



Andrew
Thomas
Peacebuilder
Award

30TH
ANNIVERSARY

2026 Annual Conference

Rooted in Peace:
One Tree, Many Branches

October 8 **Virtual** | October 9 **Hybrid** - The Desmond Hotel, Albany



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One Tree, Many Branches.

Dear Colleagues,

It is with great pride and gratitude that I welcome you to the New York State Dispute Resolution Association's 2026 Annual Conference. This year's gathering is a particularly meaningful one — we come together to mark not one but three significant milestones in the life of our organization and the broader dispute resolution community.

We are proud to celebrate the **30th Anniversary of the Andrew Thomas PeaceBuilder Award**, a recognition that for three decades has honored individuals and organizations whose leadership, vision, and unwavering commitment have advanced the principles of peacebuilding, collaboration, and constructive conflict resolution throughout New York and beyond. This year, we are pleased to present the Award to **The Maryland Judiciary's Mediation and Conflict Resolution Office (MACRO)** — a worthy recipient whose work reflects the very best of what this recognition stands for.

We also mark **thirty years of partnership** between NYSDRA, our statewide network of Community Dispute Resolution Centers, and the New York State Office of the Attorney General in administering New York's Lemon Law Arbitration Program — a collaboration that has served consumers in all 62 counties and demonstrated what is possible when community-based dispute resolution operates at scale.

And we are excited to formally launch the **Lawrence H. Cooke Dispute Resolution Legacy Fund** — NYSDRA's inaugural endowment, created to honor the legacy of Chief Judge Lawrence H. Cooke and to provide lasting support for community dispute resolution throughout New York State for generations to come. All of this unfolds under our conference theme, *"Rooted in Peace: One Tree, Many Branches"* — a reminder that the work of peacebuilding continues to grow and flourish through the dedication of mediators, facilitators, educators, advocates, and community leaders. Like the branches of a strong tree, our diverse approaches and perspectives are united by a common purpose: creating opportunities for understanding, resolving conflict constructively, and fostering stronger relationships.

May this conference renew our shared commitment to those values and inspire us to keep cultivating a future rooted in peace.

With appreciation and excitement for what lies ahead,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Theresa Hobbs".

Executive Director
New York State Dispute Resolution Association

Honoring Four Decades of Impact: The History of NYSDRA

New York State was among the earliest leaders in the community dispute resolution movement. When Chief Judge Lawrence H. Cooke championed landmark bipartisan legislation in 1981 creating the Community Dispute Resolution Centers Program (CDRCP) as part of the Unified Court System, New York became the first state in the country to establish a statewide program of community dispute resolution centers. By 1987, all sixty-two counties were served, organized through thirty-two contract agencies spanning single-county nonprofits, regional multi-county centers, and community umbrella organizations.

As the CDRC network took root, center directors began meeting informally, sharing experiences, and developing a common professional identity. The concept of a statewide association emerged organically from those conversations as a vehicle to represent the CDRCs' collective interests, amplify their voice, and advocate on behalf of community mediation in New York State. The first officers were elected on May 29, 1984, with Andrew Thomas — then director of the Center for Dispute Settlement in Rochester — serving as founding President. The NYS Association of Community Dispute Resolution Centers, later renamed the New York State Dispute Resolution Association (NYSDRA), was formally established as a membership organization in 1985.

From its earliest days, NYSDRA served a function that the New York State Unified Court System, as a branch of state government, was not positioned to fill: because state law prohibits the Judicial Branch from directly funding programs in the Executive Branch, NYSDRA became the essential intermediary through which state agencies could contract for dispute resolution services — with local CDRCs delivering services under subcontract. NYSDRA's first contract was executed in 1987 with the NYS Department of Housing and Community Renewal for a Mobile Home Mediation Program, and its first Executive Director, Christopher Owens, established the Albany office in 1989.

Over the decades that followed, NYSDRA's programs expanded to include Special Education Mediation, Lemon Law Arbitration, Agricultural Mediation, AmeriCorps, and more. In 1996, membership expanded beyond CDRCs to include individual practitioners, reflecting the growing breadth of the ADR field.

Today, NYSDRA serves as the statewide backbone organization for New York's CDRCs, collectively reaching approximately 70,000 New Yorkers each year across all sixty-two counties. NYSDRA advocates before the judiciary, the legislature, and state agencies on behalf of the network; administers contracts and sub-grants; provides training, professional development, and public awareness programs; and hosts this annual conference — the field's signature gathering for practitioners, CDRC staff, volunteers, and partners. In 2026, the conference marks the 30th anniversary of the PeaceBuilder Award, first presented in 1996.

Guided by this year's theme, **Rooted in Peace: One Tree, Many Branches**, we honor the strong foundation laid by those who came before us while celebrating the many branches of our work that continue to grow and serve communities across the state.

