

**SPEECH OF NYCLA PRESIDENT VINCENT  
CHANG AT NEW YORK COUNTY SPECIAL  
MASTERS PROGRAM OATH CEREMONY,  
MARCH 22, 2022, ROTUNDA, 60 CENTER STREET**

Well it is wonderful to see everyone in person. To see people in real pants with real shoes – not just virtual images on a screen.

And it is especially wonderful to celebrate the NYCLA special master's program.

The special master's program meets the challenges of the future based upon the lessons of the past.

NYCLA first launched a special master's program in 1976 to help the New York court system manage its congested calendars during a statewide budget crisis. 350 NYCLA lawyers volunteered to act as special masters of

the courts to alleviate the burden that our court system faced.

Our previous special master's program and this special master's program fulfill one of NYCLA's core missions – support of our judiciary.

Over the decades, we have taken up the cudgels to defend our judges and our courts in the media when they are unfairly attacked.

And NYCLA has fought over the decades for increased judicial compensation, increased judicial budgets and increased judicial independence. We have defended the courts when judges or the judiciary are attacked in the media,

Now, the framers believed an independent judiciary was central to a republican form of government and “critical to fairness and impartiality.” And we submit that sufficient judicial salaries, sufficient judicial staff, and sufficient judicial compensation are in turn critical to judicial independence.

Thus, let me assure you that support of our courts, support of our judges, and support of the critical principle of judicial independence have been -- and will always be -- central to the mission of the New York county lawyers association.

In addition to support of our judiciary, another core mission of NYCLA is the promotion of diversity.

NYCLA was the world’s first diverse bar association, as

early as 1908 admitting members without regard to race, ethnicity, religion or gender. NYCLA provided a bar association home to people of color, women lawyers and others dispossessed by the major bar associations at the time of our founding. And over the last 115 years we've continued this tradition as an inclusive, diverse, open, and innovative bar association.

Today, in furtherance of that tradition, we celebrate the relaunching of our special master's program with a focus on creating a pipeline for attorneys of color and other underrepresented communities. One goal is to inspire our special masters to consider seeking judicial office.

Our program will also help our special masters become better lawyers, giving them invaluable and otherwise unattainable insights into the adjudicatory process.

Well a number of thanks are in order. We thank the unified court system and the Franklin Williams commission for making this program possible.

We all our special masters who have agreed to commit their time and effort to serve our courts and to serve our state. And special thanks to NYCLA treasurer Richard Swanson. I know how busy and how skilled Richard is and he will be inducted as a special master today.

We thank Austin D'Souza who originated this program and made it a reality, and Anthe Bova, Steve Lessard and Asha Smith from NYCLA who have helped make this program a success.

And thanks to all of the great judges who have made this program a reality --First Department Judge Troy Webber, former administrative Judge George silver, Judge Adam Silvera and administrative Judge Deborah Kaplan who has been so supportive of NYCLA over the years;

So we are proud and honored to be a part of this program. We hope that this is only the first class of many more to come and the start of a great and enduring

partnership among the Franklin Williams Commission,  
NYCLA and the courts.