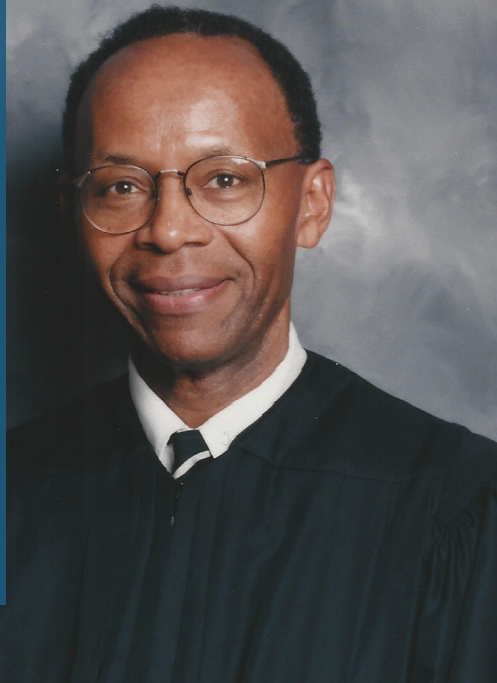


# Judiciary Times

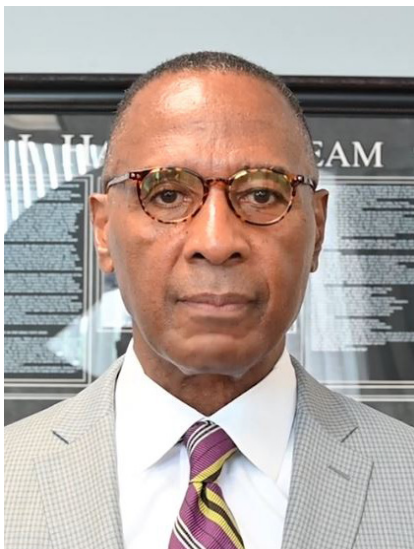
**Winter 2024 - Spring 2025 Edition**  
Administrative Office of the Courts  
Communications and Community Relations

**REMEMBERING**  
two of the  
true giants of  
New Jersey's  
Supreme Court

Pages 2 and 4



## A message from the administrative director



This issue of the Judiciary Times features a sampling of a publication about the anniversary of the creation of the modern court system under the 1947 state constitution.

Since the adoption and approval of the 1947 state constitution, the New Jersey Judiciary has been a national leader in the development of court programs and services. In fact, our simple yet effective court system was barely 10 years old when Alaska and Hawaii – the last two states to join the union in 1959 and 1960, respectively – turned to New Jersey when developing their court systems.

New Jersey was the first state in the nation to establish an administrative office of the courts, which works with our 15 vicinages to promote the effective and efficient operation of the courts and has been adopted by other states...

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## Inside this issue



### Entrance Hall Dedicated to Judge Lisa P. Thornton

An official portrait was dedicated to Assignment Judge Lisa P. Thornton in the Monmouth County Courthouse.

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### Spotlight: Richard J. Hughes Justice Complex

Planning for the Justice Complex began in 1977 and construction began the following year.

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### Essex Vicinage Hosts Domestic Violence Summit

Essex held its third annual Domestic Violence Summit on March 13 and March 14 at Rutgers Law School in Newark.

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# Justice James Coleman passes at 91

Justice Coleman's legacy and the path he paved for others who followed him are enormous, as are the obstacles he overcame growing up in a small rural community in segregated Virginia during the Depression.

Despite his upbringing in the Jim Crow-era south, New Jersey Supreme Court Associate Justice James H. Coleman Jr. never fostered a harsh attitude toward those with whom he came into contact throughout his storied legal career.

"He was never angry, never," said Meredith Kaplan Stoma, an attorney who clerked for Justice Coleman during the 1991-1992 term, when the justice sat in the Appellate Division. "He looked at his background as bringing him to where he was."

He achieved several major milestones in the state's courts, notably the first Black judge in Appellate Division and the first Black associate justice on the New Jersey Supreme Court. During his 39-year judicial career, Justice Coleman wrote more than 2,000 opinions, of which about 400 have been published.

*"Justice Coleman's life story – the self-described son of a 'southern dirt farmer' and grandson of a slave, who grew up in the racial segregation era of Jim Crow – will continue to serve as an inspiration for generations to come,"* Chief Justice Stuart Rabner said in a statement.

*"His legacy lives on through his work. Over the course of a remarkable 39-year career in the Judiciary, Justice Coleman authored more than 2,000 opinions. They included landmark decisions about the jury selection process and cross-racial identification evidence, which helped remove discrimination from our courtrooms,"* the chief justice said.

*"As Justice Coleman eloquently described in an essay after his retirement, he 'looked for the opportunity in every difficulty rather than the difficulty in every opportunity.' In doing so, he marked a path that has helped create a fairer system of justice,"* the chief justice said.

In his 2020 autobiography, *"A Plowboy's Judicial Coronation and the Intersection of Law and Religion,"* Justice Coleman wrote, "My judicial temperament was defined by humility, modesty, and incrementalism. I led by gentle persuasion while using people skills, common sense, and street smarts not found in books."

Camden Vicinage Family Division Judge Charles W. Dortch Jr., who was raised a generation later in a community 20 minutes from Justice Coleman's hometown, said the justice was universally respected and "overcame those trials and tribulations with tremendous strength, perseverance and dignity."

"He never let what others tried to do in terms of treating him differently keep him from progressing or did not cause him to have any hate in his heart," said Judge Dortch, who, like Justice Coleman, began his career on the bench as a workers compensation judge. "He had a powerful presence that was palpable. He gave me strength and he gave me pride. "I don't have one-tenth the strength that man had," Judge Dortch said.

Justice Coleman was born on the kitchen table of his grandmother's house in Lawrenceville, Va, on May 4, 1933. He graduated in 1952 from James S. Russell High School in Lawrenceville and was a 1956 cum laude graduate of Virginia State University.

He earned his law degree in 1959 from Howard University School of Law in Washington, D. C. and was admitted to the bar in New Jersey the following year. In 1963, he was admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court.



**James H. Coleman Jr.**  
Associate Justice  
New Jersey Supreme Court

He served in the U.S. Army Reserves and was discharged in February 1962.

Justice Coleman was in private practice in Union County from July 1960 until February 1970.

He joined the former New Jersey Department of Labor and Industry in July 1960 as an assistant to the commissioner. During his service with the department, he was an assistant to the director of the Division of Workers' Compensation; consultant to the New Jersey Rehabilitation Commission; counsel for and manager of the New Jersey Subsequent Injury Fund; and referee of formal hearings in the Division of Workers' Compensation.

In July 1964, he was appointed a judge of the New Jersey Workers' Compensation Court and served there until his appointment to the Union County Court in May 1973. He served in that capacity until December 1978, when he became a Superior Court judge in Union County.

"We were young together and old together. He was a good and gentle man," said retired Associate Justice Virginia Long, who sat with Justice Coleman in Union County, on the Appellate Division and on the Supreme Court. "We did not always agree, but we agreeably disagreed. His legacy resides in the opinions he wrote and, perhaps more importantly, in the aspirations of

generations of our fellow citizens who followed in his footsteps.”

Justice Coleman was elevated to the Appellate Division by Chief Justice Wilentz in March 1981. He was named a presiding judge of the Appellate Division in May 1987. He was nominated by Gov. Christine Todd Whitman on Oct. 3, 1994, and sworn in by Chief Justice Robert N. Wilentz on Dec. 16, 1994. Gov. Donald DiFrancesco nominated him to a tenured term in 2001.

Justice Coleman served on the Supreme Court until he retired on May 3, 2003. Retired Justice Stewart G. Pollock, who sat with Justice Coleman on the high court, called Justice Coleman “a respected colleague and good friend” with whom he played doubles tennis weekly.

*“We both wanted to be all that we could, whether as a justice, husband, or father,”* Justice Pollock said.

*“On both the tennis court and the Supreme Court, Jim was the essence of professionalism.”*

Justice Coleman authored numerous opinions that helped to break down the barriers of segregation.

In *State of New Jersey v. Gilmore*, he authored the Appellate Division opinion which struck down the indiscriminate exclusion of racial minorities from serving on juries. He also authored a Supreme Court decision which concluded that a special jury charge regarding the unreliability of cross-racial identification was required in cases that involved cross-racial eyewitness identification.

*“Justice Coleman was a trailblazing and distinguished jurist,”* said U.S. District Court Judge Michael A. Shipp, who clerked for Justice Coleman during the 1994 to 1995 term. *“He left an indelible mark on the many lives he touched, and we are all better because of him.”*

*“Personally, he provided me with the blueprint for my professional life,”* Judge Shipp said.

*“Throughout my career, I have sought to emulate his commitment to excellence; his meticulous eye for detail; and his sense of compassion and fairness. He was an intellectual giant, but never lost sight of the impact of his decisions on everyday people.”*

Justice Coleman’s influence on the work of the New Jersey Courts was not limited to the courtroom.