DAY ONE VIRTUAL
CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

At a
Glance

Thursday,
October 8

8:30 - 8:45 AM
WELCOME TO OUR ANNUAL CONFERENCE
Theresa Hobbs, J.D., MBA, LPEC, NYSDRA Executive Director

9:00 - 10:00 AM
KEYNOTE ADDRESS
**What the Machine Can't Mediate:
The Human Root of Dispute Resolution
in a Founding Moment (CLE)**
Susan Guthrie, Esq.,

10:15 - 11:15 AM
CONCURRENT SESSIONS

- Gen Z at the Table: Rethinking Engagement, Leadership, & Service
- The Performing Arts as a Useful Tool in Dispute Resolution Across Cultures (CLE)
- Navigating Mediation Rosters: A Practitioner's Guide (CLE)
- Rooted in Well-Being: Practitioner Sustainability as a Foundation for Peacebuilding Work

11:30 AM - 12:30 PM
CONCURRENT SESSIONS

- From Seed to Sapling: Growing Youth Leadership in Peacebuilding
- Peacebuilding Under Pressure: Conflict Resolution in the Hasidic Jewish Community
- Supporting Self-Determination Through Deep Listening (CLE)
- The Tree That Took Hold: Challenges, Growth, and Renewal in the First 25 Years of the Attorney-Client Fee Dispute Resolution Program (CLE)

12:30 - 12:45 PM
The Promise Endures: Honoring Robert A. Baruch Bush
Presented by Leonard L. Riskin, J.D., LL.M

12:45 - 1:30 PM
VIRTUAL LUNCH
A Small Dialogue About Meaningful Moments
John Sarrouf, M.S., Co-Executive Director, Essential Partners

1:45 - 2:45 PM
CONCURRENT SESSIONS

- Improv is the Gym - Exercising Your Awareness and Connection
- Conflict Competency: Coaching, Communication, and Growth in ADR Practice
- Hearing the Child's Voice: Child-Centered Approaches to Family Mediation
- Unconscious Bias in ADR: Ethical Considerations for Neutrals (CLE)

3:00 - 4:00 PM
CONCURRENT SESSIONS

- The Undiscovered Country: Social Media, Conflict and Conflict Management
- The Friendship Bench Model: Community-led Mental Health and Peacebuilding (CLE)
- Building Your Future in ADR: Career Insights from the Field (CLE)
- Reflective Practice as Professional Discipline: Mediators Examining their Own Biases, Blind Spots, and Growth Edges

4:15 - 5:15 PM
CONCURRENT SESSIONS

- Building Cultural Flexibility to Negotiate and Mediate in Diverse Settings (CLE)
- Exploring the Parallels Between Transformative Mediation and Donna Hicks' Essential Elements of Dignity
- From Settlement to Signature: Writing Mediation Agreements
- AI in ADR: Opportunities, Cautions, and the Human Role in Dispute Resolution (CLE)

5:15 - 5:30 PM
CLOSING REMARKS
Shira May, Ph.D., NYSDRA Board President

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Thursday, October 8



Theresa Hobbs, J.D., MBA, LPEC



Susan Guthrie, Esq.

8:30 - 8:45 AM
WELCOME TO OUR ANNUAL CONFERENCE
Theresa Hobbs, J.D., MBA, LPEC NYSDRA Executive Director

9:00 - 10:00 AM
KEYNOTE ADDRESS
What the Machine Can't Mediate: The Human Root of Dispute Resolution in a Founding Moment (CLE)
Susan Guthrie, Esq., Nationally Recognized Mediator & Attorney
Guthrie Consulting & Media

In this opening keynote, Susan Guthrie explores how AI and generational change are reshaping dispute resolution. Drawing on community mediation, emerging AI governance, and access-to-justice principles, she examines what technology can extend, what it must never replace, and why mediators have a critical role in shaping the field's future.

10:15 - 11:15 AM
CONCURRENT SESSIONS
Gen Z at the Table: Rethinking Engagement, Leadership, and Service
Mallory Panuelo, CVA

Drawing on research and her experience as a Gen Z leader, Mallory Panuelo explores how expectations around trust, leadership, flexibility, and impact are reshaping civic engagement. Participants will learn how service and volunteer programs can create more relevant opportunities that empower young people as leaders and decision-makers.

The Performing Arts as a Useful Tool in Dispute Resolution Across Cultures (CLE)
Robyn Weisman, Esq., L.L.M

This session explores how theater, storytelling, music, and dance can support peacebuilding, intercultural dialogue, and dispute resolution. Through real-world examples, participants will learn practical, culturally grounded ways to use the performing arts to foster empathy, understanding, reconciliation, and community engagement.

Navigating Mediation Rosters: A Practitioner's Guide (CLE)
Krysta Hartley, Esq. & Bridget O'Connell, Esq.

