

QUEENS TODAY

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OFFICIALS UNVEILED A NUMBER OF pedestrian safety and beachfront access improvement projects in Rockaway Beach last month, the Queens Post reported. NYC Department of Transportation Commissioner Ydanis Rodríguez joined Councilmember Joann Ariola and members of Community Board 14 celebrated the installation of an all-way stop at Shore Front Parkway and Beach 81st Street, a new curb extension and new crosswalks at Beach 77th Street and the reconstruction of the parkway's medians at both of those intersections. "Rockaway residents and visitors deserve year-round safe access to their beachfront and these new crossing locations will greatly improve safety and convenience for those walking to and from the shore," Rodríguez said. "Through projects like these, NYC DOT's relentless commitment to pedestrian safety has helped reduce pedestrian fatalities to historic lows in 2023, countering a nationwide trend of higher pedestrian deaths."

A 28-YEAR-OLD MAN AND HIS 61- year-old stepfather were shot during a weed deal gone wrong in a Flushing apartment building on Tuesday, the Daily News reported. The 28-year-old, a self-admitted marijuana dealer, was in the middle of a sale inside the building on 71st Avenue near 162nd Street around 1 a.m. when the two men he was selling to attempted to rob him. Hearing the struggle, his father ran into the lobby where the deal was going down. One of the suspects pulled out a gun and shot the stepson and then shot the stepfather when he attempted to help the 28-year-old. Both were taken to a nearby hospital where they are expected to recover. No arrests have been made and the investigation is ongoing.

HATE CRIME CHARGES WERE brought against the man prosecutors say beat a Sikh man to death following a fender bender in October, NBC4 reported. Gilbert Augustin faces the charges after he called 66-year-old Jasmer Singh "Turban man" several times during an altercation over a minor car crash in Kew Gardens last month. The fight turned physical, and Augustin allegedly pushed the 66-year-old to the ground. Singh hit his head on the pavement and later was pronounced dead. The courtroom inside the Queens Criminal Courthouse where Augustin was charged this week was packed with members of the New York City Sikh community, many of whom live in Queens. "Why Sikhs? We are proud. We are proud New Yorkers. Why we are being targeted?" said Subeg Multani, Singh's son. "Looks like to me we are living in a third-world country, or we are living back in 2001. No! This is 2023." Augustin pleaded not guilty to the charges. If convicted, he faces up to 25 years in prison.



Support for judicial pay increase continues to mount

The New York State Commission on Legislative, Judicial and Executive Compensation heard testimony in support of raising the wages for judges in New York, including from Appellate Division, Second Department Justice Lourdes Ventura (right) on Tuesday, Oct. 31, 2023.

Screenshot via New York State Commission on Legislative, Judicial and Executive Compensation

By Jacob Kaye
Queens Daily Eagle

Voices in support of raises for the state's judges continued to roll in during the New York State Commission on Legislative, Judicial and Executive Compensation's second public hearing held on Tuesday.

The commission, which is charged with determining whether or not judges — and soon state lawmakers and top officials in the executive branch — should be given a boost in their pay, collected testimony from judges, attorneys and others involved in the state's judicial system on Tuesday from Albany.

Much like their first hearing — held on Oct. 13 — a vast majority of those who gave testi-

mony urged the commission to institute a raise and a cost-of-living increase for judges in New York, who have seen their salaries remain stagnant for around half a decade.

At the first hearing, the commission, which is legally-mandated to form and consider raises for judges, lawmakers and executive branch leadership four times every 10 years, heard from top officials within the state's court system, including Chief Administrative Judge Zayas. The former top criminal court judge in Queens advocated for increasing judicial salaries to match that of the salaries paid to federal judges, as well as a cost-of-living increase doled out over time to insure a discrepancy between federal and state judges doesn't again widen.

Tuesday's hearing saw testimony from a number of leaders of judicial and attorney organizations, many of which said they supported Zayas' request.

"New York State is the center of the legal, business and financial communities and our judges and court system plays an important role in developing a body of law that is recognized throughout the country and around the world as the gold standard for its treatment of financial and commercial matters," said Richard Lewis, the president of the New York State Bar Association. "We must maintain our judiciary's national and international reputation of equality, fairness and independence."

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Long Island woman found guilty of killing cop in 2021 crash

By Jacob Kaye
Queens Daily Eagle

A Long Island woman is facing nearly three decades in prison after being convicted on Tuesday by a Queens jury that found she drunkenly drove into Detective Anastasios Tsakos on the Long Island Expressway, killing the officer in 2021.

