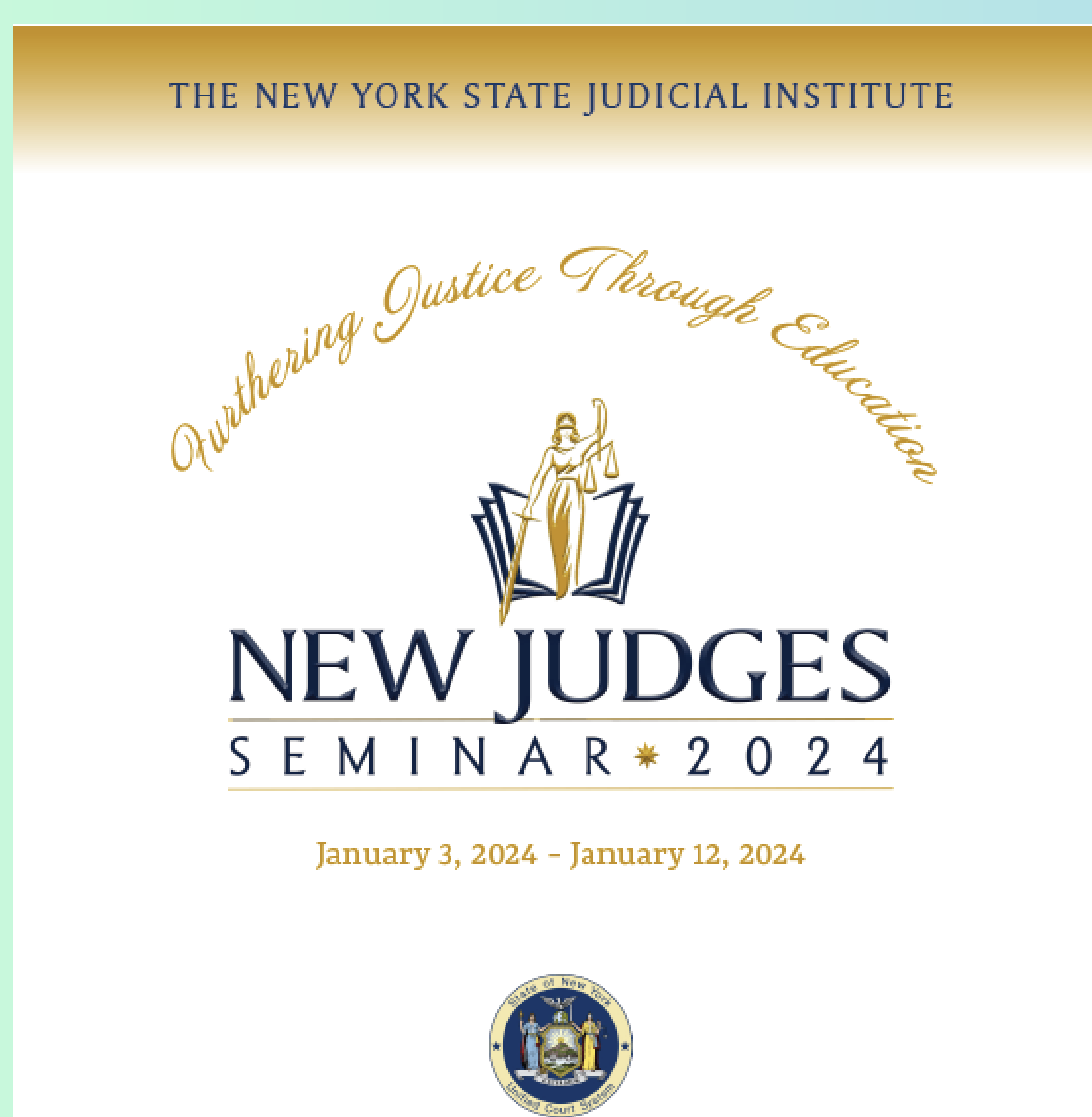


THE IMPORTANCE-AND PRIVILEGE-OF EDUCATING JUDGES

Judges, and especially the Surrogates who hear Article 17-A guardianship cases for people with I/DD have always been among the most important stakeholders in the work of promoting SDM. We are fortunate to have had three Surrogates on our Advisory Council (AC) from its beginning, and their wise council and advocacy on behalf of SDM has been of inestimable value.

The Surrogates' Association's unanimous endorsement of the new SDMA legislation was critical to its passage, and the Surrogates and their court staffs have advanced SDM and SDMNY facilitation in a variety of ways, from providing information about alternatives to guardianship, including SDM, in their Clerk's offices or on their websites, and doing community education, to training Guardians ad Litem (GALs) about SDM. And, of course, they have now written a substantial number of decisions either denying petitions for guardianship or restoring rights to persons already under guardianship, based on formal and informal systems of SDM.



NY State Judicial Institute

Surrogates are elected for 14-year terms, and are also mandatorily retired at 70, so there is turnover every year: new Surrogates who may have had no experience with guardianship or with people with I/DD. The New York State Judicial Institute holds a yearly "New Judges School" for all the newly elected and appointed judges in New York, with a variety of classes from the general to those specific to particular courts. Largely because of our new statute, but also because Surrogates are now utilizing SDM more and more, there is now a session devoted entirely to SDM and Article 17-A. We taught 8 new Surrogates last year, and 6 more (plus several curious judges who hear Article. 81 guardianship cases) this past Wednesday with, as the faculty, our Founding Director Kris Glen (who is a retired New York County Surrogate) and 2 Surrogate/AC members.

To make it really special, we were able to show a video of SDMNY Decision-Maker Louis, who was referred to us by one of those Surrogates, and whose guardianship is in the process of being terminated because of his successful completion of our facilitation process and his SDMA. After viewing the video, one participant left the session enthusiastically commenting how glad he was to have learned of an alternative that not only might avoid guardianship for people with I/DD, but that would allow them to live inclusive lives "with the dignity everyone deserves."

THANKS TO THE JUDICIAL INSTITUTE FOR RECOGNIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF SDM AND THE SURROGATES WHO ARE MAKING IT A REALITY FOR SO MANY!