



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jesse Hamilton

Senator Jesse Hamilton Hosts “Meet Your Judges” Forum in Crown Heights

JESSE HAMILTON August 19, 2015

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(Brooklyn, NY) Senator Jesse Hamilton hosted eight judges and close to a hundred residents of the Crown Heights community at a “Meet Your Judges” forum at the Jewish Children’s Museum Tuesday night Aug., 18th.

Senator Hamilton opened the program by recapping his recent trip to Israel and recounted how he could see the ISIS flag from the Golan Heights. Senator Hamilton went on to

highlight the importance of bringing information out into the community and introduced the moderator, Judge Genine D. Edwards.

The judges offered brief presentations about themselves and how they came to be judges. The majority of the forum consisted of questions and answers from the audience.

Members of the audience questioned the judges as to whether an Orthodox Jew could get a fair jury trial in Brooklyn. A young student asked the panel about who judges the judges to ensure the law is upheld. Another member of the audience questioned why the system takes so long to dispense justice, saying that someone could be in court for years and years before a case reached a conclusion. A woman in the community asked the judges if there was any course of action against police officers who wrongly ticket - she expressed her frustration that although the tickets are dismissed the police officers are not penalized. Other questions included whether employees are required to give their employers criminal history, and whether tenants are required to move out if their property is purchased by a new owner.

The judges in attendance represented a range of courts, including civil court, criminal court, family court, housing court, guardianship court, and supreme court. Moderated by Judge Genine D. Edwards, the panelists were Judge Cheryl J. Gonzales, Judge Craig S. Walker, Judge Michael Gerstein, Judge Jacqueline D. Williams, Judge Devin Cohen, Judge Reginald A. Boddie, and Judge Loren Baily-Schiffman.

Judge Genine D. Edwards emphasized the importance of familiarizing the public with court system, remarking that if people are nervous and anxious due to unfamiliarity with the courts they are not in a position to make decisions.

In response to an audience question, Judge Cheryl J. Gonzales replied as to the rights of tenants and the procedures a landlord must follow before a tenant can be evicted.

Judge Devin Cohen emphasized that the court system can take time and is very different from the way it is portrayed on television. Where on television everything can be resolved in an hour, in real world courts a lot of court business was filing and waiting.

Loren Baily-Schiffman spoke about guardianship, saying that over the past decade guardianship law has been made more precise and tailored to needs of the individual. She added that guardianship was not there to take away anyone's rights.

Regarding small claims court (cases usually under \$5,000), Judge Reginald Boddie offered that when an individual comes to court they must be sure to be prepared with the appropriate documentation. No matter how sympathetic a judge may be, their job is to apply the law.

Judge Jacqueline D. Williams said that Kings County Family Court is one of the largest in the country, handling three areas: custody and visitation, abuse and neglect, and juvenile delinquency. She offered that she often deals with many personal cases, and takes part in trying to provide young people with a way to get back on track.

Judge Craig S. Walker discussed criminal court. He focused his remarks on drug treatment courts' three decades of work. He highlighted the fact that without dealing with the underlying issue, often drug and mental health related, there would be repeated encounters with the justice system. He also spoke about the upcoming launch in November of the Veterans Court.

Judge Michael Gerstein discussed the issues he often sees in criminal court, frequently connected to drug addiction, mental illness, and poverty. He discussed broadly the types of cases that have come in front of him. He highlighted the point that we have room for improvement in addressing issues of treatment and drug treatment.

During the question and answer section a variety of topics were broached including resources for the court system and the connection between resources and speedier justice, the merits of the jury system and the protections it offered, the importance of jury service, landlord tenant issues and illegal lockouts, and recourse when the police fail in their duties.

Senator Hamilton extended thanks to the judges, the Jewish Children's Museum, and all the members of the community who attended.

About Senator Hamilton:

Senator Jesse Hamilton has spent his entire career helping people, including over 15 years as President of the School Board and District Leader. He is a husband, father, and public servant delivering and fighting for one of the most diverse Senate districts in New York State.

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