

Hon. Edwina G. Mendelson
Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Justice Initiatives
New York State Unified Court System

In 2017, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Edwina Mendelson was appointed to head the newly expanded New York State Unified Court System's Office for Justice Initiatives, tasked with ensuring meaningful access to justice for all New Yorkers in civil, criminal and family courts, regardless of income, background, or disability. To serve this mission, the Office for Justice Initiatives administers pro bono attorney and other volunteer programs, self-help services, Help Centers, and many other resources designed to serve unrepresented court users, including resources to assist those navigating virtual court operations ushered in by the Covid-19 crisis.

Additionally, Judge Mendelson leads the Equal Justice in Courts Initiative, a top priority for New York State Chief Judge Janet DiFiore, to implement the recommendations of Special Adviser on Equal Justice, Jeh Johnson, in his October 2020 report examining racial bias in the state court system, as well as to implement the November 2020 court based recommendations of the New York State Judicial Committee on Women in the Courts to enhance gender fairness in the New York State Courts.

Judge Mendelson also directs several juvenile and family justice initiatives, including the New York State Unified Court System's Child Welfare Court Improvement Project, its Advisory Council on Child Fatalities, the ongoing implementation of the seminal law raising the age of criminal responsibility in New York State, and the Child Support and Guardianship Working Groups of the Unified Court System/New York State Bar Association's COVID-19 Recovery Task Force. Additionally, as a member of Chief Judge DiFiore's Commission to Reimagine the Future of New York's Courts, Judge Mendelson serves on the Regulatory Innovation, Online Dispute Resolution, and Pandemic Practices Working Groups.

In January 2021, Judge Mendelson began overseeing the Unified Court System's Office of Policy & Planning, which is responsible for administering the state's more than 300 problem-solving and accountability courts, including groundbreaking opioid courts, drug courts/judicial diversion parts, veterans' treatment courts, mental health courts, human trafficking intervention courts, domestic violence courts, integrated domestic violence courts, young adult parts, juvenile treatment courts, community courts, and impaired driving courts. Each model has the advantage of specially trained judges and staff, dedicated dockets, intensive judicial monitoring, and coordination with outside services and agencies. In addition, it leads special projects and other endeavors providing guidance and support to the court system.

Judge Mendelson was appointed to the Court of Claims in 2017 and remains active on the bench, conducting pro se trials in state correctional facilities. Judge Mendelson also serves in Supreme Court Criminal Term, New York County. Previously, she presided over New York County Supreme Court's Youth Part, hearing cases of youth charged as adults.

Judge Mendelson first joined the court system as a Court Attorney-Referee in Queens County Family Court, after representing clients in New York City Housing Court, Family Court, and Supreme Court. She later became a Family Court Judge in 2003, the Queens County Supervising Family Court Judge in 2008, and a year later, was elevated to Administrative Judge of all New York City Family Courts.

Judge Mendelson, a graduate of CUNY Law School whose motto is "Law in the Service of Human Needs", also holds a Ph.D. in Criminal Justice, and has been an adjunct professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and Hofstra Law School. She maintains active membership and leadership positions in New York bar association and court committees advancing professional development and system improvement in the delivery and quality of justice services, and also lectures nationwide to share New York's equal justice and access to justice practices and protocols for replication in other jurisdictions.