Jessica Beauvais, a 34-year-old woman from Hempstead, was convicted of aggravated manslaughter, vehicular manslaughter and other charges on Tuesday after she killed Tsakos on the busy roadway as he was working a different crash scene on the LIE.

Tsakos' death prompted a widespread response from the city's law enforcement community and elected officials, including then-Mayor Bill de Blasio who called the officer's killing

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The woman who fatally struck Detective Anastasios Tsakos on the Long Island Expressway in 2021 while she was drunk was found guilty of manslaughter charges on Tuesday, Oct. 31, 2023.

Photo via NYPD/Instagram

Molina out as DOC boss

By Jacob Kaye
Queens Daily Eagle

Louis Molina, the commissioner of the city's troubled Department of Correction, is out as DOC head and has been promoted to serve as the mayor's assistant deputy mayor of public safety, the mayor's office announced just before 5 p.m. on Tuesday.

Molina's new role in Mayor Eric Adams' administration comes after a rocky tenure leading the correction department over the past year and 10 months.

Molina's first year with the DOC was the deadliest year on Rikers Island in a decade. His second year has largely been defined by the ever-growing threat of a federal takeover of the jail, which both he and Adams have insisted is not necessary. Nonetheless, the federal judge overseeing the ongoing civil rights case and the federal monitor she appointed have scolded Molina at several points over the past several months for what they say has been increased defiance of oversight and court orders.

According to the mayor's office, Molina will report directly to Deputy Mayor of Public Safety Philip Banks in his new role. Molina will be "tasked with coordinating with all city agencies on public safety matters to ensure they align with Mayor Adams' vision to keep every New Yorker safe," according to a release from the mayor's office.

Molina's successor at the DOC has not been named, though one should be appointed in the coming weeks, according to city officials.

Check back with the Eagle on Thursday for more on Molina's move and his tenure at the DOC.

Support flows in for judicial pay increases

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"But the failure to adequately compensate our judges devalues their work in a way that we at the New York State Bar Association believe is detrimental to the properly functioning justice system," he added.

Those giving testimony on Tuesday, including several officials with Queens ties, said that the need for judicial salary increases is dire for a number of reasons.

Lewis said that the wage gap between the salaries of state judges and federal judges – which has been widening since 2019, the only year in the past several decades the pay of the two judges has aligned – has led some judges to seek spots on the federal bench over jobs in New York state courts.

"A failure to keep pace with the increases that have occurred at the federal level, salary stagnation at the state level has been an impediment to retaining qualified and experienced judges and has made it difficult to continue attracting the best and the brightest," Lewis said.

The lack of raises has also impeded on the court system's efforts to diversify the bench, according to Appellate Division, Second Department Justice Lourdes Ventura, who also serves as the president of the Latino Judges Association.

Despite making up around 20 percent of the state's population, Hispanic and Latino New Yorkers only account for around 10 percent of the state's judiciary – similar discrepancies can be seen among Black judges and Asian American judges.

Ventura said that stagnant wages have played a major role in maintaining the discrepancy.

"This representation deficit in our judiciary is directly linked to the pay issues that this commission is focused on here today," Ventura said. "How are we to retain our judges on the bench and attract new judges to the bench, and how are we to specifically retain existing Hispanic and Latino judges to the bench or attract new ones? Attrition, retention and recruitment are vital issues to the Latino Judges Association, particularly considering the existing deficit



State Supreme Court judges currently make around 10 percent less than their federal counterparts. The New York State Commission on Legislative, Judicial and Executive Compensation is currently considering raising their salaries.
Eagle file photo by Walter Karling

when it comes to representation in our courts."

"If pay parity with our federal counterparts is not restored, the Hispanic and Latino representation deficit might only worsen," the Queens native added.

Ventura, who was a member of the first all-Latino judicial panel in the Appellate Term, Second Judicial Department, said that the lack of salary increases often have disparate effects on immigrant judges, or those who come from an immigrant background.

"Many of us start off our careers with more debt – we not only support ourselves, but we assist our families within and outside of the United States," Ventura said. "We support and

maintain households, we support and provide health care for our children, our aging parents, and extended family members as well."

"Judges are similar to all hard working people in our great state," she added.

Tuesday's hearing marked the second time the commission has heard testimony from those in the judiciary, as well as from those who work in the court system and members of the public. The hearing also marks the continuation of the multi-year effort to determine the salaries of the state's judges, elected officials, governor and top members of the executive branch. In the coming months, the commission will work to collect feedback and deliberate of judge's salaries before moving on to consider the salaries of state lawmakers next year.

