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NEW YORK
CITY BAR

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**STATEMENT CONDEMNING ASSASSINATION OF
FORMER WISCONSIN JUDGE JOHN ROEMER
AND CALLING FOR GREATER STATE AND FEDERAL JUDICIAL SECURITY**

The New York City Bar Association (“City Bar”) grieves the assassination of retired Wisconsin state court Judge John (“Jack”) Roemer and calls for government action to protect the safety, security, and independence of all federal and state judges throughout the United States.¹

I. The Killing of Former Wisconsin Judge John Roemer

At approximately 6:30 a.m. on June 3, 2022, local law enforcement personnel responded to a 911 call reporting that two shots had been fired inside the New Lisbon, Wisconsin home of retired Juneau County Circuit Court Judge John (“Jack”) Roemer.² Initially, responding officers sought to negotiate with the gunman. However, he rebuffed all efforts.³ At 10:17 a.m., after roughly four hours of futile attempts at engagement, a tactical team stormed the residence.⁴ Inside, they found Roemer, 68, zip-tied to a chair and fatally shot.⁵ Roemer’s suspected assailant, Douglas K. Uhde, 56, was in the basement of the house, suffering from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.⁶ The suspect was transported to a local hospital, where he was admitted in critical condition and died on June 7, 2022.⁷ His firearm was recovered at the scene.⁸

Almost immediately after the shooting public officials announced that it was not a random act of violence and that, with the suspected assailant in custody, there was no ongoing danger to the community.⁹ The public officials explained that the gunman had specifically targeted Roemer and that Roemer’s assassination was related to a prior criminal case in which the suspect had been sentenced by Judge Roemer.¹⁰ In the suspect’s vehicle, law enforcement also found what appeared to be the gunman’s “hit list,” which included the names of U.S. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers, and Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer.¹¹

Roemer served for approximately 13 years as a Juneau County Circuit Court judge. He was first elected to the bench in 2004 and prevailed in retention elections in 2010 and 2016.¹² He retired in August 2017 to care for his wife, who was in failing health and has since passed away.¹³ According to judicial authorities, Roemer was a very well-regarded and highly respected jurist.¹⁴

Those acquainted with Roemer's suspected assailant described him as a solitary individual who had worked a factory job and never put down roots and spent much of his adult life in prison.¹⁵ The suspect's social media accounts reflect a disaffected, right-wing political orientation. He had multiple Facebook pages and, on some, he shared posts on conservative themes such as gun confiscation. Other posts vilified prominent women including Janet Reno and Hillary Clinton, using profane language and highly offensive imagery.¹⁶

The suspected assailant's extensive criminal record includes convictions in Wisconsin and Texas.¹⁷ It is not clear why he fixated on Roemer, of all of the judges that he had appeared before. He had crossed paths with Roemer on only one instance. In November 2005, Roemer had sentenced the suspected assailant to six years in prison on a charge of armed burglary with a dangerous weapon.¹⁸ However, the suspect pleaded guilty to the charge, as well as three related firearms offenses.¹⁹ Moreover, Roemer handled little more than the sentencing in the case. The case dated back to 2001 and had been before other judges at both the trial and appellate levels for some years before Roemer was assigned the case in February 2005.²⁰

II. Pending Federal Legislation to Enhance Judicial Security

Just two days after Roemer was murdered in his home, a federal judge whose son was killed at home in a similar targeted attack nearly two years ago renewed her call for greater protections for judges across the country.²¹ In July 2020, a gunman disguised as a delivery worker appeared at the front door of U.S. District Judge Esther Salas' New Jersey home. When her 20-year-old son, Daniel Anderl, and her husband, Mark Anderl, answered the door, her son was shot and killed, and her husband was seriously wounded.²² The gunman, Roy Den Hollander, was a terminally-ill lawyer and men's rights activist who had previously appeared as counsel in a case before Judge Salas.²³ On his website, Hollander disparaged Salas in racist and sexist terms.²⁴ He was later found in New York, dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound.²⁵

Since the 2020 attack on her family at their home, Judge Salas has been championing legislation to afford federal judges and their families greater protections so that judges can do their jobs without putting their lives on the line.²⁶ Judge Salas maintains that enhanced protections are needed for all judges. She emphasizes – rightfully so - that judges are uniquely at risk because, by definition, their jobs require presiding over and deciding cases; by definition, basically 50% of those appearing in any case will be unhappy with the judge's decision.