This session offers a practical overview of mediation rosters within the New York State Unified Court System. Participants will learn how rosters work, how neutrals are selected, qualification and training requirements, and the role of ADR Coordinators, with updates from the Division of ADR and an open Q&A.

Rooted in Well-Being: Practitioner Sustainability as a Foundation for Peacebuilding Work
Marissa Badgley, MSW

This session explores practitioner well-being as an essential part of sustainable peacebuilding. Participants will examine burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma while challenging narratives of self-sacrifice and considering more sustainable approaches to conflict resolution work.



Mallory Panuelo, CVA



Robyn Weisman, Esq., L.L.M



Krysta Hartley, Esq.
& Bridget O'Connell, Esq.



Marissa Badgley, MSW

11:30 AM - 12:30 PM
CONCURRENT SESSIONS

From Seed to Sapling: Growing Youth Leadership in Peacebuilding
Jessica Laus

Created in response to persistent educational segregation in New Jersey, Leadership for Educational Liberation is a paid program for youth ages 15–24. Through restorative circles and workshops, participants build skills in justice, nonviolence, advocacy, organizing, and storytelling while building community across high school and university students.

Peacebuilding Under Pressure: Conflict Resolution in the Hasidic Jewish Community
Michael Amo

Drawing on conflicts involving the Hasidic Jewish community of Kiryas Joel, this session explores dispute resolution amid political, religious, and cultural tensions. Participants will examine how fear, bias, local politics, and municipal dynamics can complicate resolution, and learn practical strategies for moving conflicts from entrenched positions toward shared interests.

Supporting Self-Determination Through Deep Listening (CLE)
Hannah Diamond, Esq., & Kim Pesenti, M.A.

This session offers a practical overview of mediation rosters within the New York State Unified Court System, including how neutrals are selected, Part 146 qualifications, training requirements, application review, and the role of ADR Coordinators. Participants will gain a clearer understanding of roster processes, requirements, and statewide ADR resources, with time for questions and real-world challenges.

The Tree That Took Hold: Challenges, Growth, and Renewal in the First 25 Years of the Attorney-Client Fee Dispute Resolution Program (CLE)

Federica Romanelli & Jeremy Zeliger, Esq.

This session reflects on 25 years of the Attorney Client Fee Dispute Resolution Program and its role in advancing fairness, trust, and access to justice. Participants will explore lessons learned, challenges overcome, and how the Program has expanded pathways into ADR while building a stable and trusted statewide initiative.

12:30 - 12:45 PM

The Promise Endures: Honoring Robert A. Baruch Bush
Presented by Leonard L. Riskin, J.D., LL.M

As part of the 2026 NYSDRA Annual Conference, we will honor the life and legacy of Robert A. Baruch Bush, who passed away on February 27, 2026. A pioneering scholar and educator, Baruch was a principal architect of transformative mediation whose work shaped conflict resolution around the world.

The remembrance will include a special virtual tribute from Leonard L. Riskin, J.D., LL.M., Baruch’s longtime friend and colleague, who will share personal memories and reflections on Baruch’s contributions and legacy. Baruch’s scholarship, mentorship, and commitment to human dignity continue to influence generations of mediators, educators, and practitioners. We are honored to remember his remarkable contributions and the friend, colleague, and human being behind them.

12:45 - 1:30 PM
VIRTUAL LUNCH

A Small Dialogue About Meaningful Moments
John Sarrouf, M.S., Co-Executive Director, Essential Partners

Essential Partners Co-Executive Director John Sarrouf will lead a brief exercise demonstrating how Reflective Structured Dialogue™ can deepen mutual understanding and ground perspectives in lived experience. This casual, bring-your-lunch virtual session offers practical strategies for dispute resolution professionals, with no preparation required.

1:45 - 2:45 PM
CONCURRENT SESSIONS

Improv is the Gym - Exercising Your Awareness and Connection
Kat Koppett, M.A.

This interactive session uses improvisation to strengthen listening in high-pressure situations. Through practical exercises, participants will learn to notice needs, values, emotions, and their environment, building greater curiosity, connection, and presence.

Conflict Competency: Coaching, Communication, and Growth in ADR Practice
Angela Nelson, J.D., Dr.PH

This interactive workshop explores how stress, triggers, and communication patterns shape high-conflict situations. Participants will practice strategies to manage escalation, stay present under pressure, and build resilience for sustainable ADR practice.

Hearing the Child's Voice: Child-Centered Approaches to Family Mediation
Connie Fraser

This interactive session explores child-centered mediation during separation and divorce. Participants will learn how to give children a voice without burdening them with adult decisions, and use practical strategies to keep parents focused on their children’s needs.

Unconscious Bias in ADR: Ethical Considerations for Neutrals (CLE)
Theodore Cheng, Esq.

