

N.C. Innocence Inquiry Commission Announces New Leadership.



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission Announces New Leadership

The changes are the result of the expiration of terms and vacancies.

RALEIGH — The [North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission](#) announced some changes in leadership today. Chief Justice Paul Newby appointed [Brunswick County Senior Resident Superior Court Judge Jason Disbrow](#) as chairman of the Commission Effective January 1. Judge Disbrow replaces Johnston County Senior Resident Superior Court Judge Thomas H. Lock whose second term expired.



Judge Laura Pierro will take over the role of executive director of the Commission effective April 1. Judge Pierro will fill the vacancy left by former executive director Lindsey Guice Smith who left to pursue other career opportunities. Judge Disbrow appointed current [Associate Director Catherine Matoian](#) to serve as interim executive director effective January 1, 2024. Generally, the executive director manages staff and contracts for services as necessary to conduct full investigations into claims of factual innocence and assists the Commission in the performance of its duties.

"I am proud and humbled to serve as the next executive director of the North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission," said Judge Pierro. "Having spent the last 25 years pursuing justice while abiding due process, I am cognizant that there is no greater injustice than someone who has been wrongfully convicted. I am therefore prepared to work diligently in this new role and embrace any challenges that lie ahead."

Judge Pierro earned two Bachelor of Arts degrees in Linguistics and Spanish from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and a Juris Doctor from Wake Forest University School of Law. She began her legal career as a law clerk to three criminal judges of the superior court of New Jersey, Monmouth Vicinage and the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office. Pierro was then hired by the Ocean County Prosecutor's Office in Toms River, New Jersey, where she spent the next 20 years serving in various roles from assistant prosecutor in the grand jury, juvenile and trial sections, to director of the Special Victims' Unit, trial team leader, chief of the trial section and ultimately the deputy executive prosecutor in charge of all litigation.

Judge Pierro successfully litigated several high-profile cases including the prosecution of a prominent religious figure for child sexual abuse that garnered national and international attention and a paroled sex offender for whom a life sentence was sought for the first time in a non-homicide case in the county's history. She also recorded multiple convictions on several other homicide, violent crimes, and public corruption cases.

Pierro was born in Buffalo, New York and returned to her home state when she was appointed to the bench as a United States immigration judge. After serving in Manhattan, she then transferred to one of the Immigration Courts in New Jersey before electing to leave the bench to become the executive director of the North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission.

About North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission

The North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission is a state agency charged with investigating post-conviction claims of factual innocence. The agency was created by the General Assembly in 2006 and began operations in 2007. The Commission is the first and only of its kind in the country. Since 2007, over 3,600 claims have been submitted and reviewed by the Commission. The Commission has held 19 hearings. Fifteen individuals have been exonerated as a result of the Commission's investigations.

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About North Carolina Judicial Branch

The [North Carolina Judicial Branch](#) is an equal and distinctively separate branch and core function of government. More than 7,000 Judicial Branch employees statewide administer justice in courthouses in North Carolina's 100 counties. The [Judicial Branch budget for FY 2021-22](#) was \$672.4M, 86.2% of which is used to pay salaries and the remaining 13.8% is used for operations. The Judicial Branch receives only 2.59% of the overall State budget.

About North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts

The North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC) is the administrative agency for the [North Carolina Judicial Branch](#), providing

administrative services to help the North Carolina court system operate more efficiently and effectively, taking into account each courthouse's diverse needs, caseloads, and available resources.

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