

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NEW YORK CITY LAW DEPARTMENT OFFICE OF THE CORPORATION COUNSEL



As one of the oldest, most dynamic legal firms in the world, the New York City Law Department ranks among the City's largest law offices and is the country's largest municipal law office. From its modest origins, the Law Department – also called the Office of the Corporation Counsel – grew to meet a growing City's ever-evolving needs.

The Law Department's roots stem from an English institution known as the Recorder, an office established in New York City by Colonial Governor Thomas Dongan in 1683. The Recorder served as a combined political/legal counselor to the recently incorporated City, also called "the Corporation." By the early 19th century, the Recorder's legal business evolved beyond what one person could manage, and the City Council named additional attorneys to handle the work.

The attorneys oversaw the City's legal dealings. Counsels to the Corporation came and went, and the City's caseload shifted repeatedly from one law firm to another. This eventually proved unworkable, and the 1849 City Charter Revision established an independently elected chief executive officer, known as the Corporation Counsel, and a staff of five, known as the Law Department.

As the office grew, the Corporation Counsel became an important figure in City affairs. In 1856, Corporation Counsel Lorenzo Shephard filed an injunction against his boss, Tammany Hall Mayor Fernando Wood, to protect Central Park's development from unlawfully falling under Wood's control. This move gave the Corporation Counsel's Office an independent identity as a protector of New York City and its people.

Today, **Muriel Goode-Trufant**, as the 82nd Corporation Counsel, leads over 760 attorneys and 685 support professionals in 24 varied legal and non-legal divisions, and as New York City's chief attorney oversees a vast array of City cases while serving the public.

As part of its work, the Law Department handles many unique, complicated legal issues. The Law Department's "clients" include the City as a municipal corporation, the Mayor, the City Council, as well as the numerous City agencies and employees in all affirmative and defensive civil litigation

It also acts as the presentment agency in juvenile prosecutions in the New York Family Court, and through advising on legislative and transactional matters. Its work impacts nearly every day-to-day aspect of New York City, including education, housing, environmental protection, transportation, juvenile justice and civil rights, among others.

The New York City Law Department has had offices in many locations over the years, including City Hall. Today, it has its main office at 100 Church Street in lower Manhattan and offices in all five boroughs and in Kingston, New York.

LAW DEPARTMENT BY THE NUMBERS:

1683

The Recorder, an office established in Colonial New York City by British Governor Thomas Dongan, evolves into the modern day Law Department.

1849

New York City Charter Revision established an independently elected chief executive officer, known as the Corporation Coun-sel, and a staff of five, to be known as the Law Department.

FY 2024

Annual Budget is \$325.3 Million.

2025

The New York City Law Department employs approximately 1,445 employees: 760 Attorneys and 685 Support Professionals in 24 Legal and Support Divisions. Current case filings are about 70,000 in both Federal and State Courts.

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