



Department of Justice

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ATTORNEY GENERAL LYNCH NAMES RUPA BHATTACHARYYA AS SPECIAL MASTER OF THE SEPTEMBER 11TH VICTIM COMPENSATION FUND

WASHINGTON – Attorney General Loretta E. Lynch today announced that she has chosen Rupa Bhattacharyya to head the [September 11th Victim Compensation Fund \(VCF\)](#) after current VCF Special Master Sheila L. Birnbaum steps down later this month.

Special Master Birnbaum will continue to the full-time practice of law at Quinn Emanuel, LLP, where she is a partner. Bhattacharyya, who currently serves as Director of the Justice Department’s Constitutional and Specialized Tort Litigation Section in the Civil Division’s Torts Branch, will assume her new position on July 21.

“Rupa Bhattacharyya is an exceptional administrator and a devoted public servant, and I am delighted to name her as the new Special Master of the VCF,” said Attorney General Lynch. “Throughout her career at the Treasury and Justice Departments, she has earned a reputation for fairness, efficiency and integrity. I am confident that under her leadership, the VCF will continue to guarantee that those whose lives were forever changed by the events of September 11th, 2001, can receive the compensation they deserve. I thank outgoing Special Master Sheila Birnbaum for her outstanding leadership of the VCF over the last five years and I welcome Ms. Bhattacharyya to her new post.”

“As a life-long New Yorker, serving as Special Master of the VCF has been perhaps the most personally rewarding work of my career,” said Special Master Birnbaum. “My goal from the beginning was to establish a program that is fair, transparent and easy to navigate and I believe we have accomplished this and more over the past five years. It has been a true privilege to work on behalf of the victims of 9/11 and their resilience is inspiring. As the VCF moves into a new chapter following the reauthorization, I know the team is well poised to continue to succeed in compensating those most impacted by the events of Sept. 11, 2001.”

Birnbaum has served as VCF Special Master since May 2011, after the fund created under the James Zadroga 9/11 Health & Compensation Act (Zadroga Act) was signed into law by President Obama on Jan. 2, 2011. The VCF was reauthorized in December 2015 and under Birnbaum’s leadership has rendered award decisions on more than 10,000 claims and paid over \$1.8 billion to first responders, recovery workers and residents who suffered physical harm or were killed as a result of the terrorist-related aircraft crashes of Sept. 11, 2001, or the debris removal efforts that took place in the immediate aftermath.

The VCF accomplishments under Birnbaum's leadership include:

- Drafting and issuing the final rule to reflect the Zadroga Act when the VCF first reopened in 2011 and then issuing the [revised rule](#) to reflect the December 2015 Reauthorization statute;
- Establishing collaborative, ongoing working relationships with "partner" entities such as the WTC Health Program (NIOSH), local, state and federal agencies, key employers such as FDNY and NYPD and advocacy groups focused on 9/11 issues, all in an effort to ease the burden on claimants and ensure efficient claims processing;
- Establishing an ongoing focus on outreach and communications with claimants, including the VCF website (available in four languages), a toll-free Helpline, town hall meetings and pro bono legal clinics in coordination with the New York City Bar;
- Developing productive working relationships with law firms representing VCF claimants, including frequent conference calls and meetings to keep attorneys updated on VCF progress and activity;
- Design and implementation of the initial claim form and redesign of a simpler [form](#) to meet the reauthorization mandate, as well as enhancements to the online system;
- Continuous efforts to improve the quality of claim submissions to support faster review and decision-making and simplify and streamline the claim review process as it evolved;
- Conducting extensive outreach for the Oct. 3, 2013, filing deadline to ensure all potential claimants knew of the deadline and had an easy way to register to preserve their right to file a future claim;
- Hiring of VCF staff and expansion of team to meet claimants' needs, including identifying and personally training hearing officers to conduct hearings; and
- Improving transparency by providing various public reports on a weekly, quarterly and annual basis, along with frequent "Messages from the Special Master" providing updates on the VCF.

"I am honored to be selected by the Attorney General for this important service," Bhattacharyya said. "I look forward to working alongside the dedicated VCF staff to ensure that 9/11 claimants promptly receive the payments to which they are entitled."

Prior to Bhattacharyya's selection to run the 9/11 VCF, she has served as the Justice Department's Constitutional and Specialized Torts Branch Director since April 2012. As Director, Bhattacharyya oversees separate groups of attorneys and professional staff for the [Vaccine Injury Compensation Program](#), which has paid in excess of \$3.4 billion to more than 4,700 people since the Program's 1988 inception under the National Childhood Vaccine Injury Act; [the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act program](#), which has awarded more than \$2 billion in compassionate compensation to eligible claimants under the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act; and the Constitutional Torts staff, which defends constitutional tort claims brought against federal officials sued in their individual capacities in federal district courts and reviews and makes determinations on requests for individual capacity representation from federal employees. Bhattacharyya has also served informally as an advisor to the Civil Division on matters related to the 9/11 VCF, including implementation of the reauthorizing legislation and promulgation of the associated regulations. She additionally serves as an advisor to other

government components on compensation and representation programs, including the newly created U.S. Victims of State Sponsored Terrorism Fund, administered by the Department's Criminal Division.

Bhattacharyya also served for nearly four years as the Deputy Assistant General Counsel for International Affairs at the U.S. Department of the Treasury, providing legal and legislative advice on a broad range of international economic and financial matters as well as administrative matters including hiring and budget. In 2012, she received an Exceptional Service Award from the Secretary of the Treasury for playing a critical role in framing the legal contours of key national security objectives of the Treasury Department, for contributing significantly to the implementation of the Dodd-Frank Act, particularly with respect to its international implications and for deploying information technology resources to enhance information sharing and streamlining procedures for processing Freedom of Information Act requests.

She previously worked for nearly 12 years as an attorney in the Justice Department's Civil Division, mostly in the Federal Programs Branch. She was awarded the Attorney General's John Marshall Award for Outstanding Legal Achievement for Trial Litigation, as well as three Special Commendations from the Assistant Attorney General of the Civil Division for Outstanding Service. Before coming to the Justice Department, Bhattacharyya clerked for then Chief Judge Julia Smith Gibbons of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Tennessee.

Bhattacharyya received her J.D. from Harvard Law School, a Masters of Arts in Law and Diplomacy (M.A.L.D.) from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University and her B.A. from Tulane University.

For additional information on the Victim Compensation Fund, please visit: www.vcf.gov.

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