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Contact: Eric Friedman  
[efriedman@nycbar.org](mailto:efriedman@nycbar.org)

Eli Cohen  
[ecohen@nycbar.org](mailto:ecohen@nycbar.org)

## **New York City Bar Association Launches Civic Education Task Force**

New York, November 14, 2022 – The New York City Bar Association today announced the launch of a Civic Education Task Force to develop ways for lawyers to increase public understanding of how government works on the local, state and federal levels in America, and the dynamics that enable our democracy and system of justice to thrive. The Task Force will develop ways in which lawyers, judges and legal professionals can contribute to and support efforts to improve civil discourse, combat misinformation, foster greater civic engagement and participation in elections, and strengthen belief in, and allegiance to, the rule of law.

The initiative comes at a time when only about [two-thirds of eligible Americans](#) vote in presidential elections (roughly the same for New Yorkers) and only about 40% do so in midterms. Only about [13% of New Yorkers](#) eligible to vote did so in this year’s primaries. America’s turnout in the 2020 election ranked [31<sup>st</sup> out of 49 countries](#) with recent national elections. One in four Americans [can’t name any branch of our government](#) and less than half can name all three branches.

“Knowledge is essential to constructive civic engagement,” said City Bar President Susan J. Kohlmann. “Government of the people can only function if the people understand how their government works and how to participate in it.”

The Task Force intends to serve as a “hub for best practices and a clearinghouse for opportunities for the legal community to contribute to civic literacy,” said Judge Katharine H. Parker, a co-chair of the Task Force. “In the tradition of the City Bar bringing together representatives of the entire legal profession, our Task Force includes members from large and small firms, the state and federal judiciary, government agencies, nonprofits and law schools. The entire legal profession has a direct stake in ensuring that the public understands how our government functions and our justice system operates.”

“Civic education is the first building block for greater civic engagement,” said Task Force Co-Chair Dawn Smalls. “I am excited to work with the Task Force to ensure that civic education is integrated into the school curriculum, and develop ways that lawyers can engage in and support greater public literacy and engagement. The Task Force will include educators and non-lawyers

who have important expertise to advise us on our work. We look forward to working with them to convene leaders in civic education to discuss best practices and areas where we can collaborate and leverage one another's work."

"It's hard to argue with Justice O'Connor and Chief Justice Roberts on this matter," said Kohlmann. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who founded the iCivics program during her retirement, wrote, "The practice of democracy is not passed down through the gene pool. It must be taught and learned anew by each generation of citizens." In 2019, Chief Justice John Roberts said, "[W]e have come to take democracy for granted, and civic education has fallen by the wayside."

On the formation of the Civic Education Task Force, Kohlmann said, "It's hard to think of a more important issue for our future when the rule of law and democracy depend on an educated public."

**About the Association**

*The mission of the New York City Bar Association, which was founded in 1870 and has over 23,000 members, is to equip and mobilize a diverse legal profession to practice with excellence, promote reform of the law, and uphold the rule of law and access to justice in support of a fair society and the public interest in our community, our nation, and throughout the world. [www.nycbar.org](http://www.nycbar.org)*