This interactive program explores how unconscious bias can affect decision-making and fairness in ADR proceedings. Participants will examine biases that can arise between counsel, during neutral selection, and between counsel and neutrals, and learn practical techniques for recognizing and minimizing bias to support fairer, more effective dispute resolution.

3:00 - 4:00 PM
CONCURRENT SESSIONS

The Undiscovered Country: Social Media, Conflict and Conflict Management
Tricia S. Jones, Ph.D.

This session explores how social media, AI, and communication technology are reshaping conflict and ADR practice. Participants will examine their effects on communication, empathy, relationships, and conflict escalation, while exploring emerging uses of AI and online dispute resolution. The session offers practical tools for helping clients navigate the growing role of media and technology in conflict.

The Friendship Bench Model: Community-led Mental Health and Peacebuilding (CLE)
Nick Schmitt, Esq. & Ahmed Rodriguez

Originating in Zimbabwe, the Friendship Bench model trains community members to provide basic mental health support. This session explores CMS’s Queensbridge Houses pilot, how the model works, and its potential to expand access to care, reduce conflict, and build stronger communities.

Building Your Future in ADR: Career Insights from the Field (CLE)

Timothy Lyon, Dr. Maria Volpe, Hon. Jackie A. Brillling, Bobbie Dillon, M.S., (facilitator), Dr. Debra Dupree, PsyD, Harold Coleman, Esq., & Jeffrey Zaino, Esq.

What does it take to build a sustainable career in ADR? Six practitioners from across mediation, arbitration, community dispute resolution, law, education, and organizational leadership share practical guidance and lessons from their own careers. The panel will explore professional identity, specialization, provider rosters, mentorship, networking, volunteerism, marketing, and the many paths to building a meaningful ADR practice.

Reflective Practice as Professional Discipline: Mediators Examining Their Own Biases, Blind Spots, and Growth Edges

Karen Carroll, Esq.

This session gives mediators practical tools to identify and challenge bias in their work. Participants will explore how personal experience, culture, communication styles, values, and beliefs can shape mediation, and learn approaches to reflection, journaling, and group practice that support ethical, culturally competent mediation.



Jessica Laus



Michael Amo



Hannah Diamond, Esq., & Kim Pesenti, M.A.



Federica Romanelli & Jeremy Zeliger, Esq.



Robert A. Baruch Bush



Leonard L. Riskin, J.D., LL.M



John Sarrouf, M.S.



Kat Koppett, M.A.



Angela Nelson, J.D., Dr.PH



Connie Fraser



Theodore Cheng, Esq.



Tricia S. Jones, Ph.D.



Nick Schmitt, Esq. & Ahmed Rodriguez



Timothy Lyon, Dr. Maria Volpe, Hon. Jackie A. Brillling, Bobbie Dillon, M.S., (facilitator), Dr. Debra Dupree, PsyD, Harold Coleman, Esq., & Jeffrey Zaino, Esq.



Karen Carroll, Esq.



Lisa Pomerantz, Esq.



Ed Watt



Shari Greenleaf, J.D.



Alexander Paykin, Esq., Renee Jackson, Esq., Morgan Tregenza, Esq. & Jim Melamed, J.D.



Shira May, Ph.D.

4:15 - 5:15 PM
CONCURRENT SESSIONS

Building Cultural Flexibility to Negotiate and Mediate in Diverse Settings (CLE)

Lisa Pomerantz, Esq.

This program explores cultural flexibility in mediation and how cultural differences shape the way conflict is experienced, expressed, and resolved. Participants will learn to recognize and adapt to different cultural dimensions and prepare more effectively for cross-cultural negotiations and mediations.

Exploring the Parallels Between Transformative Mediation and Donna Hicks' Essential Elements of Dignity

Ed Watt

This workshop explores the intersection of Transformative Mediation and Donna Hicks' Ten Essential Elements of Dignity. Participants will examine how dignity violations can escalate conflict and how empowerment, recognition, agency, and respect can support meaningful change. The session offers practical insight into integrating dignity principles into mediation, interactions, and relational repair.

From Settlement to Signature: Writing Mediation Agreements

Shari Greenleaf, J.D.

This practical workshop focuses on writing clear, effective mediation agreements. Through peer engagement and concrete tips, participants will explore how to prepare for agreement writing, draft strong agreements, avoid common mistakes, and manage final details and signatures.

AI in ADR: Opportunities, Cautions, and the Human Role in Dispute Resolution (CLE)

Alexander Paykin, Esq., Renee Jackson, Esq., Morgan Tregenza, Esq. & Jim Melamed, J.D.

This session explores the growing role of AI in mediation, arbitration, negotiation, and other ADR processes. Participants will examine practical uses for AI alongside concerns around accuracy, bias, privacy, ethics, and overreliance on technology, with a focus on using AI responsibly while preserving the judgment, trust, and human connection central to effective dispute resolution.