In the early 1980s, Chief Justice Robert N. Wilentz met with representatives of the Coalition of Minorities in the Judiciary, a group composed of Black and Hispanic employees from the Administrative Office of the Courts and the vicinages. Coalition members conveyed their concerns about the experiences of Black and Hispanic judicial employees, attorneys, and court users.

Chief Justice Wilentz convened an internal Ad Hoc Committee on Minority Concerns in June 1984 to examine the group’s concerns and appointed then-Judge Coleman chair.

The Coleman Committee’s report evolved into the Supreme Court Committee on Minority Concerns, now known as the Supreme Court Committee on Diversity, Inclusion and Community Engagement. The committee is tasked with overseeing the implementation of court-approved recommendations designed to “rid the court of all vestiges of bias and discrimination.”

To assist the standing committee in its ongoing work in this area, the court created advisory committees in each of the state’s 15 vicinages to work in collaboration with the standing Supreme Court committee, vicinage leaders, and other vicinage advisory committees. The committee publishes a biennial report in odd years.

*“Justice Coleman played a pivotal role in the inception of the New Jersey Judiciary’s Minority Concerns Program,”* said Appellate Division Judge Hany Mawla, the committee’s current chair.

*“Without his leadership and foresight in the early days of the program, the Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement Committee would not be what it is today.”*

Throughout the years, Justice Coleman was a leader, role model, and inspiration for so many of us. We are indebted to his tireless generosity and friendship. In his passing we take solace and draw inspiration from the life he lived,” Judge Mawla said.

Justice Coleman also served as the first chair of the New Jersey Supreme Court Historical Advisory Board, which Chief Justice Rabner formed in 2015 to preserve and promote the history of the court.

Justice Coleman’s portrait hangs outside of the New Jersey Supreme Courtroom at

the Richard J. Hughes Justice Complex in Trenton. The portrait was dedicated during a ceremony in 2016, 13 years after his retirement.

*“Justice Coleman left our entire Judiciary a legacy defined by his commitment to justice,”* said Appellate Division Judge Morris G. Smith, whose father served on the minority concerns committee. *“He served in every level of our Judiciary, and he understood what litigants, lawyers, and judges go through every day in our courts. He brought that perspective to his writing.”*

*“Justice Coleman stayed connected to the next generation of judges.”* Judge Smith said. *“He was always available...with a word of advice or a funny story from his days on the bench. I think I speak for many of us who followed in his footsteps when I say we owe him a debt we cannot repay.”*

After he retired from the court, Justice Coleman joined Porzio, Bromberg & Newman P.C. in Morristown in 2004, focusing on advising attorneys and clients on appellate strategy and mediating and arbitrating disputes.

*“Justice Coleman had tremendous integrity and intent in everything he did,”* Judge Dortch said.

*“He had no ulterior motive except to be the best jurist he could be and to deliberate fairly on cases and to treat everyone with respect.”*

Justice Coleman is survived by his wife, Sophia, two children and four grandchildren.

Services for Justice Coleman were held on Aug. 23 and Aug. 24.

*Justice Coleman  
had tremendous  
integrity and  
intent in  
everything  
he did.”*

*- Judge Charles W. Dortch Jr.*





**Alan B. Handler**  
Associate Justice  
New Jersey Supreme Court

# Justice Alan B. **Handler** passes at 92

New Jersey Supreme Court Associate Justice Alan B. Handler, 92, a jurist who sat on the state’s high court for more than 20 years and authored nearly 500 opinions covering virtually every area of the law, died on May 23, 2024.

Justice Handler served on the New Jersey Supreme Court from 1977 to 1999 under Chief Justices Richard J. Hughes and Robert N. Wilentz.

Justice Handler’s legacy is vast. He wrote several major opinions on financing for poor school districts, championed First Amendment rights, addressed workplace discrimination, and reshaped products liability law and toxic tort doctrine.

Sitting in the Appellate Division before he was appointed to the Supreme Court, Justice Handler in 1974 wrote the majority opinion giving females the right to play Little League baseball in New Jersey. The following year, in what is believed to be the first case in the nation to address the right of transsexual people to marry, divorce and claim spousal support, he wrote the opinion in *M.T. v. J.T.*

*“His scholarly opinions on the common law, education, free speech, search and seizure, ethics, the role of state constitutional law as an independent source for protecting individual rights, among other subjects, remain an important influence on the court’s jurisprudence and will continue to live on,”* said Chief Justice Stuart Rabner. *“Justice Handler was also a warm friend and source of wise counsel to many.”*

As remembered by his friend and fellow jurist, the now-deceased Daniel J. O’Hern, Justice O’Hern wrote, *“Every great court needs a cleanup hitter, someone strong, someone certain, someone upon whom others can safely rely to come through at crucial moments. That was Justice Handler’s role on the New Jersey Supreme Court.”*

Appointed to the Superior Court in 1968 by then-Governor Richard J. Hughes, Justice Handler was assigned to the Appellate Division in 1973. He resigned from the bench in 1976 to serve as counsel to Governor Brendan Byrne.

In March 1977, he joined then-Chief Justice Richard J. Hughes on the Supreme Court in March 1977, serving until he retired in September 1999.

*“Justice Handler’s intellect, personal integrity and dedication to the Judiciary as an institution are unmatched. His work is equal to that of the greatest of the jurists who have preceded him on the Court,”* former Chief Justice Deborah T. Poritz, who has served with Justice Handler since her own appointment in 1996, said when he announced his retirement from the court.

*“In addition to relying on Justice Handler’s outstanding analytical abilities, the members of the Court have repeatedly found that his delightful sense of humor has eased the stresses that are inherent in the deliberative process.”*

Anthony Bartell, a partner at McCarter & English, LLP in Newark who worked as a law clerk for Justice Handler after he graduated from Harvard Law in 1986, said the justice “displayed the same determination on the squash court as he did on the Supreme Court. “He almost always beat me soundly, despite our 30-year age difference.”

*“I will treasure always Justice Handler’s intelligence, work ethic empathy, curiosity, and wit. “I learned much from Justice Handler, and these lessons have stayed with me in the ensuing 37 years since we last worked together,”* Bartell said. *“The world is a poorer place without him.”*

*I will treasure always Justice Handler’s intelligence, work ethic empathy, curiosity, and wit.*

*The world is a poorer place without him.*

*- Anthony Bartell*

John Farmer, a former state attorney general and dean of Rutgers Law School in Newark who clerked for Justice Handler in the late 1980s, said Justice Handler's work and life were rooted in several bedrock principals, including individual dignity.

*"He recognized that the authority of the Court's rulings rested not on a popular mandate, like legislators or the governor, or on its ability to enforce its rulings by using executive power, but ultimately on its ability to persuade the other branches of government and the public that its reading of the law was correct,"* said Farmer, who is director of the Miller Center for Community Protection and Resilience (CPR), which is housed at and affiliated with Eagleton and Rutgers Law School.

*"For that reason, he stressed, especially in cases involving unsettled societal questions, the primary audience for the opinions you write are not the winners; they don't need to be persuaded. Opinions are properly addressed, he believed, to the losers, so that they can understand, and ultimately accept, the reasoning behind the decision against them,"* Farmer said.

Paula A. Franzese, a former law clerk who is now Peter W. Rodino Professor of Law at Seton Hall Law School, called the justice her most important teacher in the law.

*"He taught me that wisdom and compassion are indivisible, that each of us is more than our mistakes, and that the rigorous commitment to excellence, if it is to mean anything, must be practiced with mercy,"* Franzese said.

*"Justice Handler upheld the promise of a judiciary able to realize its role as the guarantor of rights, willing to forego the expedient for the just and the popular for the principled. Now, as a law professor, when I ask my students whether a given judicial opinion has the feel of rightness and justness, I am honoring the learned Justice's legacy. In that and countless other ways, Justice Handler has affected eternity."*

David Beckett, who clerked for the justice from 1987-1988, said Justice Handler taught him how to think and said he exuded the "demeanor of a justice."

*"He had a nice way of being personable and good to deal with, but at the same time he was reserved,"* said Beckett, who practices labor and employment law in Princeton. *"He gave a real good example of how to conduct yourself."*

*"He gave me a way to look at the law and legal problems in as broad a way as possible,"* said Beckett. *"It was a great way to start in the law."*

Justice Handler was born on July 20, 1931, in Newark. He attended Newark Academy and Princeton University where he was a member of Phi Beta Kappa. He graduated magna cum laude in 1953 and earned an additional degree at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs.

Justice Handler studied law at Harvard Law School, where he received his degree in 1956, the year in which he was admitted to the bar.

Justice Handler served as deputy attorney general from 1961 to 1964 and as first assistant attorney general from 1964 to 1968.

After leaving public service, Justice Handler joined the New Jersey law firm of Wilentz, Goldman and Spitzer, retiring in 2016.

In retirement, Justice Handler enjoyed spending time at his sheep farm in Hunterdon County with his family and wide assortment of animals. He also enjoyed reading in his library, building stone walls on his property, and becoming a sculptor, using members of his beloved breed of sheep, the Leicester Longwool, as models.