The U.S. Marshals Service, charged with protecting the nation's federal judges, has seen a significant increase in threats in recent years. Specifically, threats and inappropriate comments directed at the federal judiciary nearly doubled between 2016 and 2018 and have remained at elevated levels – approximately 4500 in 2021 – ever since.²⁷

III. Applicable Principles of International Law

Judges must be free to fulfill their judicial duties fearlessly, deciding cases solely on the basis of the facts and the law, without being concerned that an aggrieved party will exact retribution. The same holds true even as to former judges. A party's retaliation against a judge – whether current or former—“sends a message” to sitting judges and has an inherent chilling effect on their ability to decide cases “without fear or favor.” Further, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to continue to attract the best and the brightest to service on the bench if becoming a judge, in effect, puts a target on one's back.

International law recognizes that judges play a unique and vital role in any society and therefore affords them special protections that require government support. For example, Principle 1 of the U.N. Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary establishes that all governments have an affirmative duty “to respect and observe the independence of the judiciary.”²⁸ Similarly, Principle 2 of the U.N. Basic Principles establishes that judges are to decide cases “impartially, on the basis of facts and in accordance with the law” and that governments are to support that undertaking by protecting judges from any and all “restrictions, improper influences, inducements, pressures, threats or interference, direct or indirect, from any quarter or for any reason.”²⁹ Principle 4 is to much the same effect, providing that governments are to guard judges against “any inappropriate or unwarranted interferences with the judicial process.”³⁰ Principle 7 holds that governments are to “provide adequate resources” for a number of functions, including judicial security, “to enable the judiciary to properly perform its functions.”³¹ And, lastly, Principle 11 states that judges' security must be “adequately secured by law.”³²

In sum, the U.N. Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary leave no doubt but that governments bear direct responsibility for ensuring their judges' safety.

IV. Conclusion and Call to Action

The rule of law will not long endure if it is “open season” on the nation's judges. The New York City Bar Association urges all branches of our federal and state governments to take all measures necessary to ensure the safety, security, and independence of the judiciary, one of the foundational pillars of our democracy.

June 24, 2022

¹ More than 150 years old, the New York City Bar is an organization of over 23,000 members in New York City and elsewhere throughout the United States, and in more than 50 countries around the globe. Its members include judges, prosecutors, defense counsel, government lawyers, and public interest/non-governmental organization practitioners, as well as legal academics and attorneys representing nearly every major law firm and corporation in the United States. The City Bar has a long and distinguished history of promoting the rule of law and human rights, including the rights of legal professionals to fulfill their professional obligations. The City Bar's Task Force on the Independence of Lawyers and Judges assisted with this Statement.

² See Update: Critical Incident Investigation in Mauston, Wis. (Wisconsin Dept. of Justice, June 4, 2022) (“Update”), <https://www.doj.state.wi.us/news-releases/update-critical-incident-investigation-mauston-wis>; Ex-judge killed in ‘targeted act’ against judicial system, state says (Washington Post, June 4, 2022) (“Ex-Judge killed”),

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/06/04/wisconsin-judge-killed-targeted-roemer-uhde/>; Retired Judge Killed in Targeted Wisconsin Murder (Heavy, June 4, 2022) (“Retired Judge Killed”), <https://heavy.com/news/john-roemer/>; Douglas Uhde: Suspect in Murder of Wisconsin Judge (“Douglas Uhde”) (Heavy, June 8, 2022), <https://heavy.com/news/douglas-uhde/>; Slain retired judge had sentenced suspect to six years in prison, court records show (“Slain retired judge”) (NBC News, June 5, 2022), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/suspect-fatally-shot-retired-judge-sentenced-6-years-prison-court-reco-rcna32023>; Killing in Wisconsin Was Motivated by Judicial Matter, Attorney General Says (New York Times, June 4, 2022) (“Killing in Wisconsin”), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/03/us/wisconsin-killing-judge.html>; Judge Zip-Tied, Shot by Militia Member Who Had Whitmer on Hit List: Police (Newsweek, June 4, 2022) (“Judge Zip-Tied, Shot”), <https://www.newsweek.com/judge-zip-tied-shot-militia-member-who-had-whitmer-hit-list-police-1712853>; Source: Whitmer, McConnell, Evers on Wisconsin gunman's list (Washington Post, June 4, 2022) (“Source”), https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/spokesman-whitmer-was-on-wisconsin-gunmans-list-of-targets/2022/06/04/74c729b8-e441-11ec-ae64-6b23e5155b62_story.html. (All websites cited in this statement were last visited June 17, 2022.)

