

CHIEF JUDGE KAYE: A CREATIVE REFORMER

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Several years ago I attended a meeting at the Red Hook Community Justice Center, a multijurisdictional community court designed to provide a range of services to Brooklyn's Red Hook community. Established in 2000, largely through the efforts of Chief Judge Judith Kaye, this Community Justice Center exemplifies the type of creative administrative pragmatism Chief Judge Kaye has brought to the New York judicial system.

Even a brief description of Red Hook reveals just how innovative it is: Recognizing that the traditional structures of our court systems often ignore the complex realities of peoples' lives, it brings low-level criminal cases, family court cases, and civil court cases all under one roof, so that one judge hears all of the cases in which a particular individual is involved. In that way the judge can get a real sense of the person standing before him and can provide an efficient, coordinated response to the various problems she may face.

The Community Justice Center serves not only those who are directly involved in the legal system but also the larger community. There is a Public Safety Corps that literally cleans up the neighborhood; a youth court program that helps teens develop a stake in their own schools and communities; a community advisory board, whose members set priorities for their own communities; community-impact panels that facilitate communication between minor criminal offenders and their neighbors; the list goes on and on.

The Red Hook Community Justice Center is just one example of the many reforms Chief Judge Kaye has brought to the New York judicial system, making the New York courts more responsive to the needs of New Yorkers. As an initial matter, she has worked tirelessly to identify the problems in the New York judicial system and to think creatively about how best to solve them. During her tenure as Chief Judge, she has established more than two dozen task forces to study various court-related issues, such as jury service, judicial elections, court reorganization, and court security. She also helped establish the

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Center for Court Innovation, a nonprofit think tank that engages in research and development for the state judiciary.

The fruits of these efforts are already apparent. Thanks in large part to Chief Judge Kaye's efforts, New York is now home to hundreds of "problem-solving courts"—courts that combine therapeutic techniques with legal principles to address drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, mental illness, and other problems. It is also home to integrated domestic violence courts where specially trained judges handle cases that usually would have been divided among multiple courts. And, thanks again to Chief Judge Kaye, there are more than forty new courthouses that help ensure that these new courts and others have the space they need to operate efficiently and effectively.

Chief Judge Kaye has also helped launch new programs that bring different stakeholders together to ensure the most effective delivery of services to the people of New York. "Adoption Now," for example, allows courts and child care agencies to work together to streamline the adoption process; the result has been to reduce by more than 2500 the number of children freed for adoption but still waiting for parents.

Chief Judge Kaye has spearheaded numerous administrative reforms, all of which have made the New York courts fairer and more effective. She has reformed jury service, eliminating twenty-two different categories of service exemptions so that more citizens serve, but their service lasts only days, not weeks (as under the old system). She has implemented benchmarks to ensure that civil disputes are resolved in a timely manner and she has established a Commercial Division to facilitate the efficient resolution of complicated business disputes. And, finally, she has enacted reforms to ensure that attorneys better serve their clients, requiring continuing legal education programs for lawyers, establishing statements of client rights, and developing a fee dispute resolution program.

Essentially, Judith Kaye's tenure as Chief Judge has seen more than twenty-five years of human concern, imagination, and effective action, all harnessed in the interest of an improved state justice system. And all the while, she has administered the New York Court of Appeals and has written her own opinions in a manner that does honor to that court's long-standing tradition of judicial excellence.

Cicero told us that "it is our duty to honor and revere those whose lives are conspicuous for conduct in keeping with their high ethical standards and who, as true patriots, have rendered efficient service to their country." It is our duty, then, to honor Chief Judge Kaye for her service, and it is my personal privilege to have been able to participate in this tribute to her. Chief Judge Kaye's concern for

the people of New York, her commitment to improving the effectiveness and accessibility of the judicial system through creativity and innovation, and her great success in carrying out that commitment make her a model for judges everywhere.