Justice Handler was predeceased by his wife Rose Handler. He is survived by three daughters, two brothers, two stepchildren and six nephews and nieces.

A memorial celebration of Justice Handler's life will be announced later.

*Justice  
Handler's  
intellect,  
personal  
integrity and  
dedication  
to the  
Judiciary  
as an  
institution are  
unmatched.  
His work is  
equal to that  
of the greatest  
of the jurists  
who have  
preceded him  
on the Court.*

*- Retired Chief Justice  
Deborah T. Poritz*



**Michael A. Andrew Jr.**

Tax Court Judge

# Tax Judge Court Michael **Andrew** passes at 88

Judge Michael A. Andrew Jr., one of the original members of the New Jersey Tax Court, died on June 5 after a brief illness. He was 88.

Judge Andrew, appointed to the newly formed Tax Court in 1979 by then-Gov. Brendan T. Byrne, was named presiding judge in 1995. The last of the original members of the Tax Court, Judge Andrew retired in 2000.

Judge Andrew started his legal career after serving in the U.S. Army. Born and raised in Trenton, he resided in the capital city for most of his life before retiring to Holland, Penn., He was appointed associate city attorney of Trenton from 1967 to 1970 before co-founding the law firm of Merlino & Andrew with the late former state Senate President Joseph P. Merlino.

Judge Andrew was graduated from Trenton Central High School in 1953 and earned his bachelor's degree from Temple University. He received his law degree from Temple University Beasley School of Law.

He was predeceased by his first wife, Dorothy, and his brother, Frank. He is survived by his wife, Johanna, and three sons Michael, Mark, and Matthew, as well as grandchildren Hailey, Tyler, Jacob, Jonah, and Ava.

The family held a private funeral service.



# Judge Lisa P. Thornton

## Entrance hall, portrait dedicated to late Monmouth assignment judge

By **MaryAnn Spoto**  
**Communications Manager**  
**Administrative Office of the Courts**

The New Jersey Judiciary and Monmouth County last spring memorialized the vicinage's late assignment judge, Lisa P. Thornton, with two permanent reminders of her enduring legacy to the law and the public.

A new grand entrance to the west wing of the Monmouth County Courthouse in Freehold was dedicated on March 13 to Lisa P. Thornton, and her official portrait was dedicated on Law Day, May 1.

The portrait hangs in the courtroom where she presided.

The dedication of the west wing entrance was attended by more than 400 of Judge Thornton's relatives, friends, and colleagues, who paid tribute to the state's first Black female assignment judge on what would have been her 60th birthday.

*"What a marvelous tribute to an extraordinary person to have the entry of the halls of justice with her name permanently emblazoned on it," Chief Justice Stuart Rabner said.*

*"Lisa cared deeply about the justice system, about the concept of justice, and about treating people fairly – all people, from all backgrounds, all of the time."*

The Monmouth County Board of Commissioners had already allocated funding for a major renovation of the west wing of the courthouse entranceway when Judge Thornton passed away suddenly on May 26, 2023.

In January, the county, in partnership with the Judiciary and the Monmouth Bar Association, announced the entrance would be dedicated to Judge Thornton, who led the vicinage since 2014.

Monmouth Assignment Judge Marc Lemieux said the hall serves as a memorial to Judge Thornton's reputation for fairness, compassion, and empathy while being a fierce proponent of justice.

*"She was truly a trailblazer. She left her mark on all who she encountered and certainly upon this courthouse," Judge Lemieux said.*

*"Judge Thornton was this courthouse. She breathed life into this courthouse every single day. And this memorial hall is a physical representation of her legacy," he said.*

To honor Judge Thornton, the Monmouth Bar Association on May 1 posthumously recognized Judge Thornton with the Abraham Zager Award for Professionalism, which was presented to Judge Thornton's family.

Judge Thornton was highly acclaimed for spearheading a statewide criminal justice initiative that addressed prevention, enforcement, and re-entry. After she was seated as a judge, Judge Thornton served in the civil, criminal and family divisions and was presiding judge of the family division when Chief Justice Rabner named her assignment judge in 2014, succeeding Judge Lawrence Lawson.

**Lisa P. Thornton**  
Assignment Judge  
Monmouth Vicinage





# A message from the administrative director

Continued from Page 1



**Judge Glenn A. Grant**  
Acting Administrative Director  
of the Courts

*The New Jersey Judiciary continues to be a national leader in jurisprudence.*

*With partners in various segments of society, we have reduced the number of youths who suffer the long-term effects of detention and increased the number of youths who benefit from restorative justice programs.*

For me, the background of this organization is like a multi-volume set of books that chronicles its past and present. The chapters have been written by the justices, judges and administrative leaders who came before us, and they are continually updated — and in some cases, rewritten — by the work of all of you.

The structure and layout of the latest volumes begin with the 1947 constitution, and the subsequent chapters of this compilation continue through to the present day. The overarching theme of our story, as Chief Justice Rabner has repeatedly reminded us, is “to do justice every day.”

This compendium comprising the chapters of our story, has many contributing writers, but the individuals with the greatest number of volumes and chapters are the chief justices and the members of the Supreme Court.

However, the ultimate success of this chronology relies on the contributions of many. It is made possible by the talented justices and judges throughout our organization.

Today, significant chapters are being written and revised by a new cadre of associate justices, Appellate Division judges, assignment judges, trial court judges, and Tax Court Judges, as well as recall judges who are all shaping the future of our legal system.

I salute each and every judicial member of our organization whose efforts ensure that the

major themes of the Judiciary’s history continue to be crafted and written with honor, integrity and vision. Your individual and collective commitment to advancing that seven-letter word called “justice” is truly remarkable.

The New Jersey Judiciary continues to be a national leader in jurisprudence. With partners in various segments of society, we have reduced the number of youths who suffer the long-term effects of detention and increased the number of youths who benefit from restorative justice programs. We created recovery courts to stop substance abuse and related criminal activity, and we developed an innovative program to monitor the well-being of our most vulnerable citizens.

Our history is being compiled by the New Jersey Supreme Court Historical Advisory Board, which maintains an online archive that includes biographies, photographs, speeches, and oral histories of those who have served on our high court. The board also maintains a historical display in the lobby of the Richard J. Hughes Justice Complex in Trenton. That display is changed periodically.

I would like to thank all our judges, managers, and staff for their continued dedication and service to the people of New Jersey. And thank you for taking the time to read the stories in this publication and learn about our Judiciary’s rich history.



# Pioneering Supreme Court justices

The following New Jersey Supreme Court chief justices and associate justices are recognized as pioneers by being the first of their gender or race to serve on the high court:



**James H. Coleman Jr.**  
Supreme Court Justice

## James H. Coleman Jr.

Justice James H. Coleman Jr. was the first African-American to serve on the Supreme Court. He was nominated by then-Gov. Christine Todd Whitman on Oct. 3, 1994 and was sworn in by Chief Justice Robert N. Wilentz on Dec. 16, 1994.

Justice Coleman began his judicial career as a New Jersey Workers' Compensation Court judge in 1964. He served in that capacity until May 1973, when he was appointed a judge of the Union County Court. Justice Coleman became a Superior Court judge in December 1978 and was promoted to the Appellate Division in March 1981. Justice Coleman was named a presiding Appellate Division judge in May 1987.

Justice Coleman was born in Lawrenceville, Va., on May 4, 1933. He was a cum laude graduate of Virginia State University and received his law degree from Howard University School of Law in Washington, D.C. He passed on Aug. 2, 2024 at the age of 91.

For more information about Justice Coleman's life and career, see Page 2.



**Deborah T. Poritz**  
Supreme Court Chief Justice

# Deborah T. Poritz

Deborah T. Poritz was the first woman and to date the only woman to serve as chief justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court. Nominated by then-Gov. Christine Todd Whitman, she was sworn in as chief justice on July 10, 1996 after serving as the state's first female attorney general.

The law was a second career for Chief Justice Poritz, who was a college English instructor at Ursinus College in Collegeville, Pa. After graduating from the University of Pennsylvania Law School, Chief Justice Poritz joined the New Jersey Attorney General's Office as a deputy attorney general in the environmental protection section of the Division of Law. She was later in charge of appeals and was chief of the banking, insurance and public securities section and was eventually promoted to head the Division of Law.

Chief Justice Poritz was appointed chief counsel to Gov. Thomas H. Kean in 1989. When Kean left office in 1990, Chief Justice Poritz became a partner in a Princeton law firm, where she worked until January 1994, when Whitman tapped her to serve as attorney general. She served as the state's chief law enforcement officer until she was elevated to the Supreme Court. Chief Justice Poritz retired from the Supreme Court in October 2006.

Chief Justice Poritz was born in New York on Oct 26, 1936. She earned her bachelor's degree magna cum laude from Brooklyn College in 1958, where she was Phi Beta Kappa, and was a Woodrow Wilson Fellow in English and American literature at Columbia University. She also was a graduate student and teaching assistant in English and American literature at Brandeis University.