³ See Update, *supra* n.2; Suspected shooter who killed retired Wisconsin judge in ‘targeted’ attack identified (The Guardian, June 4, 2022) (“Suspected shooter”), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jun/04/wisconsin-judge-shooting-suspect-identified-latest>; Ex-judge killed, *supra* n.2; Slain retired judge, *supra* n.2; A former judge was killed in his Wisconsin home in a targeted attack, officials say (CNN, June 4, 2022) (“Former judge killed”), <https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/04/us/wisconsin-judge-killed-targeted-attack/index.html>; Killing in Wisconsin, *supra* n.2; Judge Zip-Tied, Shot, *supra* n.2.

⁴ See Update, *supra* n.2; Ex-judge killed, *supra* n.2; Slain retired judge, *supra* n.2; Judge was killed, *supra* n.3; Killing in Wisconsin, *supra* n.2; Judge Zip-Tied, Shot, *supra* n.2.

⁵ See Ex-judge killed, *supra* n.2; Slain retired judge, *supra* n.2; Judge Zip-Tied, Shot, *supra* n.2; A gunman who allegedly killed a retired judge had a list of targets, officials say (“List of targets”) (National Public Radio (“NPR”)/Associated Press, June 4, 2022), <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/03/1103052315/wisconsin-shooting-targeted-attack-judicial-system>.

⁶ See Update, *supra* n.2; Suspected shooter, *supra* n.3; Ex-judge killed, *supra* n.2; Slain retired judge, *supra* n.2; Former judge killed, *supra* n.3; Judge Zip-Tied, Shot, *supra* n.2.

⁷ The suspected assailant was declared legally brain dead on June 4, 2022, but remained on life support until June 7, 2022 to permit organ donation. See Update, *supra* n.2; Douglas K. Uhde: Social Media Shows Pro Trump, Gun Posts (Heavy, June 7, 2022) (“Social Media”), <https://heavy.com/news/douglas-k-uhde-social-media-trump/>; Douglas Uhde, *supra* n.2; Man accused of killing Wisconsin judge dies in hospital (The Independent/Associated Press, June 7, 2022), <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ap-madison-wisconsin-tony-evers-mitch-mcconnell-b2096001.html>; The man accused of killing a former Wisconsin judge in a ‘targeted attack’ has died, Wisconsin Justice Department says (CNN, June 7, 2022), <https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/06/us/wisconsin-judge-killing-suspect-history/index.html>.

⁸ See Update, *supra* n.2; Ex-judge killed, *supra* n.2; Slain retired judge, *supra* n.2; Former judge killed, *supra* n.3.

⁹ See Update, *supra* n.2; Ex-judge killed, *supra* n.2; Slain retired judge, *supra* n.2; Former judge killed, *supra* n.3; Killing in Wisconsin, *supra* n.2; Judge Zip-Tied, Shot, *supra* n.2; Source, *supra* n.2.

¹⁰ See Update, *supra* n.2; Ex-judge killed, *supra* n.2; Suspected shooter, *supra* n.3; Former judge killed, *supra* n.3; Douglas Uhde, *supra* n.2; Killing in Wisconsin, *supra* n.2; Judge Zip-Tied, Shot, *supra* n.2; Source, *supra* n.2; Federal judge whose son was killed two years ago calls for greater judicial protections after former Wisconsin judge killed (CNN, June 5, 2022) (“Federal judge”), <https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/05/us/wisconsin-judge-killed-attack/index.html>.

¹¹ See Slain retired judge, *supra* n.2; Mitch McConnell, two governors said to be in Wisconsin gunman's hit list (Reuters, June 4, 2022), <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/michigan-governor-named-hit-list-gunman-who-killed-retired-wisconsin-judge-2022-06-04/>; Ex-judge killed, *supra* n.2; Former judge killed, *supra* n.3; Judge Zip-Tied,

Shot, *supra* n.2; Source, *supra* n.2; Gretchen Whitmer's office says she was on 'hit list' found with suspect accused of killing judge (Axios, June 4, 2022), <https://www.axios.com/2022/06/04/gretchen-whitmer-wisconsin-judge-target-government-officials>; Former Wisconsin judge killed in 'targeted' attack; suspect had hit list that included Mitch McConnell, Gov. Whitmer (NBC News, June 4, 2022), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/former-wisconsin-judge-killed-targeted-attack-suspect-hit-list-include-rcna31995>; Suspect who allegedly killed retired judge had hit list that included Mitch McConnell, Gov. Whitmer: Official (ABC News, June 4, 2022), <https://abcnews.go.com/US/suspect-allegedly-killed-retired-judge-hit-list-included/story?id=85181587>; Retired judge killed; gunman identified; sources say Governor Evers was on suspect hit list (620WTMJ, June 3, 2022), <https://wtmj.com/news/2022/06/03/critical-incident-response-initiated-after-shooting-at-home-of-former-judge-in-juneau-county/>.