5:15 - 5:30 PM
CLOSING REMARKS

Shira May, Ph.D., NYSDRA Board President

DAY TWO HYBRID
CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

At a
Glance

Friday
October 9

Crowne Plaza Albany
The Desmond Hotel

Sessions marked with 🌐 offer hybrid attendance (in-person + virtual).

Sessions marked with 🏠 are in-person only.

8:30 - 9:30 AM

Registration & Networking Breakfast 🏠

Light refreshments and informal networking with colleagues across sectors.

Location: Fort Orange Courtyard

9:45 - 10:45 AM

KEYNOTE ADDRESS 🌐

Managing Differences in a Polarized World

William J. Doherty, Ph.D., Co-Founder, Braver Angels

Location: Town Hall

11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Practical Strategies to Move from Polarization to Connection 🌐

William J. Doherty, Ph.D., Co-Founder, Braver Angels

Location: High Street Ballroom

12:00 - 2:00 PM

Celebration Luncheon & Andrew Thomas PeaceBuilder Award Presentation 🌐

Honoring The Maryland Judiciary's Mediation and Conflict Resolution Office (MACRO)

Location: Fort Orange Ballroom | Virtual broadcast begins at 12:30PM

2:15 - 3:15 PM

The Imperative to Use All Available Talent in ADR Through Intentional Neutral Selection 🌐

J. Christopher Heagarty, Esq. & Homer LaRue, J.D., CEO & Co-Chair, Ray Corollary Institute

Location: Town Hall

3:30 - 4:30 PM

Interactive Session & Cocktail Reception 🏠

Interact with the day's keynote speaker and session presenters, ask questions, hear stories & enjoy a cocktail.

Location: High Street Ballroom



CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Friday, October 9

Crowne Plaza Albany - The Desmond Hotel



8:30 - 9:30 AM

REGISTRATION & NETWORKING BREAKFAST 🍴

Light refreshments and informal networking with colleagues across sectors.

Location: Fort Orange Courtyard



William J. Doherty, Ph.D.,
Co-Founder, Braver Angels

9:45 - 10:45 AM

KEYNOTE ADDRESS 🌐

Managing Differences in a Polarized World

William J. Doherty, Ph.D., Co-Founder, Braver Angels

Location: Town Hall

This session explores the causes and effects of political polarization and how conflict resolution professionals can navigate an increasingly divided environment. Participants will reflect on the forces driving polarization and examine Braver Angels' approach to strengthening relationships across political divides.



William J. Doherty, Ph.D.,
Co-Founder, Braver Angels

11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Practical Strategies to Move from Polarization to Connection 🌐

William J. Doherty, Ph.D., Co-Founder, Braver Angels

Location: High Street Ballroom

After his keynote, Bill Doherty will engage participants in conversation about how they see the effects of polarization in their work and social worlds, and offer tools for handling the challenges of engaging constructively during difficult conversations.



Andrew Thomas, President, ALT
Associates Conflict Management
& Lou Gieszl, Assistant State Court
Administrator for Programs at
Maryland Judiciary

12:00 - 2:00 PM

Celebration Luncheon & Andrew Thomas PeaceBuilder Award 🌐

Honoring the 2026 Andrew Thomas PeaceBuilder Award Recipient

Location: Fort Orange Ballroom | Virtual broadcast begins at 12:30 PM

For 30 years, the Andrew Thomas PeaceBuilder Award has recognized outstanding contributions to mediation, conflict resolution, and peaceful communities. This year, Andrew Thomas will join NYSDRA in Albany to present the anniversary award to the Maryland Mediation and Conflict Resolution Office (MACRO) for its leadership and lasting impact on ADR.



Homer LaRue, J.D. &
J. Christopher Heagarty, Esq.

2:15 - 3:15 PM

The Imperative to Use All Available Talent in ADR Through
Intentional Neutral Selection 🌐

J. Christopher Heagarty, Esq., and Homer LaRue, J.D.

Location: Town Hall

Chris Heagarty interviews Prof. Homer LaRue about lessons from his career as an arbitrator, developing the next generation of ADR professionals, and removing systemic barriers to create more equitable opportunities in arbitrator development and selection.



3:30 - 4:30 PM

COCKTAIL RECEPTION 🍷

Interact with the day's keynote speaker and session presenters, ask questions, hear stories & enjoy a cocktail.

Location: High Street Ballroom

The Promise Endures:
Honoring the Life & Career
of Robert A. Baruch Bush

Robert A. Baruch Bush believed that mediation was about far more than resolving disputes. Through his groundbreaking work, The Promise of Mediation, he challenged us to see conflict not simply as a problem to be solved, but as an opportunity for growth, understanding, and human connection.

