

# Cuomo taps appellate judge for top court

By Michael Virtanen

*The Associated Press*

**ALBANY** » New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo on Friday selected a midlevel appellate judge from Albany for the state's highest court.

Justice Leslie Stein, a jurist for the past 17 years, will replace Judge Victoria Graffeo on the seven-member Court of Appeals. Her nomination is subject to a Senate hearing and confirmation.

Graffeo's 14-year term expires next month. Her name was on the short list of seven potential nominees and the only Republican.

Cuomo cited Stein's extensive judicial experience, noting that she "has worked throughout her career to help ensure that women, families, victims of domestic violence, and vulnerable New Yorkers have a voice in our legal system."

Cuomo's first two nominees who joined the court last year, Judges Jenny Rivera and Sheila Abdus-Salaam, are women. He is expected to win re-election this fall and nominate another jurist to replace Judge Robert Smith, who must retire at the end of this year. A state commission reviews appli-

cants and establishes a list of those it finds qualified.

The Court of Appeals reviews lower court decisions, interprets statutes and the state's constitution, and often makes case law.

Stein said she was humbled and honored by the selection and looks forward to continuing to serve New Yorkers.

She was appointed in 2008 to the midlevel Appellate Division court in Albany, according to judicial officials. A 1978 graduate of Macalester College in Minnesota and Albany Law School in 1981,

she worked as a clerk to Schenectady Family Court judges for two years, then practiced matrimonial and family law until 1997.

Stein was elected Albany City Court Judge in 1997, served as acting Family Court judge in 2001 and was elected that year to the state Supreme Court.

She was an administrative judge for courts in Rensselaer County dealing with domestic violence cases from 2006 to early 2008.

The city and state bar associations found her well qualified for the top court.