# Roberto Rivera-Soto

Roberto Rivera-Soto was the first Hispanic-American appointed to the New Jersey Supreme Court. He was nominated by then-Gov. James E. McGreevey on April 20, 2004 and was sworn in on Sept. 1, 2004.

Prior to his appointment to the Supreme Court, Justice Rivera-Soto was a partner at Fox Rothschild. He previously served as senior vice president, general counsel and corporate secretary of Caesars World from 1994 to 1999 and as vice president, corporate counsel and secretary of Greate Bay Hotel & Casino in Atlantic City from 1983 to 1994.

From 1980 to 1983, Justice Rivera-Soto was a litigation associate at Fox Rothschild in its Philadelphia office. From 1978 to 1980, he served as an assistant U.S. attorney in the criminal division of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania and, during 1977, Justice Rivera-Soto interned in the Office of the District Attorney of Delaware County, Pennsylvania.

Justice Rivera-Soto was born in New York City and grew up in Puerto Rico. He graduated from Colegio Nuestra Senora Del Pilar, Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico in 1970. He is a 1974 honors graduate of Haverford College, where he was the José Padin Scholar of the Class of 1974. He received a doctor of law degree in 1977 from Cornell University School of Law, where he was a Charles K. Burdick Scholar, and a member of the Moot Court Board.

Justice Rivera-Soto retired from the Supreme Court in 2011.



**Roberto Rivera-Soto**  
Supreme Court Justice



**Marie L. Garibaldi**  
Supreme Court Justice

# Marie L. Garibaldi

Marie L. Garibaldi achieved several professional firsts in a storied legal career, including becoming the first female to serve as a justice on the New Jersey Supreme Court when then-Gov. Thomas H. Kean named her to the bench in September 1982. Chief Justice Robert N. Wilentz swore her in on Nov. 17, 1982.

Justice Garibaldi was president of the New Jersey State Bar Association (NJSBA) – the first woman to serve in that role – when Kean nominated her to the high court.

Justice Garibaldi was a prosecutor for the Internal Revenue Service in New York before she went to work at the law firm of Riker Danzig, Scherer and Hyland, where she became a partner in the mid-1970s, a time when it was not common for women to hold such positions.

She also sat as judge of Weehawkin’s municipal court from 1973 to 1975.

Justice Garibaldi served as president of the NJSBA from May 1982 to November 1982, when she joined the court. Her term resulted in the advancement of women in the association in leadership positions, establishment of the NJSBA’s Resource Center for Law Office Management, the Bar Foundation Mock Trial program and a special task force to investigate alternative dispute resolution, which is now a fundamental part of the settlement of legal disputes in New Jersey.

Justice Garibaldi authored more than 225 opinions during her nearly 18 years on the court and was devoted to developing and expanding programs to resolve cases outside of traditional litigation.

Justice Garibaldi was born in Jersey City on Nov. 26, 1934. She attended Stevens Academy in Hoboken and Connecticut College, from where she graduated in 1956. She graduated from Columbia University Law School in 1959 and received a master’s degree in tax law from New York University in 1963.

Because Justice Garibaldi, an only child, never married and had no children, she thought of her law clerks as her extended family. She lived for much of her life in Weehawkin, Hudson County and maintained her chambers in the William J. Brennan Courthouse in Jersey City.

Justice Garibaldi retired in February 2000. She died Jan. 15, 2016 at the age of 81.



# Assignment Judge Trailblazers

The assignment judge is designated by the chief justice to lead the court system in each vicinage. Working with the trial court administrator, the assignment judge is responsible for administering policies, rules and directives developed and approved by the chief justice, the Supreme Court and the administrative director of the court.



**Lawrence M. Lawson**  
Assignment Judge

## Lawrence M. Lawson

The Judiciary's first African-American assignment judge, Lawrence M. Lawson was appointed to the top judicial post in the Monmouth Vicinage by Chief Justice Robert N. Wilentz in April 1993.

Judge Lawson succeeded Assignment Judge Alvin Y. Milberg.

Judge Lawson was nominated to the Superior Court in 1987 by former Gov. Thomas H. Kean. His initial assignment was in the civil division. The chief justice named him presiding judge of the criminal division, where he served until returning to the civil division in 1990. He was reassigned to the criminal division in 1992.

Judge Lawson graduated from Neptune High School in 1965 and received his bachelor's degree from Bowie State College in Bowie, Md., in 1969. He received his law degree in 1972 from Catholic University in Washington, D. C.

He served as clerk to Judge Thomas L. Yaccarino in the Monmouth Vicinage. In 1974, Judge Lawson opened a law office in Asbury Park and continued in practice there until his nomination to the Superior Court.

In 1983, he was elected to the Neptune Township Committee and became mayor in 1984. He was re-appointed to that post in 1985 and continued to serve as a member of the Township Committee until his confirmation as a Superior Court judge. He also served as attorney for the Board of Adjustment in Neptune Township and as municipal prosecutor in Asbury Park.

Judge Lawson was succeeded by Lisa P. Thornton, the Judiciary's first African-American female assignment judge.

# Sybil R. Moses

Sybil R. Moses became the Judiciary's first female assignment judge when Chief Justice Deborah T. Poritz named her to head the Bergen Vicinage in March 1997.

Judge Moses succeeded Judge Peter Ciolino.

Judge Moses was appointed to the Superior Court bench in January 1987. She was one of two general equity judges in the vicinage. From January 1993 until September 1996, she was presiding judge of the criminal division in the county. She previously served in the criminal, civil and family divisions.



**Sybil R. Moses**  
Assignment Judge

From 1979 to 1987, she was a state administrative law judge. She was senior administrative law judge from 1986 to 1987. From 1974 to 1979, she was an assistant prosecutor in Bergen County, serving as acting chief of the trial section from 1978 to 1979.

Judge Moses was a 1961 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, where she received her master's degree in international relations in 1962 and was a Woodrow Wilson Fellow, and earned her law degree from Rutgers Law School-Newark in 1974.

Judge Moses died on Jan. 23, 2009 at the age of 69.



**Lisa P. Thornton**  
Assignment Judge

# Lisa P. Thornton

Chief Justice Stuart Rabner appointed Judge Lisa P. Thornton – the state's first African-American female assignment judge – to lead the Monmouth Vicinage in July 2014.

Judge Thornton succeeded Judge Lawrence M. Lawson, the Judiciary's first African-American assignment judge.

Judge Thornton was appointed to the bench in January 2008 by Gov. Jon S. Corzine. She served in the civil and criminal divisions as well as in the family division, where she was presiding judge.

Judge Thornton began her career at Prudential Financial in December 1986 and earned her law degree while employed there, rising to senior trial attorney. She simultaneously sat in Neptune Township Municipal Court from January 1999 until December 2001. She was named special deputy commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Banking and Insurance in April 2002 and in January 2006 left the department to become senior associate counsel in the Office of the Governor.

In September 2006, Judge Thornton joined the state Attorney General's Office as chief of staff. She served until her appointment to the bench in January 2008. Judge Thornton received her law degree from Rutgers School of Law-Newark in 1992 and her bachelor's degree from Rutgers University, Douglass College in 1986. She passed suddenly on May 26, 2023.

# Julio L. Mendez

Julio L. Mendez became the Judiciary's first Hispanic assignment judge when Chief Justice Stuart Rabner named him to lead the Atlantic/Cape May Vicinage in September 2011

Judge Mendez succeeded Judge Valerie H. Armstrong.

Judge Mendez was appointed by Gov. James E. McGreevey on July 19, 2002 and then reappointed with tenure by Gov. Jon Corzine in July 2009. His first assignment was in Cumberland County, in the criminal division for two years and then in the family division.

In September 2005, after he served for one year in the family division, then-Chief Justice Deborah T. Poritz appointed Judge Mendez to be presiding judge of the division for the Cumberland/Gloucester/Salem Vicinage.

Prior to his appointment to the bench, Judge Mendez was in private practice for 20 years. He then served as a staff attorney for the Cumberland County Board of Social Services, as Vineland city solicitor and as a trustee for Cumberland County College.

Judge Mendez is a graduate of Glassboro State College, now Rowan University, where he earned his bachelor's degree in 1978, and Rutgers School of Law – Camden, where he earned his law degree in 1981.



**Julio L. Mendez**  
Assignment Judge

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## Judge Messano **named ACJC chair**



**Carmen Messano**  
Retired Appellate Division  
Chief Judge

The Supreme Court has appointed retired Chief Appellate Division Judge Carmen Messano to chair the panel that investigates allegations of unethical conduct against judges, Chief Justice Stuart Rabner announced.

Judge Messano succeeds retired Justice Virginia A. Long as head of the Advisory Committee on Judicial Conduct (ACJC).

The ACJC holds public hearings on formal complaints against judges and can recommend discipline to the Supreme Court, including suspension or removal. The committee also can impose private discipline on its own, such as a reprimand or censure.