His vision transformed the field of mediation. He taught that the greatest success of mediation is not found in the agreements it produces, but in its ability to help people rediscover their own voice while recognizing the dignity and humanity of others. These principles of empowerment have inspired generations of mediators and continue to shape the practice of conflict resolution around the world.

Baruch's influence extended well beyond his scholarship. As a teacher, mentor, and colleague, he encouraged others to approach conflict with curiosity, compassion, and confidence in people's capacity to transform difficult interactions. His work reminded us that even in our deepest disagreements, there is always the possibility of understanding.

His legacy lives on in every mediator who listens with intention, every conversation that restores respect, and every moment when people choose dialogue over division. The promise he articulated



Robert A. Baruch Bush (1948 - 2026)

more than three decades ago continues to guide our profession and inspire those committed to building stronger relationships and more peaceful communities.

As we remember Robert A. Baruch Bush, we celebrate not only an extraordinary scholar, but a visionary whose faith in the transformative power of human connection changed the practice of mediation forever.

May we honor his memory by continuing to fulfill the promise he so beautifully described—helping people find their voice, recognize one another's humanity, and discover that transformation is always possible.

Andrew
Thomas
Peacebuilder
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30TH
ANNIVERSARY

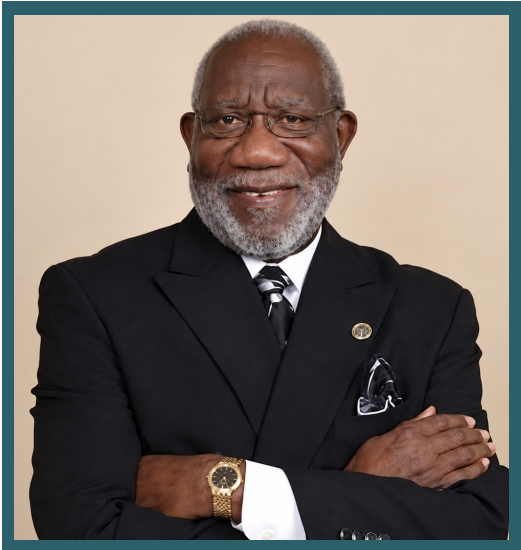
Celebrating 30 years of the Andrew Thomas PeaceBuilder Award

As NYSDRA gathers under the theme “Rooted in Peace: One Tree, Many Branches,” we proudly celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Andrew Thomas PeaceBuilder Award, recognizing the individuals and organizations whose leadership and service have strengthened the field of dispute resolution and inspired a more peaceful future.

Established in 1996, the award was created in honor of its inaugural recipient, Tekaronianeken Jake Swamp, Sub-chief of the Wolf Clan of the Mohawk Nation and Director of the Tree of Peace Society. Through his lifelong work promoting the teachings of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and planting Trees of Peace around the world, Chief Swamp demonstrated that peace grows through understanding, respect, and unity.

In 1998, the award was renamed in honor of Andrew Thomas, NYSDRA's founding President, whose extraordinary leadership, commitment to social justice, and dedication to training generations of mediators helped shape the dispute resolution profession throughout New York State and beyond.

For three decades, the Andrew Thomas PeaceBuilder Award has reflected the enduring values of its namesakes. Like the Tree of Peace, its roots run deep, while its branches continue to grow through the work of each honoree—extending the reach of dialogue, collaboration, and peacebuilding into communities across our state and beyond.



Andrew Thomas PeaceBuilder Award Past Recipients

- Sarah Rudgers-Tysz - 2024
- Dominick J. Brancato - 2020
- Susan Herman - 2017
- Laura and Richard Chasin - 2015
- Professor Hal Abramson - 2013
- Charlie Pillsbury - 2011
- David Kaczynski - 2010
- Marvin E. Johnson - 2009
- Marc Gopin - 2008
- Louise Diamond - 2007
- Robert Baruch Bush and Joseph Folger - 2006
- Arun Gandhi - 2005
- Gillian Martin Sorenson - 2004
- Dr. Howard Zehr - 2003
- John Wallach - 2002
- The Honorable Ann T. Pfau - 2001
- Lt. Governor Mary O. Donohue - 2000
- Andrew Thomas (pictured above) - 1998
- Dr. Thomas F. Christian - 1997
- Chief Jake Swamp - 1996

Honoring a Champion of Conflict Resolution

October 9, 2026 · The Desmond Hotel, Albany, NY

NYSDRA is honored to present the 2026 Andrew Thomas PeaceBuilder Award to the Maryland Judiciary's Mediation and Conflict Resolution Office (MACRO) in recognition of its exceptional and sustained leadership in advancing alternative dispute resolution as a cornerstone of justice in Maryland and as an inspiration to the field nationwide.



