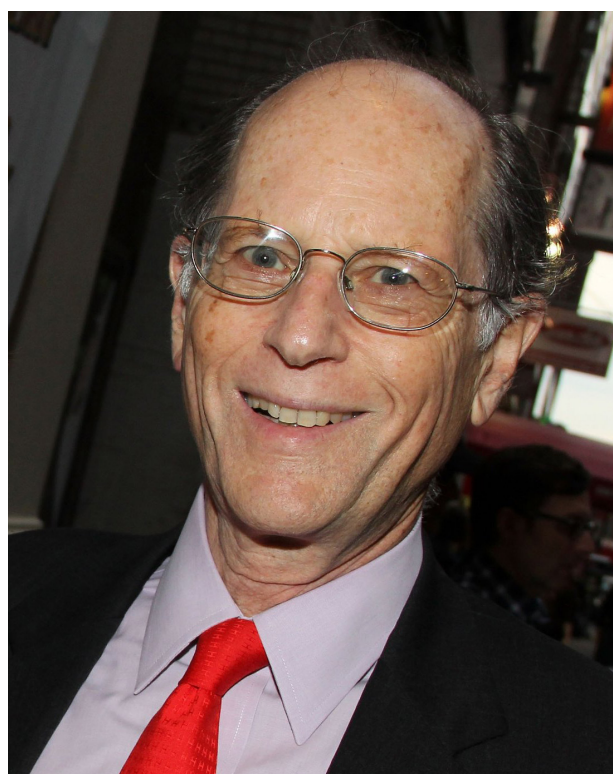


Court-Appointed Police Monitor Has Fought for City and Against It

BY J. DAVID GOODMAN | August 13, 2013



Peter L. Zimroth, a lawyer, has been named to be the court-appointed monitor overseeing changes to the New York Police Department's stop-and-frisk program. Photo Credit: Bruce Glikas/FilmMagic, via Getty Images

His name appears only a few times in more than 230 pages of judicial findings and court orders filed on Monday in the federal case over the New York Police Department's stop-and-frisk policies.

Yet those brief mentions of Peter L. Zimroth belie the outsize role that he will have in defining the future of street stops by police officers in the city, as he takes on the role of court-appointed monitor for the police.

For Mr. Zimroth, a 70-year-old former chief lawyer for the city and a current law firm partner, the role is just the latest challenge in a long and varied career that has seen him fighting both for local officials and against them.

"Peter is an extremely fair-minded person," said Frederick A. O. Schwarz Jr., who preceded Mr. Zimroth as the city's corporation counsel during the Koch administration. "He understands how government works. He also understands the importance of good policing and civil liberties."

Indeed, his selection appeared aimed at deflecting accusations of bias against the Police Department by the monitor, whose difficult task involves ensuring that stops would be conducted by officers in line with Monday's decision in the case of *Floyd v. the City of New York*.

Mr. Zimroth, a lifelong New Yorker, said on Monday that he was "honored" that the judge in the federal stop-and-frisk case, Shira A. Scheindlin, had selected him. He got her call about a week and a half ago, he said, met with the judge in her chambers and accepted.

"I have always loved public service," he said from a lakeside family cottage in New Hampshire. "It has been very important to me in my life."

Born on Jan. 11, 1943, Peter Lenard Zimroth, the son of a dry cleaner and a homemaker, grew up in Bensonhurst and Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn. Though he did not directly experience the horrors of the Holocaust, he said hearing stories as a young child of a Jewish family had a profound impact and still informed his legal work. "I vicariously lived

through that sort of vitriol that can be spewed at people," he said.

In particular, he said, it drove him to represent, pro bono, a Muslim congregation prevented from bringing a mosque to Bridgewater, N.J. "I felt really strongly that these were people who were doing nothing more than wanting to pray at a mosque," he said. "That's it. And they were faced with this incredible backlash and prejudice. I felt, why else am I a lawyer if not to help people like that?"

A graduate of Columbia College and Yale Law School, Mr. Zimroth quickly climbed to the heights of the legal profession, first as a clerk for a United States Court of Appeals judge in the District of Columbia and then for Justice Abe Fortas of the Supreme Court.

He became a professor at the New York University School of Law in 1970 and the next year represented David Durk, a police detective and whistle-blower against the department, in testimony before the Knapp Commission on police corruption. In 1975, he began working for the Manhattan district attorney, Robert M. Morgenthau, becoming his first deputy.

Mr. Zimroth went into private practice for several years but left in 1987 to become the city's top lawyer, where he grew close to Mayor Edward I. Koch and worked to reform the city's campaign finance system.

He said his work for the city gave him a "tremendous respect for the Police Department, not just the department in the abstract but for the people who serve the city and protect us."

But, he added, "at the same time, I have always believed that effective law enforcement is very important — it's crucial — but so is the need for law enforcement officials to act within the law and the Constitution. And I don't think they are in conflict."

An avid hiker and traveler, Mr. Zimroth is a partner in the New York office of Arnold & Porter L.L.P. and lives in a West End Avenue apartment with his wife, the actress Estelle Parsons. "Friends of mine have jokingly called me a theater groupie, following her all over," he said. (Ms. Parsons, 85, is currently rehearsing for a fall production in Washington.)

Mr. Zimroth said he goes into the position with the full knowledge of how it has been portrayed by the mayor and the police commissioner, who reiterated at a news conference on Monday their view that an outside monitor would confuse the Police Department's chain of command and possibly drive up crime.

The city's current top lawyer, Michael A. Cardozo, said on Monday that an appeal by the city would wait until "the monitor has entered an order that requires us to do something specifically."

Mr. Zimroth said it was too early to say what that order would be, but he said he would approach the role through the same frame he has applied throughout his career.

"I have really lived my professional and public life with the thought that public officials have to live within the law," he said. "And that does not necessarily mean that they're less effective. And I believe that now."