Judge Messano retired in May 2023 after more than 25 years on the bench, including 10 years as the chief judge of

the Appellate Division. He was appointed to a three-year term on the panel. Justice Long chaired the ACJC for the past 10 years. Her term on the committee expired Aug. 31. The Court also named retired Superior Court Assignment Judge Georgia M. Curio as vice-chair, succeeding retired Appellate Presiding Judge Stephen Skillman, whose term on the ACJC also ended.

Judge Curio was initially appointed to the ACJC in 2019. The committee also includes members of the New Jersey Bar and the general public.

The recent Supreme Court order also reappointed attorney Diana C. Manning and Paul J. Walker to new three-year terms.

ACJC terms can be as long as 12 years, broken into four three-year terms.





**Mary Catherine Cuff**

Served on Appellate Division and temporarily assigned to the Supreme Court

# Judge Cuff named chair of **Disciplinary Review Board**

By  
**MaryAnn Spoto**  
Communications Manager  
Administrative Office of the Courts

Retired Judge Mary Catherine Cuff, who served in leadership positions throughout the Judiciary during her career, is the new chair of the New Jersey Supreme Court's Disciplinary Review Board.

Judge Cuff's appointment, effective April 1, was announced by Chief Justice Stuart Rabner. She succeeds retired Judge Maurice J. Gallipoli, who began his service on the Disciplinary Review Board (DRB) in February 2012 and has retired from the board.

The DRB reviews attorney misconduct cases prosecuted by the Office of Attorney Ethics and, after a public hearing, decides whether to dismiss the case or recommend sanctions to the Supreme Court. If the DRB recommends disbarment, the Court will hold a hearing before deciding on final discipline.

*"We thank Judge Gallipoli for leading the DRB with distinction for many years – yet another facet of his remarkable career in public service,"* Chief Justice Rabner said.

*"We're also fortunate that Judge Cuff is well-suited to continue the tradition of excellence at the DRB. Throughout Judge Cuff's storied career with the Judiciary, she has been a model of scholarship, wisdom, and grace."*

First sworn onto the court in February 1988, Judge Cuff spent 28 years on the bench, including stints as a family division presiding judge in the Monmouth Vicinage, a presiding judge in the Appellate Division, and as a judge temporarily assigned to the state Supreme Court.

*"I am honored and humbled by the Court's invitation to accept this appointment,"* Judge Cuff said.

*"The DRB plays an important role in maintaining not only the ethical obligations undertaken by attorneys, but also the need to ensure the public that those in the legal profession will work to protect the best interests of their clients."*

Judge Cuff began her legal career as a law clerk for Judge Robert A. Matthews. She served as a deputy attorney general in the Office of the Attorney General from 1974 to 1978. She served as an assistant U.S. Attorney in the District of New Jersey from 1978 to 1986, concluding her service there as chief of the civil division.

Appointed to the bench by Gov. Thomas Kean in 1988, she was assigned to the Monmouth civil division for three years. She sat in the family division until 1994, when she was appointed to the Appellate Division. She was named an appellate presiding judge in September 2005 and was temporarily assigned to the Supreme Court from 2012 until her retirement from the bench in 2016.

Judge Cuff also chaired the Supreme Court Committee on Judicial Education for more than a decade and chaired the Advisory Committee on Public Access from 2009 to 2012. She is a graduate of Rutgers University Law School and Rosemont College.

The DRB consists of nine members appointed by the Supreme Court who serve without compensation. Three appointees are non-lawyer public members, one member is typically a retired judge, and the remaining five members are attorneys.

# Landmark cases

The New Jersey Supreme Court is recognized as one of the leading state courts in the nation. The issues that come before the Court cover a vast array of topics, from the education of children to procedures in criminal trials.

Often the circumstances of the cases are unique. The Court then must consider the unusual and often difficult problem presented and reach a decision that is fair and informed by existing law.

## **Winberry v. Salisbury (1950)**

This early decision concerned the question of whether the New Jersey Supreme Court, rather than the Legislature, had the power to govern the “practice and procedure” in the courts of the state. The Court held that the provision in the state constitution authorizing the Supreme Court to enact rules of practice and procedure should be interpreted to prohibit the Legislature from enacting laws that purported to govern practice and procedure in the courts. There is no similar provision in the U.S. Constitution.

## **Henningsen v. Bloomfield Motors, Inc. (1960)**

This decision held the manufacturer liable for a defective automobile driven by the plaintiff. The Court declared that both a manufacturer who put a new car into the stream of commerce, promoting its purchase by the public, and the dealer who sold it, would be deemed to accompany that car with an implied warranty that it was reasonably suitable for its intended use. The Court further declared that this warranty extended not only to the buyer, but to members of her family and others using the car with her consent. In effect, the New Jersey Supreme Court was informing manufacturers across America that they could no longer rely upon tightly worded expressed warranties as a shield against consumer claims.

## **Southern Burlington County NAACP v. Township of Mount Laurel**

(Mount Laurel I) (1970) An action was brought against Mount Laurel on the grounds that the township’s land use regulations unlawfully excluded low and moderate-income families. The Court held *“as a developing municipality, Mount Laurel must, by its land use regulations, make realistically possible the opportunity for an appropriate variety and choice of housing for all categories of people who desire to live there, of course including those of low and moderate income.”* This opinion became known as Mount Laurel I.

## **Southern Burlington County NAACP v. Township of Mount Laurel Mount Laurel II) (1983)**

Because Mount Laurel failed to implement the provisions of Mount Laurel I, the Court revisited the case in 1983. The decision in what is now known as Mount Laurel II set forth specific requirements that every town in New Jersey must provide its “fair share” of the regional need for low- and moderate-income housing.

The decision in Mount Laurel II set forth the critical yet previously unstated principle that all people, including those society deems “poor,” have a right to live anywhere and that municipalities cannot manipulate zoning regulations to preclude people from living in an area solely because of economic status.

## **Robinson v. Cahill (1976)**

The Court held that the Public School Education Act of 1975 was facially constitutional and that it complied with the requirement that local school districts be afforded a means of overcoming budget shortfalls. The Court held that the court order that the state and the governor disburse funds to ensure that all children would receive equal educational opportunities was not a violation of the separation of powers because the Court must correct the violation of the plaintiff’s fundamental right to receive an equal educational opportunity.

## **Abbott v. Burke (1985)**

This case involved a constitutional challenge to the Public School Education Act of 1975. The plaintiffs challenged the plan for funding New Jersey’s constitutional mandate of a through and efficient education through local property taxes. The Court decided that the matter should be handled first at the administrative level and transferred it to the state Commissioner of Education.

## **In Re: Karen Ann Quinlan (1976)**

In this case, the Court held that the right to privacy under both the U.S. and New Jersey Constitutions bestowed upon an individual, or guardians acting on the individual’s behalf, a protectable interest against intrusion by the state and established a patient’s right to refuse life-sustaining medical treatments.

### **In the Matter of Baby M. (1988)**

In this case, the Court denied a former husband's claimed entitlement to frozen embryos without his ex-wife's consent, held that no contract can alter the parental rights of a woman who bears a child as that child's mother, and thus restored the parental rights of the woman who acted as a traditional surrogate for an infertile couple. This holding was extended in New Jersey to gestational surrogates in which the mother carries the baby to birth but is not genetically related to the baby.

### **Doe v. Poritz (1995)**

The Court ruled that bills related to Megan's Law, including community notification of the presence of a sex offender living in a neighborhood, are constitutional. The Court held, that a prosecutor's decision to provide community notification, including the manner of notification, is subject to judicial review before such notification is given, and that such review is constitutionally required.

### **Lewis v. Harris (2006)**

The Court held that the state's marriage laws violated the rights of same sex couples to equal protection under the law. In response, the Legislature created same sex unions.

### **State v. Henderson (2011)**

The Court confronted the problem of false identifications in situations in which a witness might honestly identify a person as the culprit but be mistaken. Drawing upon an extensive record of scientific studies and reports, the Court laid down a new framework to assess the reliability of eyewitness identification testimony in New Jersey courts.

### **State v. Andujar (2021)**

The Court upheld an Appellate Division opinion overturning a 2017 first-degree murder conviction after finding that the prosecution might have relied on implicit or unconscious bias when it sought to dismiss a prospective juror who is Black. The Court ordered a new trial for the defendant and asked the administrative director of the courts to arrange for a judicial conference to explore the nature of discrimination in the jury selection process.



**More information about these and other landmark decisions rendered by the Court can be found at <https://www.njcourts.gov/virtualmuseum>**



# The Appellate Division

**The Appellate Division of the Superior Court is the state's intermediate appellate court. It hears appeals and interlocutory motions from the Superior Court, the Tax Court and from state administrative agencies.**

The Appellate Division decides approximately 6,500 appeals and 10,000 motions each year. The chief justice selects Appellate Division judges from among the state's Superior and Tax Court judges.

When the modern court began under the current New Jersey Constitution in 1948, there were six appellate judges, two parts with three judges each. The first Appellate Division judges were Nathan L. Jacobs – who served as an associate justice on the New Jersey Supreme Court from March 1952 until February 1975 - Howard Eastwood, John G. Bigelow, John B. McGeehan, Ralph W.E. Domges and Frederic R. Colie.