The MACRO Team
Back row (left to right): Cheryl Jackson, Nick White, Lisa Mannisi, Monica Villarreal, Cynthia Jurrius, Alecia Parker, Tara Cuffia.
Front row (left to right): Judy Muller, Tisha McDuffie, Jenn Williams.

Note: Lou Gieszl, who will accept this award on behalf of MACRO, is not pictured above.

Since its founding, MACRO has worked with vision and dedication to ensure that mediation and conflict resolution are not merely available — but embraced — throughout the Maryland court system and the communities it serves. Through its commitment to quality practice, equitable access, and collaborative partnership, MACRO has built a statewide ADR infrastructure that reflects the very ideals this award was established to honor.

MACRO's work resonates deeply with NYSDRA's own mission, and the New York State dispute resolution community is proud to celebrate all that MACRO has built — a statewide ADR infrastructure rooted in the belief that when people have access to peaceful, constructive means of resolving conflict, whole communities are strengthened.



MACRO
MEDIATION AND CONFLICT
RESOLUTION OFFICE

The Lawrence H. Cooke Dispute Resolution Legacy Fund

HONORING A LEGACY. INVESTING IN THE FUTURE.



Chief Judge Lawrence H. Cooke (1914 - 2000)

Chief Judge Lawrence H. Cooke believed deeply in the dignity and worth of every person who walks through the courthouse door. His leadership helped advance a vision of justice in which people have meaningful opportunities to resolve conflict outside the traditional courtroom—through mediation, dialogue, and other forms of alternative dispute resolution.

During our 2026 Annual Conference, NYSDRA will launch the Lawrence H. Cooke Dispute Resolution Legacy Fund, a permanent endowment created to carry that vision forward and strengthen community-based dispute resolution throughout New York State.

With a goal of raising \$1.5 million over the next three years, the Legacy Fund represents an investment in the future of New York’s statewide network of Community Dispute Resolution Centers (CDRCs). These centers bring mediation, restorative practices, and other conflict resolution services directly to individuals, families, and communities—helping ensure that financial circumstances do not stand in the way of access to these vital resources. By helping people address disputes early and constructively, community-based mediation reduces the need for court intervention — helping relieve the pressure on an already overburdened court system.

Leading this effort as Campaign Chair is the Honorable Lawrence K. Marks, former Chief Administrative Judge of the New York State Unified Court System and a longtime champion of access



Lauren Opie and Lawrence H. Cooke II, daughter and grandson of the late Chief Judge Lawrence H. Cooke

to justice and alternative dispute resolution. Judge Marks’s leadership reflects the important connection between New York’s courts and its community dispute resolution network—and a shared commitment to ensuring that these services remain strong and accessible for generations to come.

The Legacy Fund will provide a lasting source of support for the CDRC network while creating opportunities to strengthen and expand programs, deepen connections between centers and the courts and communities they serve, and respond to emerging needs across New York State.

Help Us Grow the Legacy

This conference marks an exciting beginning. By contributing to the Lawrence H. Cooke Dispute Resolution Legacy Fund, you become part of a statewide effort to honor an extraordinary legacy while investing in what comes next.

Our goal: \$1.5 million in three years.

Our purpose: lasting support for community dispute resolution across New York State.

Contributions may be made through traditional donations, gifts of stock, donor-advised funds, estate-planning gifts, qualified retirement-plan distributions, and year-end giving opportunities.

Together, we can honor Judge Cooke’s vision while strengthening a community-based system that helps New Yorkers resolve conflict earlier, preserves relationships, expands access to justice, and supports the effective work of our courts.

Thirty Years of Partnership: NYSDRA, the CDRCs, and New York State's Lemon Law Arbitration Program

New York enacted its New Car Lemon Law in 1983 and has since expanded consumer protections to cover used vehicles, motorcycles, motor homes, wheelchairs, self-propelled farm equipment, and leased-vehicle excess wear-and-tear disputes. At the heart of New York's approach is independent arbitration — a court alternative that gives consumers an accessible forum in which both parties can present testimony and evidence to an impartial arbitrator, helping individuals resolve conflicts while avoiding costly legal fees and lengthy court proceedings.

Since 1996, the Office of the Attorney General has partnered with NYSDRA to administer New York State's Lemon Law Arbitration Program, working in collaboration with the statewide network of Community Dispute Resolution Centers (CDRCs). Serving all 62 New York counties, the CDRCs are what make this program work at the community level: coordinating cases, scheduling hearings, maintaining case materials, and supporting the volunteer arbitrators who hear from the parties, weigh the evidence, and issue decisions.

When NYSDRA assumed administration in 1996, its statewide office organized specialized arbitration training while local centers integrated Lemon Law disputes into their community networks — pairing statewide administration with the accountability of local service delivery. Thirty years later, this long-standing collaboration among the Office of the Attorney General, NYSDRA, the CDRCs, and volunteer arbitrators continues to put the Lemon Law's protections into practice for New Yorkers across all 62 counties.



