwina G. Richardson, who serves as an ex officio member of the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice. “The Commission, which is a national model, has made significant progress since its inception in expanding access to justice throughout the State. I am eager to work with Justice Ryba, Judge Ally, Ms. Barnett, and the Commission members as we strive to amplify these efforts, seeking ever-more creative solutions in addressing the unmet civil legal services needs of all New Yorkers.”

“I’m grateful to Chief Judge Wilson for the appointment, which will allow me to collaborate with Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Edwina Richardson, Helaine Barnett, and Judge Ally in efforts to help New Yorkers by developing policies and initiatives that will expand much-needed access to legal services,” said Justice Ryba.

“I am thankful to Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson, Chief Administrative Judge Joseph A. Zayas, and the executive leadership team for giving me this opportunity to work on a Commission charged with the most fundamental right—access to justice,” said Judge Ally. “I’m excited to work with Helaine Barnett and Justice Christina Ryba. There is tremendous potential in servicing the needs of those in our community who need assistance.”

Justice Ryba, who had been serving as a member of the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice and Co-Chair of its Modest Means Subcommittee, was elected in 2015 to State Supreme Court in Albany County, where she presides over both civil and criminal matters. The first Black person elected to the Supreme Court in any of the Third Judicial Department’s 28 counties, she was appointed as the District’s Supervising Judge for Supreme Court in 2023. Prior to her ascension to the bench, she served the court system as Special Project Counsel to the Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for

Courts Outside New York City and before that worked in the Appellate Division, Third Department, initially as Special Project Counsel to the Presiding Justice and later as a Principal Court Attorney in the Motions Department. Before joining the court system, she was an associate at Nixon Peabody, LLP. Justice Ryba previously served as an Assistant Attorney General in the Litigation Bureau of the Office of the New York State Attorney General. She began her legal career as an Assistant Corporation Counsel for the City of Albany, later serving as General Counsel and then Deputy Director in the Albany Community Development Agency. She is a graduate of Albany Law School.

Among Justice Ryba's numerous extra-judicial activities, she currently serves as Second Vice President of the Association of Justices of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, as a member of the New York Women Judges Association, and as Chair of the Third Judicial Department's Judicial Hearing Officer Selection Committee. She is a former president of the Albany County Bar Association and the Albany County Bar Foundation. Justice Ryba is the recipient of many honors, including the Albany County Bar Association's 2023 President's Award, the Alpha Chi Omega Chi Women's Club of Albany's 2022 Woman of Distinction Award, and City and State's 2020 Law and Power 100 Award.

Judge Ally was elected to New York City Civil Court in 2018. He was designated an acting Supreme Court Justice in 2020 and named Supervising Judge of New York City Civil Court in New York County, where he oversees the Court's operations and handles a busy calendar. He previously sat on the New York City Criminal Court bench in Bronx County, hearing arraignments, family violence and other matters, and presiding over trials. Before becoming a judge, he was a solo practitioner and handled a range of criminal, civil, and family matters, including serving on the Family Court's Assigned Counsel Panel in New York County and representing litigants in juvenile delinquency, child custody, and other cases. Previously, he was employed by the New York City Law Department as an Assistant Corporation Counsel and before that worked as a staff attorney for the New York City Administration for Children's Services. He earned his law degree from Hofstra University School of Law.

Judge Ally presently serves as President of the Asian American Judges Association of New York and is a member of the Franklin H. Williams Judicial Commission, Judicial Friends, Inc., the New York City Civil Court's Consumer Credit Fairness Act Judicial Task Force, and the Civil Court's Equal Justice in the Courts Committee, among other affiliations. He is a frequent lecturer and panelist on topics ranging from developments in ethics and risk management to tips for handling virtual appearances to implicit bias in the courtroom. Judge Ally is an adjunct professor at Long Island University, where he teaches a graduate-level course in family law, aimed at psychology and counseling students.

The appointments are effective immediately.

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