¹² See Suspected shooter, *supra* n.3; Social media, *supra* n.7; Ex-judge killed, *supra* n.2; Slain retired judge, *supra* n.2; Source, *supra* n.2; Federal judge, *supra* n.10.

Before becoming a judge, Roemer worked for 12 years as an assistant district attorney in Juneau County. He also served as an assistant state public defender in Baraboo, Wisconsin and was in the private practice of law. He retired from the U.S. Army Reserve as a lieutenant colonel in November 2002. See Retired Judge Killed, *supra* n.2; Social media, *supra* n.7; Douglas Uhde, *supra* n.2; Suspected shooter, *supra* n.3; List of Targets, *supra* n.5; Man suspected of murdering judge was previously sentenced to prison by him, records show (Channel 3000, June 5, 2022) (“Previously sentenced”), <https://www.channel3000.com/man-suspected-of-murdering-judge-was-previously-sentenced-to-prison-by-him-records-show/>; Ex-judge killed, *supra* n.2; Slain retired judge, *supra* n.2; Former judge killed, *supra* n.3; Source, *supra* n.2.

¹³ See Retired Judge Killed, *supra* n.2; Suspected shooter, *supra* n.3; Ex-judge killed, *supra* n.2; Slain retired judge, *supra* n.2; Source, *supra* n.2.

¹⁴ See Previously sentenced, *supra* n.12; Federal judge, *supra* n.10; Former judge killed, *supra* n.3; *see also, e.g.*, Retired Judge Killed, *supra* n.2; Douglas Uhde, *supra* n.2; Suspected shooter, *supra* n.3; Source, *supra* n.2.

¹⁵ See, *e.g.*, Social Media, *supra* n.7; Douglas Uhde, *supra* n.2.

¹⁶ See Social Media, *supra* n.7; Douglas Uhde, *supra* n.2; *see also* Suspect in shooting of judge was 'anti-government' and charges brought after six bodies found in a home in January (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel/Yahoo News, June 5, 2022), <https://www.jsonline.com/story/nletter/dailybriefing/2022/06/05/suspect-shooting-judge-anti-government/7526030001/>; Wisconsin Judge's Killer a Pro-Trump 'Grievance Collector': Ex-FBI Agent (Newsweek, June 5, 2022), <https://www.newsweek.com/wisconsin-judges-killer-pro-trump-grievance-collector-ex-fbi-agent-1712907>.

¹⁷ See Social Media (summarizing suspect's criminal history), *supra* n.7; Douglas Uhde, *supra* n.2; Previously sentenced, *supra* n.12; Source, *supra* n.2.

¹⁸ See Retired Judge Killed, *supra* n.2; Social Media, *supra* n.7; Douglas Uhde, *supra* n.2; Suspected shooter, *supra* n.3; Ex-judge killed, *supra* n.2; Slain retired judge, *supra* n.2; Former judge killed, *supra* n.3; Federal judge, *supra* n.10; Previously sentenced, *supra* n.12.

¹⁹ See Slain retired judge, *supra* n.2.

²⁰ See Previously sentenced, *supra* n.12; Ex-judge killed, *supra* n.2; Former judge killed, *supra* n.3; Federal judge, *supra* n.10.

²¹ See, *e.g.*, Federal judge, *supra* n.10.

²² See Suspected gunman who killed Judge Esther Salas' son disparaged her as a Latina (ABC News, July 21, 2020) (“Suspected gunman”), <https://abcnews.go.com/US/suspect-deadly-shooting-called-federal-judge-esther-salas/story?id=71901734>; Attorney who was found dead named as primary suspect in fatal shooting at federal judge's home (CNN, July 21, 2020) (“Attorney found dead”), <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/19/us/federal-judge->

[esther-salas-shooting-investigation/index.html](#); ‘Anti-Feminist’ Lawyer Is Suspect in Killing of Son of Federal Judge in N.J. (New York Times, July 20, 2020) (“Anti-Feminist Lawyer”), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/20/nyregion/esther-salas.html>; Everything We Know About the Shooting at a Federal Judge’s Home in New Jersey (New York Magazine, July 21, 2020) (“Everything We Know”), <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/07/shooting-at-judge-esther-salass-nj-home-what-we-know.html>.

²³ See Federal judge, *supra* n.10; Suspected gunman, *supra* n.22; Attorney found dead, *supra* n.22; Anti-Feminist Lawyer, *supra* n.22; Misogynistic Lawyer Who Killed Judge’s Son Had List of Possible Targets (New York Times, July 25, 2020) (“Misogynistic Lawyer”), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/25/nyregion/roy-den-hollander-esther-salas-list.html>; Everything We Know, *supra* n.22.

