

[Click to print](#) or Select 'Print' in your browser menu to print this document.

Page printed from: <https://www.law.com/newyorklawjournal/2021/11/08/peter-zimroth-federal-monitor-who-oversaw-reforms-to-nypd-dies/>

## Peter Zimroth, Former Corporation Counsel Federal Monitor Who Oversaw Reforms to NYPD, Dies

Zimroth's funeral will be held at 11 a.m. Tuesday at the Plaza Jewish Community Chapel, 630 Amsterdam Ave. His burial will be held in Monroe, Connecticut.

By Andrew Denney | November 08, 2021



**Peter Zimroth. Photo: Rick Kopstein/ALM**

Peter Zimroth, a retired Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer partner who was appointed by a federal judge to oversee the reforms to the New York City Police Department's stop-and-frisk policies, has died after a battle with cancer. He was 78.

Born and raised in Brooklyn, Zimroth is a lifelong New Yorker and a 1966 Yale Law School graduate. While in law school, he worked as an editor-in-chief of the Yale Law Review.

Police accountability has long been a hallmark of Zimroth's career. In the early 1970s, he represented NYPD Detective David Durk, who joined whistleblower Frank Serpico to testify to the Knapp Commission on corruption within the department.

His representation of Durk was an early example of his good-government bona fides. In 2013, then-Gov. Andrew Cuomo appointed Zimroth to the Moreland Commission, which Cuomo ostensibly formed to investigate corruption in New York state government but made the controversial decision to pull the plug on the entity less than a year later.

"I really feel very strongly about using the law as an instrument for social good. That's why I became a lawyer," Zimroth told The New York Times (<https://www.nytimes.com/1987/01/03/nyregion/man-in-the-news-a-seasoned-counselor-peter-lenard-zimroth.html?src=pm>) in 1987.

Early in his career Zimroth was a professor at the New York University School of Law, where he later worked as an adjunct professor and director of its Center on Civil Justice.

Prior to joining the NYU Law faculty, Zimroth worked as a prosecutor in the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York. Later in his career, he joined Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau's office, where he worked his way up to the DA's first deputy.

Mayor Ed Koch appointed Zimroth as the city's corporation counsel in 1987, a post he held until 1989.

As the city's top lawyer, Zimroth helped reform campaign finance regulation, which he said opened the electoral process to a "broader spectrum of people—and I'm extremely proud of that," Zimroth told the Law Journal in 2014 (<https://www.law.com/newyorklawjournal/almID/1202672941939/peter-zimroth/>), when he was presented with its prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award.

Among the major cases that he faced during his tenure, Zimroth successfully defended the city's ordinance to require private clubs in the city to admit women and racial minorities before the U.S. Supreme Court.



Peter Zimroth, right, with former U.S. Vice President Al Gore in 2014. Photo: Rick Kopstein/ALM

Zimroth also led the city's legal fight to prevent the secession of Staten Island from New York City— a move that was overwhelmingly popular in the city's least-populous borough at the time. Then-Gov. Mario Cuomo signed legislation that would allow Staten Island to form a charter commission to study forming a new city, but in his last day in office Zimroth signed off on a lawsuit to block the legislation.

"Secession would be a staggering blow to the City," Zimroth wrote about the issue ([https://digitalcommons.nyls.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1498&context=nyls\\_law\\_review](https://digitalcommons.nyls.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1498&context=nyls_law_review)) in the Law Journal, for which he contributed columns throughout the years. "It would mean the loss of almost 400,000 New Yorkers, more people than live in Rochester and Albany combined; the loss of the borough with the highest percentage of single and two-family dwellings in its housing stock; and the loss of substantial revenues from property, sales and income taxes."

Also during his time as corporation counsel, he filed a brief with the New York State Court of Appeals that led to the inclusion of same-sex couples to the state's legal definition of a family. He also sued the federal government, alleging that the U.S. Census disproportionately undercounted New York's minorities.

"We are deeply saddened by the loss of our colleague and friend Peter Zimroth," New York City Corporation Counsel Georgia Pestana said in a statement issued Monday. "Peter was an exemplary and thoughtful leader who made enormous contributions to the people of this city. He was a dedicated and excellent corporation

counsel who always demonstrated a strong moral compass and commitment to furthering the interests of the city. He will be sorely missed.”

Zimroth was appointed to monitor the NYPD following now-retired Southern District of New York Shira Scheindlin’s landmark 2013 ruling (<https://www.law.com/newyorklawjournal/almID/1202614859678/judge-finds-nypd-stop-and-frisk-unconstitutional/>) that the department’s use of stop-and-frisk was unconstitutional, as it was being disproportionately used on nonwhite New Yorkers, and that changes to its policies were needed.

Deputy monitor Richard Jerome said that Zimroth was adept at finding common ground between the NYPD, the city’s Law Department and the plaintiffs groups in the stop-and-frisk litigation.

“As the federal monitor, Peter faithfully sought to inspire improvements in the New York City Police Department, build collaboration among the department, plaintiffs and the communities served, while affecting sustainable, positive changes in police practices,” Jerome said in a written statement on behalf of the monitor team. “It has been our privilege to have worked with him on this monitorship, making the city a safer, fairer and more equal place. He is remembered by members of the monitor team as a leader who not only brought together a diverse group of skilled and independent thinkers, but who also challenged each of us to consider all options in our recommendations and perspectives. We admired Peter as a leader and will miss him most as our dear friend.”

Jerome said that Southern District of New York Judge Analisa Torres, who presides over the (<https://www.law.com/newyorklawjournal/almID/1202659360946/parties-ask-judge-to-resolve-stopfrisk-motions/>) stop-and-frisk litigation, will need to appoint a new monitor to succeed Zimroth.

Zimroth continued working with Arnold & Porter as a senior partner for a few years after taking on the monitor role before his retirement.

“Peter was an extraordinary lawyer, teacher, colleague and friend,” Arnold & Porter chair Richard Alexander said in a statement to the Law Journal. “His life was one of dedication to his family, his clients and to the public good, and we mourn his passing.”

Zimroth is survived in death by his wife, actress Estelle Parsons, who won an Academy Award for her performance in “Bonnie and Clyde”; Zimroth’s son, Abraham Parsons Zimroth; and Parsons’ daughters, Martha Gehman and Abbie Gehman.

Zimroth’s funeral is set to be held at 11 a.m. Tuesday at the Plaza Jewish Community Chapel, 630 Amsterdam Ave. His burial will be held in Monroe, Connecticut.

---

**Copyright 2021. ALM Media Properties, LLC. All rights reserved.**