Two of the most prolific Appellate Division judges in the court's history were Sylvia B. Pressler and Michael Patrick King.

Judge Pressler was the first woman to serve as presiding judge of administration for the Appellate Division. Judge Pressler authored more than 3,500 opinions during her 31 years on the bench. Among Judge Pressler's lasting contributions to the law was her annotation of the book *Rules Governing the Courts of the State of New Jersey*, which she had done since 1969. The book is the bible of court practice for every legal professional in the state.

*Judge Pressler died on Feb. 15, 2010. She was 75.*

Judge King authored more than 3,000 opinions for the Appellate Division, about 450 of which were published opinions. He was the first judge who was not a presiding

judge for administration honored with the dedication of a volume of the Superior Court Reports. He was so highly regarded among his fellow jurists that the Supreme Court twice tapped him as a special master to oversee two major cases.

*Judge King died on Nov. 25, 2017 at the age of 82.*

Other notable Appellate Division judges include Sidney Goldmann, who was the first presiding judge for administration; Milton Conford, who was temporarily assigned to the New Jersey Supreme Court for several years; Herman Michels and Robert Matthews.

Judge Goldmann was recognized as one of the nation's most brilliant legal minds. He was closely involved in the writing of the 1947 New Jersey Constitution and served as the official librarian and archivist of the constitutional convention held at Rutgers University in New Brunswick in the summer of 1947.

Judge Goldmann became a Superior Court judge in 1951 and was elevated to the Appellate Division the following year. He became a presiding judge in 1954 and was named presiding judge for administration in 1969.

*Judge Goldmann retired in 1971 and died on Aug. 6, 1983 at the age of 79.*

Judge Conford sat on the Appellate Division for 35 years and was presiding judge for more than eight years before he retired in 1979. Judge Conford temporarily sat on the New Jersey Supreme Court between 1972 and 1977 that the six justices called him their "permanent temporary associate."

Judge Conford died on March 20, 1989 at the age of 80. At the time of his death, Chief Justice Robert N. Wilentz said, *“Judge Conford was a legal scholar of unsurpassed reputation and towering ability. The force of his own example, an example of uncompromising independence, unceasing work, and unbending loyalty to the judiciary as an institution, helped shape the traditions of the great court that he led.”*

Judge Michels was appointed to the Superior Court on Feb. 1, 1972 and sat in the Essex Vicinage before he was assigned to the Appellate Division on April 11, 1974. He was appointed as presiding judge of the Appellate Division on Sept. 8, 1980, and then as presiding judge for administration of the Appellate Division on April 3, 1985.

During his time on the bench, Judge Michels wrote more than 3,000 appellate division opinions, including 400 which were published.

*Judge Michels retired in September 1997 and died on Dec. 31, 2010 at the age of 83.*

Judge Matthews was a judge for more than 25 years. He was appointed to the Essex County Court in 1960, and three years later became a Superior Court judge, serving in the chancery division in the Bergen, Hudson and Passaic vicinages.

Chief Justice Joseph Weintraub elevated Judge Matthews to the Appellate Division in 1969 and was named presiding judge for administration 10 years later.

*Judge Matthews retired in August 1985. He died on Dec. 22, 1993 at the age of 73.*

Today, there are 33 appellate judges assigned to the Appellate Division’s eight parts. Each part includes four judges, the most senior of whom serves as the presiding judge who oversees case flow.

Each case is decided by a two or three-judge panel. The panels issue their decisions in the form of written opinions that are either “published,” meaning they set precedent and can be used as case law in future court cases, or “unpublished,” meaning they have applicability to the parties in that appeal.

The chambers of the Appellate Division judges are located in Linwood, Jersey City, Morristown, New Brunswick, Newark, Trenton, West Long Branch, and Westmont. Arguments are heard in courtrooms in Morristown, New Brunswick, Newark, and Trenton.

The presiding judge for administration of the Appellate Division works closely with the Appellate Division Clerk’s Office to manage the work of the division. The Appellate Division Central Offices are located in Trenton under the direction of the clerk of the court.

Other Appellate Division administrators include the deputy clerk for case processing, the deputy clerk for administrative services, and the director of Central Appellate Research.



# Court innovation

The New Jersey Judiciary has long been recognized as a national leader in many areas of judicial administration and programs.

This reputation was established not long after the modern Judiciary was established by the 1947 New Jersey Constitution. Other states took notice of the simple yet effective structure of New Jersey's courts, so much so that the two newest states in the union, Alaska and Hawaii, fashioned their court systems after New Jersey's.

Other states formed their own Administrative Office of the Courts, just as New Jersey did in 1948.

What follows are examples of programs and achievements that have placed New Jersey at the forefront of judicial achievement and therapeutic justice.

## Criminal Justice Reform

Criminal justice reform represents a fundamental change in how defendants and their cases are processed in the New Jersey courts. On Jan. 1, 2017, the state moved from a system that relied principally on setting monetary bail as a condition of release to a risk-based system that is more objective, promotes public safety and is fairer to defendants because it is unrelated to their ability to pay monetary bail. The new law also sets deadlines for the timely filing of an indictment and the disposition of criminal charges for incarcerated defendants.

## Drug Court

The drug court program is a highly specialized team process within the existing Superior Court structure that relies on a collaborative relationship between criminal justice and drug treatment professionals to assist non-violent drug offenders in rehabilitation. Drug court programs are rigorous, requiring completion of four phases during five years of intensive drug and alcohol treatment and testing. The program supports the recovery process but also allows supervisors to react swiftly to impose appropriate therapeutic sanctions or to reinstate criminal proceedings when participants do not comply with the program.

Drug courts began in New Jersey in 1996 when the Camden and Essex vicinages started accepting

participants. By 1999, additional programs were established in the Mercer, Passaic and Union vicinages. A 2001 law established a process to implement drug courts statewide. In April 2002, five new drug court programs in the Bergen, Cumberland/Gloucester/Salem, Monmouth, Morris/Sussex and Ocean vicinages became operational. Drug courts in the remaining five vicinages, Atlantic/Cape May, Burlington, Hudson, Middlesex and Somerset/Hunterdon/Warren, became operational on Sept. 1, 2004.

In 2012, a law to expand the existing voluntary drug court to compel additional drug offenders into the program with the promise of intervening in the lives of an additional population of offenders, those who are initially resistant to addressing their substance abuse problem through the voluntary drug court admission process, was adopted.

## Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI)

New Jersey is considered the national model for reducing the number of youth placed in detention through the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). In 2004, the Annie E. Casey Foundation selected New Jersey to be among the first states to implement JDAI in response to reversing a national trend of detaining youth offenders, which resulted in overcrowding of youth detention centers. JDAI has reduced the inappropriate use of secure juvenile detention while maintaining public safety and court appearance rates. Significant cost-savings also have been realized. The excess space created by population reductions has allowed several counties to close their detention centers and house their youth in other counties' facilities.

## Guardianship Monitoring Program

The Guardianship Monitoring Program (GMP) is a comprehensive statewide volunteer-based court program established to monitor guardians in their handling of the affairs of incapacitated individuals. Monitoring and oversight of guardianships help identify, address, prevent, and deter activities that are harmful to incapacitated individuals. Trained GMP volunteers use the Guardianship Monitoring System (GMS), a computer application comprised of a statewide



guardianship database and a report review tool, to track and follow up on guardianship files. The volunteers' work ensures that guardians comply with statutory and court-ordered requirements to file documents and reports and manage the affairs of incapacitated individuals effectively.

### **Supreme Court Committee on Minority Concerns**

Now known as the Supreme Court Committee on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, the committee is tasked with overseeing the implementation of court-approved recommendations designed to “rid the court of all vestiges of bias and discrimination.” To assist the standing committee in its ongoing work in this area, the court created advisory committees in each of the state’s 15 vicinages to work in collaboration with the standing Supreme Court committee, vicinage leaders, and other vicinage advisory committees. The committee publishes a biennial report in odd years.

The membership of the committee reflects a broad cross-section of the bench, bar and public. Members are appointed by the chief justice and serve two-year terms. The committee consists of Superior and Municipal Court judges, attorneys, representatives from public and private sector agencies, organizations and companies and citizens.

Four subcommittees are responsible for judicial, administrative/management, staff and public education and community outreach.

New Jersey is a charter member of the National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts.

### **Ombudsman Program**

The New Jersey Courts have a long history of providing quality service to maintain the public’s trust and confidence. The Ombudsman Program was designed to enhance those services. The program has expanded as the need for such services, particularly because the number of self-represented litigants has increased dramatically.

The ombudsman is a court employee who is bound by the same rules and code of conduct as other court employees. The ombudsman cannot advocate for court users, nor provide legal advice. However, the ombudsman can provide procedural assistance.

With the support of the Supreme Court Committee on Minority Concerns, the Camden Vicinage began a pilot ombudsman program in 1997, followed by Essex

Vicinage in 1998. By 2005, each vicinage had an ombudsman available to assist court users and provide vital procedural guidance. In addition to assisting court users with procedural issues, ombudsmen also conduct trainings and presentations to staff, managers, volunteers and law clerks and conduct court tours, seminars and workshops for the public. They also participate in career and community law fairs, mentoring programs, school programs and other community events such as Law Day celebrations.