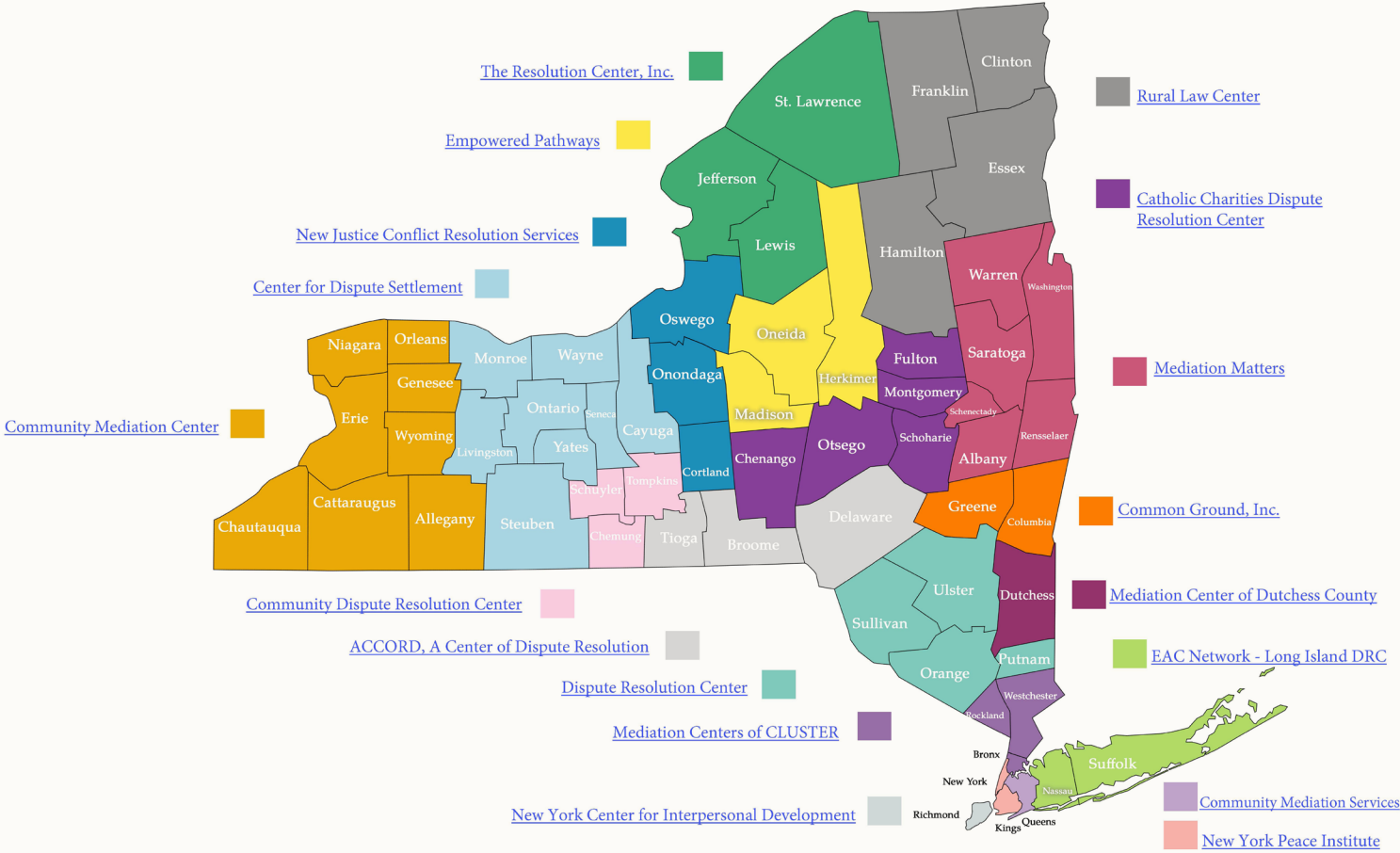
Lemon Law Case Intake Coordinator Kris Manzur and Attorney Melvin Goldberg, Esq., from the NYS Attorney General's office at NYSDRA's 2025 Annual Conference.

“Congrats and thanks to NYSDRA for its 30 years of service to New Yorkers and for the decades as the Administrator of the New York Attorney General’s Lemon Law programs!”

— *Melvin Goldberg, Esq.*

Thank You to Our Statewide Network of Community Dispute Resolution Centers

- ACCORD A Center for Dispute Resolution, Inc.
- Catholic Charities Dispute Resolution Center
 - Center for Dispute Settlement
- Common Ground Dispute Resolution Center, Inc.
 - Community Dispute Resolution Center, Inc.
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