²⁴ See Federal judge, *supra* n.10; Suspected gunman, *supra* n.22; Anti-Feminist Lawyer, *supra* n.22; Misogynistic Lawyer, *supra* n.23; Everything We Know, *supra* n.22.

²⁵ See Federal judge, *supra* n.10; Suspected gunman, *supra* n.22; Attorney found dead, *supra* n.22; Anti-Feminist Lawyer, *supra* n.22; Misogynistic Lawyer, *supra* n.23; Everything We Know, *supra* n.22.

²⁶ See Federal judge, *supra* n.10; Online Privacy Shield for Judges Advanced by Senate Judiciary (Bloomberg News, Dec. 2, 2021), <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/us-law-week/online-privacy-shield-for-judges-advanced-by-senate-judiciary>; Judicial Security Bill Advances: Judge Who Lost Son Urges Final Passage (U.S. Courts News, Dec. 2, 2021), <https://www.uscourts.gov/news/2021/12/02/judicial-security-bill-advances-judge-who-lost-son-urges-final-passage>; Booker, Menendez Applaud Senate Judiciary Committee Passage of Bipartisan Bill To Protect Privacy, Safety of Federal Judges and Their Families (Office of U.S. Senator Cory Booker, Dec.2, 2021), <https://www.booker.senate.gov/news/press/booker-menendez-applaud-senate-judiciary-committee-passage-of-bipartisan-bill-to-protect-privacy-safety-of-federal-judges-and-their-families>; S.2340 – Daniel Anderl Judicial Security and Privacy Act of 2021 (U.S. Senate/congress.gov), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/2340/text>; US S2340 (BillTrack), <https://www.billtrack50.com/BillDetail/1383866>.

See also The Daniel Anderl Judicial Security & Privacy Act (podcast) (New York City Bar Association, Jan. 26, 2022) (discussion between Christopher Pioch and Jessenia Vazcones-Yagual, co-chairs of the City Bar’s Task Force for the Independence of Lawyers and Judges, and Matthew Schafer, chair of the City Bar’s Communications and Media Law Committee, concerning provisions of the Anderl Act that would limit the public’s access to certain personal information about judges), <https://www.nycbar.org/media-listing/media/detail/the-daniel-anderl-judicial-security-and-privacy-act>; Letter from ABA President to U.S. House of Representatives Leadership re: Judicial Security Legislation (American Bar Association (“ABA”), May 12, 2022), https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/government_affairs_office/justice-and-jud-security-letter-to-house-11-may-22.pdf; Statement of ABA President Reginald Turner Re: Killing of retired Wisconsin judge John Roemer (American Bar Association (“ABA”), June 6, 2022), <https://www.americanbar.org/news/abanews/aba-news-archives/2022/06/aba-president-statement-re-wisconsin-judge/>.

But see Rand Paul Again Blocks Quick Passage of Judicial Security Bill (Bloomberg News, May 12, 2022), <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/us-law-week/rand-paul-again-blocks-quick-passage-of-judicial-security-bill>; Thomas Berry, Government Can’t Censor the Truth About Judges (Wall Street Journal, Dec. 26, 2021), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/government-cant-censor-the-truth-about-judges-legislation-law-free-speech-addresses-phone-numbers-11640533446>.

²⁷ See, e.g., Federal judge, *supra* n.10. State specific figures for judges like Judge Roemer are harder to come by.

²⁸ See U.N. Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary (Sept. 6, 1985), Principle 1 (stating that “[i]t is the duty of all governmental and other institutions to respect and observe the independence of the judiciary.”) (“U.N. Basic Principles”), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-independence-judiciary>.

²⁹ See U.N. Basic Principles, Principle 2 (stating that “[t]he judiciary shall decide matters before them impartially, on the basis of facts and in accordance with the law, without any restrictions, improper influences, inducements, pressures, threats or interferences, direct or indirect, from any quarter or for any reason.”), *supra* n.28.

³⁰ See U.N. Basic Principles, Principle 4 (stating that “[t]here shall not be any inappropriate or unwarranted interference with the judicial process”), *supra* n.28.

³¹ See U.N. Basic Principles, Principle 7 (stating that “[i]t is the duty of each Member State to provide adequate resources to enable the judiciary to properly perform its functions.”), *supra* n.28.

³² See U.N. Basic Principles, Principle 11 (stating that “[t]he term of office of judges, their independence, security, adequate remuneration, conditions of service, pensions, and the age of retirement shall be adequately secured by law.”), *supra* n.28.