

VILCEK FOUNDATION

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Vilcek Foundation Awards the Vilcek Prize for Excellence in the Administration of Justice to the Honorable Robert A. Katzmann

Chief Judge Robert A. Katzmann is the recipient of the 2020 Vilcek Prize for Excellence in recognition of his outstanding career in public service and his commitment to broadening access to legal representation for immigrants in need.

New York, NY, February 3, 2020—The Vilcek Prize for Excellence in the Administration of Justice is awarded to Chief Judge Robert A. Katzmann of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit in recognition of his exemplary career in public service, as well as his commitment to broadening access to legal representation for immigrants in need.

The Vilcek Prize for Excellence is the newest addition to the Vilcek Foundation’s prize program, which recognizes and honors immigrant contributions to the arts, sciences, and humanities. Introduced in 2019, the Vilcek Prize for Excellence is awarded to immigrants who have had a significant impact on American society, or to individuals who are dedicated champions of immigrant causes. Candidates are chosen by Jan and Marica Vilcek—cofounders, chairman and vice chairman of the Vilcek Foundation, and approved by the foundation’s board. The recipient of the Vilcek Prize for Excellence receives a commemorative award and an unrestricted cash prize of \$100,000. In accepting the Vilcek Prize for Excellence, Judge Katzmann declined the cash prize. The Vilcek Foundation will honor Judge Katzmann’s request to donate the prize money to a not-for-profit organization that provides direct services to immigrants in need in the United States.

“We admire the leadership of Judge Katzmann, whose advocacy has rendered legal counsel accessible to immigrants seeking security and opportunity in the United States,” said Jan Vilcek, cofounder, chairman and CEO of the Vilcek Foundation. “It is especially befitting that we honor the work of Judge Katzmann this year, when political turmoil and global conflict challenge us to uphold values of equality and inclusion.”

Born to a father who fled Nazi Germany and a mother from an immigrant family, Judge Katzmann has long been aware of the role the courts play in the lives of immigrants, as well as the transformative effects of citizenship and legal status. Early in his judicial career, he observed the widespread lack of competent representation for non-citizens, especially among those in need, and its adverse impact on their cases. Judge Katzmann brought attention to the issue in a 2007 lecture to the New York City Bar Association, which inspired the formation of a Study Group on Immigrant Representation from which emanated several pathbreaking initiatives, including the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project—the first government-funded program to provide legal counsel to low-income persons in immigration detention. In 2014, Judge Katzmann spearheaded the creation of the Immigrant Justice Corps; the Immigrant Justice Corps, a not-for-profit organization, is the United States’ first fellowship program to train recent law school graduates to provide high-quality legal assistance to immigrants in need.

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Announcements have also been made of the recipients of the 2020 Vilcek Prizes in Literature and the Vilcek Prizes in Biomedical Science. All of the prizewinners will be celebrated and presented with their awards at the Vilcek Foundation Prizes Gala in New York in April 2020.

The Vilcek Foundation

The Vilcek Foundation was established in 2000 by Jan and Marica Vilcek, immigrants from the former Czechoslovakia. The mission of the foundation, to honor immigrant contributions to the United States, and more broadly, to foster appreciation of the arts and sciences, was inspired by the couple's respective careers in biomedical science and art history. The foundation awards annual prizes to immigrant biomedical scientists and artists, sponsors cultural programs, and manages the Vilcek Foundation Art Collections. To learn more, please visit vilcek.org.