

**Judge Rita Mella** has served in the Manhattan Surrogate's Court since January 2013. During her tenure, she has presided over more than 40,000 cases, guiding them to resolution through trials, decisions, orders, mediation, or settlement. Judge Mella has written thousands of decisions, many of which have been published in the Official Reporter and the New York Law Journal. Her rulings often address emerging legal issues and have influenced professional discourse and legal education, with some becoming part of law school curricula.

Before her election to the Surrogate's Court, Judge Mella served six years as a Civil Court Judge assigned to the Manhattan Criminal Court. She also worked as a Court Attorney in the Surrogate's, Supreme, Family, Criminal, and Civil courts.

The **Surrogate's Court** is a specialized court that handles the affairs of people who pass away, including matters involving wills, trusts, estates, adoptions, and guardianships. One of the busiest courts in the state, the New York County Surrogate's Court receives about 10,000 new cases each year. Given the substantial value of assets of many Manhattan residents, and the complexity of estate planning to protect those assets, the court is often presented with novel and challenging legal issues. At the same time, the court serves thousands of New Yorkers with modest estates—many of whom appear without legal representation.