### **Intensive Supervision Program (ISP)**

A “prison without walls,” the New Jersey Judiciary’s Intensive Supervision Program (ISP) was created in 1983 to permit carefully selected state prison inmates to serve the remainder of their sentences in the community. The rigorous screening process through which defendants who apply for ISP must undergo include input from judges, prosecutors, police, victims and probation and parole officers. Once released from prison, defendants must maintain contact with their ISP officers, undergo urine monitoring of at least twice a week, attend substance abuse counseling sessions and abide by a curfew. ISP also mandates full-time employment, community service, maintenance of a budget and diary and payment of all court-ordered financial obligations, including child support.

### **Therapeutic Jurisprudence**

The New Jersey Judiciary’s Opportunities for Building Success Program (JOBS) connects private companies and non-profit organizations with successful drug court and probation clients who want to rebuild their lives and want to work. The Judiciary’s probation division oversees the day-to-day operations of the program, serves as a continuing point of contact for employers, and works to determine which clients are deemed appropriate for the program.

When opportunities arise, probation staff provides employers resumés to consider and links clients and potential employers to begin the application process. Probation staff consult with employers during and after the selection process.

The New Jersey Department of Workforce Development has partnered with the JOBS program and provides an array of services for probation clients, including job readiness training and access to transportation, necessary work equipment, and clothing.

# Development of the trial divisions

The New Jersey Courts were reorganized when voters approved a new state constitution on Nov. 2, 1947.

The New Jersey Courts were reorganized when voters approved a new state constitution on Nov. 2, 1947. The new court system officially went into effect on Sept. 15, 1948, when the New Jersey Supreme Court under its current structure met for the first time.

The Supreme Court replaced the old Court of Errors and Appeals, which served as the state's court of last resort since passage of the New Jersey Constitution of 1844.

The 1947 constitution left the establishment, alteration or abolishment of the inferior courts to the Legislature.

The old Court of Chancery, the old Supreme Court and the Circuit Court were abolished and superseded by a Superior Court of appellate, chancery and law divisions. These courts officially came into existence on Sept. 15, 1948. The chancery division includes the general equity, probate and family parts. The law division includes the criminal, civil and special civil parts.

**The Tax Court was established on July 1, 1979 as a court of limited jurisdiction. Tax Court judges hear appeals of tax decisions made by county Boards of Taxation. They also hear appeals on decisions made by the director of the New Jersey Division of Taxation on such matters as state income, sales and business taxes, and homestead rebates.**

The current state constitution also included provisions for county courts to supersede the Courts of Common Pleas and Oyer and Terminer and allowed the continuation of the juvenile and domestic relations courts and the district courts, the latter in criminal matters. The Legislature also provided for the reorganization of district courts in civil matters.

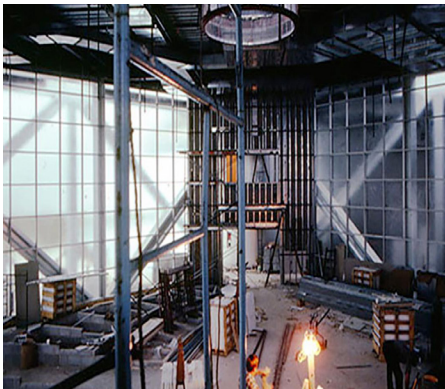
The county courts and juvenile and domestic relations courts were merged into the Superior Court in 1978 and 1983, respectively. The district courts became municipal courts.

In 1994, voters approved a measure that shifted funding for the courts, except for the municipal courts, to the state. Municipal courts are funded through the municipalities.

The old Court of Pardons was abolished by the 1947 constitution, which provided that the governor be given the power to grant pardons and that a parole board be established under the then-state Department of Institutions and Agencies. The Parole Board today operates as a separate entity and is not a part of the New Jersey Courts.

# Spotlight: Richard J Hughes Justice Complex

By **Mike Mathis**  
Judiciary Times Editor



The New Jersey Supreme Court sits in the Richard J. Hughes Justice Complex in Trenton. The eight-story, steel and aluminum structure was completed and opened by then-Gov. Brendan T. Byrne in January 1982.

The 1.2 million-square-foot complex also houses the Administrative Office of the Courts, the Department of Law and Public Safety and the Public Defender.

The building is named for the only person in New Jersey history to serve as governor and chief justice. Hughes, who died in December 1992 at the age of 83, was governor of New Jersey from 1962 to 1970 and served as chief justice from 1973 to 1979.

From 1929 until 1982, the Supreme Court sat a short distance away in the Statehouse Annex, where standing lawyers looked down on seated justices in a space known for its poor lighting and acoustics. The old courtroom is now a meeting room for legislative committees.

Planning for the justice complex began in 1977 and construction began the following year.

The main portion of the building forms a “V” around a center cube that holds the Supreme Court courtroom, two additional courtrooms and office/conference space. Indoor bridges connect the offices on the fourth, fifth, seventh and eighth floors. The main entrance to the building leads into the lobby/atrium, which is open through 10 stories to a skylight on the roof.

Arguments in the new Supreme Court courtroom were first held on March 21, 1983. The courtroom was formally dedicated on April 15, 1983 during a ceremony attended by about 90 federal and state court judges and officials, executive branch officials, members of the Legislature, and representatives of the bar, contractors, and state employee unions.

U.S. Supreme Court Justice William J. Brennan Jr., a former New Jersey trial court judge who also sat on the New Jersey Supreme Court from 1952 until 1956,

then-New Jersey Chief Justice Robert N. Wilentz, and then-Gov. Thomas H. Kean spoke. Brennan and Hughes were seated at the bench with members of the Supreme Court.

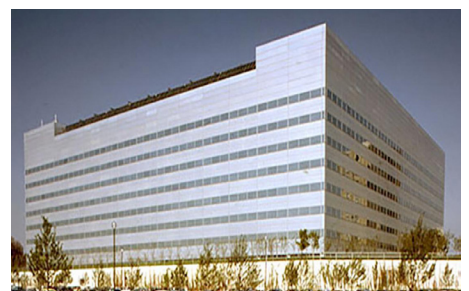
The 10,800-square-foot Supreme Court courtroom features a 21-foot tall ceiling, sloping to 18 feet in the center, a 22.5-foot high skylight, polished walls fashioned from Vermont marble and etched glass created by glass artist Benoit Gilsoul.

The bench, counsel’s tables and podium were crafted from African mahogany veneer. There are two sets of bookcases, each seven feet tall, on either side behind the bench, and there are 80 upholstered theater-style chairs in curved rows on either side of the main entrance.

Among the best known cases considered by the New Jersey Supreme Court since it has sat in the justice complex include the Baby M case, in which it ruled that surrogate motherhood was illegal, and the case of Karen Ann Quinlan, in which the court determined that relatives can decide to stop treatment for terminally-ill, comatose patients.

Perhaps some of the most interesting characteristics of the justice complex are its artwork, specifically the life-size bronze sculptures by New Jersey native J. Seward Johnson, a scion of the Johnson & Johnson pharmaceutical conglomerate.

Three works by sculptor Beverly Pepper, “Mute Metaphor,” “Symbiotic Marker,” and “Primary Presence,” are located in the lobby of the justice complex, and a bust of Brennan is displayed in the glass breezeway between the Supreme Court courtroom and lobby on the eighth floor. The bust, which was sculpted by Jon Robert Bailey, was dedicated on Jan. 30, 2001.





# Essex Recovery Court: Focusing on wellness

By **Thomas Viola**  
Assistant Criminal Division Manager  
Essex Vicinage

The Essex Vicinage Recovery Court team has focused this past court year on improving on wellness in recovery for all participants.



**The Essex Vicinage Recovery Court team**

The recovery court began a partnership with the Essex County Schools of Technology to bring trade classes to participants. It also marked the beginning of endeavors such as a boutique stocked with clothing that clients can wear to job interviews, a holiday coat drive, and a back-to-school event.

In addition to graduations, the recovery court held its 11th annual recovery walk, a treatment summit to which ambulatory recovery-court approved service providers were invited, a clothing drive held with the Essex County Bar Association to stock the ‘Essex Boutique,’ an event that enabled the children of recovery court clients to receive school supplies, and a holiday coat drive that provided outerwear for 78 children of recovery court clients.

The court year marked the first that the program worked with the Essex County Schools of Technology to provide clients the ability to participate in trade classes for auto mechanics, carpentry, and welding during the fall and spring semesters. Classes for GED, OSHA 10, and ServSafe were available.

Recovery Court Judge Thomas Callahan often says, “all gas, no brake” when describing the drive of some clients’ to succeed in recovery court and maintain their sobriety.

He put those words into practice with a non-stop drive to expand services for clients, especially those related to job readiness.

The goals for the next court year include securing same-day IDs for clients through the Essex County Division of Community Health Services, expanding partnerships with Blessed Ministries and NJ Reentry Corporation to improve employability for clients and on-site, in-court resume/interviewing training for clients.