Created in 2011, the seven-member commission was put in place at a time when judges had not seen a raise in a dozen years. It wasn't until 2015 that the commission convened and recommended incremental salary increases for the judges.

By 2019, state Supreme Court justices were paid the same salary as U.S. District Court judges, at \$210,900 a year.

However the year prior and the following year – the commission met in 2020 as per an order from then-Governor Andrew Cuomo – the commission recommended against increasing salaries for judges.

Since the 2015 increase, which was doled out over the following four years, judicial salaries have remained stagnant, and pay parity with federal judges has again become an issue.

Federal judges now earn 10 percent more than the state's Supreme Court justices, who are paid \$210,900 a year.

In giving his testimony earlier in October, Zayas requested that the commission recommend a 10 percent salary increase for judges paid out over time, matching their pay with federal judges' pay.

In all, Zayas said the increase would cost \$34.5 million in the first year, and then \$4.6 million for cost-of-living increases each of the following years.

Despite support for judicial pay increases, the state's budget could interfere – as it has in the past.

Blake Washington, the director of the Division of Budget, laid out a dire budgetary situation during the hearing on Oct. 13, telling the commission that the state faces budget deficit of around \$10 billion in the coming year.

"These gaps have to be addressed by prudent management by all state agencies, and OCA, as well," Washington said.

Budget shortfalls were also behind the decisions not to increase judicial salaries in 2019 and 2020.

But support for salary increases for judges continues.

Though not present at the hearing on Tuesday, Michael Abneri, the president of the Queens County Bar Association, said in a letter to the commission's chairperson, former Court of Appeals Judge Eugene Fahey, urged the commission to boost judges' pay.

"New York State judges' salaries have not kept pace with inflation, with the salaries of many lawyers in the private sector or the salaries of those in the federal judiciary," Abneri wrote. "We, therefore, urge the Commission to recommend a salary increase for New York State judges to a level at least equal to that of United States Federal District Court judges."

The commission will next convene for a public meeting on Monday, Nov. 6, at 10:30 a.m., from inside the New York City Bar Association's headquarters in Manhattan.

The commission is led by Fahey, who was appointed chair of the commission by Chief Judge Rowan Wilson. The group also includes Helene Blank, a litigator appointed by Rowan to the commission; Theresa Egan, a former attorney who has worked in various capacities with New York State's government; Nadine Fontaine, the general counsel for the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York; Victor Kovner, the senior counsel to the firm of Davis Wright Tremaine; Robert Megna, the president of the Rockefeller Institute of Government at SUNY and the former state budget director; and Jeremy Weinstein, a former Queens state senator and former administrative judge of both Queens' Criminal and Civil Supreme Courts.

Queens Public Library receives \$438K in funding for early reading program

By Ryan Schwach
Queens Daily Eagle

Queens Public Library celebrated new programs and funding alongside local councilmembers on Monday in Glen Oaks.

New York City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams, Councilmember Linda Lee and QPL President Dennis Walcott celebrated a \$438,000 allotment made by the City Council to the city's First Readers program, an initiative to help provide families with children younger than five with early learning programs to help build reading skills at an early age.

"Libraries are among our most precious public resources and are critical to the well-being of our society," said Adams, who read "Woo Hoo! You're Doing Great!" by Sandra Bounton to kids and families.

"These resource hubs provide free programs that help children in their cognitive and social development and support immigrant communities through English-language classes," she added. "The Council is proud to allocate \$438,000 to the Queens Public Library for intergenerational literacy programming in this year's city budget."

In the Fiscal Year 2024 budget, \$135 million

in operating funds were allocated to Queens' public library system, including \$12 million in proposed spending cuts that were restored by the Council after they were cut in preliminary budgets from Mayor Eric Adams.

"Libraries are more than just a place for residents to read their favorite book," said Lee. "Our libraries serve as centers for our children to learn and develop as they grow into our future leaders."

"I am proud to support our public libraries and to join Speaker Adrienne Adams and Queens Library President Dennis Walcott to host a Music and Movement Class that serves as a fun and interactive program to inspire our kids to pursue and achieve their dreams," she added.

The City Council also allocated \$7.8 million in capital dollars for QPL to fund facility expansions, infrastructure upgrades and equipment purchases across its branches.

"We are deeply grateful to them for their steadfast advocacy and financial support as well as for prioritizing essential literacy initiatives, allowing us to offer free access to knowledge and opportunity for learners of all ages," said Walcott.



Council Speaker Adrienne Adams and Councilmember Linda Lee celebrated new outreach programs from the Queens Public Library in Glen Oaks on Monday alongside QPL President Dennis Walcott.
Emil Cohen/NYC Council Media Unit