**Essex Vicinage Judge Thomas A. Callahan Jr. addresses the audience during the wellness lectures.**



**The recovery court boutique is located in the probation building.**



# Essex Vicinage hosts domestic violence summit



Trial Court Administrator Edward Wingren, then-Presiding Family Division Judge David Katz, Family Division Manager Kesha Manning and Assistant Division Manager Jody Polidoro. Judge Katz is now the assignment judge in the Hudson Vicinage.

The Essex Vicinage Family Division held its third annual Domestic Violence Summit on March 13 and March 14 at Rutgers Law School in Newark.

Assignment Judge Sheila Venable and Family Division Presiding Judge David B. Katz gave the opening remarks. About 130 people attended the summit, including Superior and Municipal Court judges, Superior Court staff, members of the Essex County Domestic Violence Working Group, law enforcement and community partners. The summit focused on procedural justice and fairness, its impact on domestic violence cases, and high-risk and lethality factors. Strategies to deal with custody and visitation in cases with children exposed to domestic violence also were explored.

The summit was a joint effort that involved the Superior Court, the Essex County Family Justice Center and the Office on Violence Against Women, and the Center for Justice Innovation.



Judge Katz, Tikesha Monique James of Voices, a committee of survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, and Assignment Judge Sheila A. Venable.

# Addressing mental health in Morris County

By **Cory DiBiase**  
Probation Division Manager  
Morris/Sussex Vicinage

Morris County was one of the pilot counties selected for the Mental Health Diversion Pilot Program in 2022.

A total of 12 participants have been admitted, with nine clients participating.

As early in the criminal justice process as possible, potential candidates for the program are identified by members of the pretrial services unit, defense counsel, and the Morris County Prosecutor's Office.

Once identified, clients are counseled by their attorneys about the program, apply, and sign the required releases. Clients then undergo a complete mental health evaluation, free of charge, by the Mental Health Association (MHA), which provides the prosecutor's office with the client's diagnosis and treatment recommendations.

## **The prosecutor's office then determines if the client is eligible for the program.**

Once admitted, the "wellness docket" team, consisting of members from the prosecutor and public defender's offices, MHA, a mental health probation officer, and a representative from the Community Connections Program assesses the client's needs areas including mental and physical health, substance abuse, housing, food insufficiency, Medicaid, education, and job training.

Once the client's needs are identified, the client is connected through virtual intake to necessary services and engage in clinical and medication monitoring with case management, treatment, and peer specialist services from MHA as needed.

## **Supervision is handled by a probation officer specially trained in mental health.**

The wellness docket team meets weekly to discuss client progress and the eligibility of new applicants. Clients appear in court monthly to see the judge who presides over the wellness docket. These court reviews highlight significant accomplishments, address setbacks, identify warning signs of relapse, and provide recommended changes to the treatment plan.

Two clients completed their treatment requirements earlier than expected on Jan. 9, 2024, becoming the program's first graduates.

During their final reporting on the wellness docket, the charges against them were dismissed and the graduates, family members and the team members spoke about their positive experiences in the program.

## **The graduates were eager to give back by working with future participants in a peer mentoring role.**

This dedication to the program speaks to the transformative power of linking mental health needs with the right resources in a positive environment. The wellness docket has proven successful in its first year and is dependent on creating an environment of trust and care, integrating behavioral health with other services and the court, to assist clients.



# A former probation client says thank you

By **Samantha Nunez**  
Communications Intern

*I'm a success story and I'm still clean today.*

*Now I have such a strong awareness of who I am, what I am and what my purpose in life is.*

- *Denise Tilson*

**On Oct. 14, 2024,  
Tilson will celebrate  
30 years of sobriety.**

A former probation client credits a now-retired probation officer in Bergen Vicinage with helping her turn her life around.

Denise Tilson contacted the vicinage in hopes of sending a message to former Probation Officer Renee Caggia to thank her for all she did during the first year of Tilson's probation term.

*"I don't know how many clients probation officers have, but I would imagine if I was a probation officer, I would wonder how people are doing if they ended up being successful,"* Tilson said.

*"If not, I just would want her to know that I'm a success story and I'm still clean today."*

Caggia served as Tilson's probation officer from 1993 to 1995.

Tilson was placed on Pretrial Intervention (PTI) for six months but ended up back at court and placed on probation for two years.

*"I thought to myself, if I can't stop for six months, how am I going to start for two years...for the first year I wasn't even clean,"* Tilson said.

During her first year on probation, Tilson saw herself as an "angry" woman, but through finding God, the help of her parents and the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, she was able to do it.

*"Now I have such a strong awareness of who I am, what I am, and what my purpose in life is,"* Tilson said.

Now living outside of Sarasota, Florida, Tilson lives a quiet and peaceful life spending her time with friends and traveling.

On Oct. 14, 2024, Tilson will celebrate 30 years of sobriety.

*"The credit here belongs to Denise Tilson, and her success is something I (and likely every probation officer) want for all individuals under supervision,"* Caggia said in an email.

*"I am extremely proud of Denise Tilson. It was wonderful to hear how well she is doing after 30 years!"*

Her gratitude and the lengths she went to, to express it after so much time has passed, are extraordinary. I imagine each and every probation officer would be thrilled to hear this from a former client. Truly, I could not be happier to hear of Denise Tilson's success in maintaining sobriety. Her dedication to recovery is evident, as she extends herself to sponsor others on their own journeys. During the time Ms. Tilson was on my caseload, I firmly believed in her, and tried to convey that belief and support in our interactions. I wish her the very best in her future!," Caggia said.

Tilson, who has been an AA sponsor for 13 years, is dedicated to helping those who are where she once was.

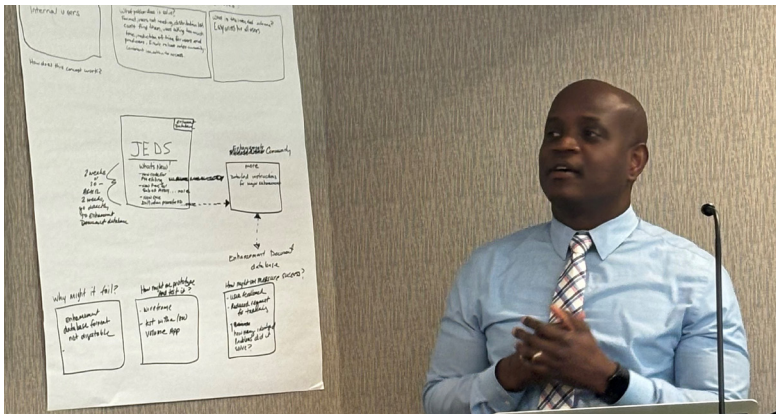
And though life isn't always easy, Tilson leans on attending AA meetings and praying to God for support.

*"At the end of the day, I thank Him because I don't do this by myself,"* Tilson said.

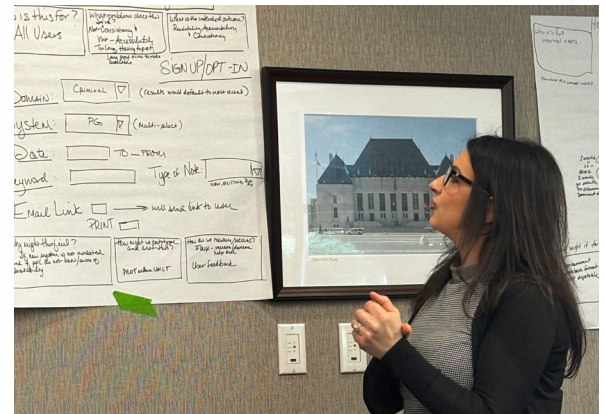
*"I don't have the power to do this by myself and I stay in contact with other people that are just like me. I want this new life." Ibus erspita spelecu ptatquidem. Elendipsus recepu*

# “Design thinking” to solve tech issues

By Kim Madera  
Assistant Director  
Automated Trial Court Services Unit



Rod Samuel puts design thinking into practice.



Danielle Reso describes a possible solution.

The management team in the Automated Trial Court Services Unit spent much of April 16 at the New Jersey Law Center in New Brunswick for a day of “design thinking.”

Design thinking is defined as “a non-linear, iterative process that teams use to understand users, challenge assumptions, redefine problems, and create innovative solutions to prototype and test.

The facilitator, who was outside the team, was told in advance of the problem the group was trying to solve and planned exercises to take the team through the design thinking process.

On the day of the event, the managers were briefed on the problem, a recognizable one that everyone was experiencing, and split into groups to work through the various steps and stages.

A series of questions were posed to the group, and responses to those questions were added to Post-it notes.

The responses and notes were then attached to the questions hung around the room as the facilitator read them aloud. The process was repeated until the scope and cause of the problem and people affected and possible solutions identified.

After the session, the facilitator compiled the information and identified a result that will be shared with the team and implemented.

While the purpose of the design thinking session was to walk away with a solution to an issue, it also resulted in a better understanding of team dynamics, shared creativity, and team building.



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