

Claribel Cortes

February 19, 2026

Dear Chairman McCabe:

I am writing to confirm my intention to seek reelection as the Middlesex County Surrogate. It has been a true honor to serve the residents of Middlesex County. I am proud of the work we have accomplished together for Middlesex County, and I remain committed to advancing policies that strengthen our communities.

I respectfully request your endorsement in the 2026 Primary Election so we can continue this important work. Thank you for your trust and support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Claribel Cortes". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Claribel Cortes
County Surrogate, Middlesex County

Claribel Cortes



Full-time: Middlesex County Surrogate

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Surrogate Claribel Cortes became the Middlesex County Surrogate on March 26, 2021, after being appointed by Governor Phil Murphy and confirmed by the New Jersey State Senate Judiciary Committee, making history as the first woman to serve as Surrogate in the county's history and the first Latina constitutional officer in Middlesex County. She subsequently ran for office in 2021, and in 2022 was officially sworn into a full five-year term as Middlesex County Surrogate.

Since taking office, Surrogate Cortes has focused on transforming how residents experience government during some of life's most difficult moments. Her administration prioritizes accessible, compassionate, and people-centered public service, ensuring families navigating probate and estate administration, adoptions, and guardianships for incapacitated adults receive guidance rooted in dignity, clarity, and personal connection. Through this work, her office supports some of the county's most vulnerable residents while helping families plan, protect, and care for loved ones.

At the core of her leadership is a deep commitment to in-person community engagement. Surrogate Cortes and her team conduct educational seminars throughout Middlesex County to help residents better understand wills, estate planning, guardianships, and adoption services before crises occur. She has strengthened partnerships with municipal leaders, mayors, council members, and municipal departments of aging, recognizing these institutions as frontline connections to residents and essential collaborators in public service delivery.

While maintaining a people-first approach, her office became the first county office to implement artificial intelligence technology as a supplemental tool designed to assist residents after hours with commonly asked questions. The technology enhances accessibility when staff are unavailable but intentionally complements—not replaces—the personal interaction and community presence that remain central to her mission.

Surrogate Cortes plays an active leadership role in advancing surrogate policy and constitutional officer collaboration statewide. She previously served as Section Chief for the Surrogates of New Jersey through the Constitutional Officers Association of New Jersey and

currently serves as Treasurer of the Constitutional Officers Association of New Jersey. She is also the Chair of the Surrogates Legislative Committee, leading the review of more than 52 legislative proposals aimed at improving probate and guardianship processes and strengthening services for families across New Jersey.

She serves on the Board of the New Jersey Association of Counties (NJAC) as the Surrogate Liaison, advocating for policies affecting surrogate offices statewide, and also sits on the NJAC Foundation Board, which provides scholarships to students attending magnet and vocational schools pursuing higher education opportunities.

While Surrogate Cortes serves in several statewide leadership roles, each commitment is rooted in one goal: bringing stronger resources, partnerships, and opportunities back to Middlesex County. She views her work across organizations as interconnected service, grounded in the belief that collaboration across counties strengthens communities locally and ensures residents receive the highest level of support and access.

Surrogate Cortes remains actively engaged with the Statewide Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey, continuing her commitment to supporting entrepreneurship, economic opportunity, and the advancement of Hispanic-owned businesses across the state. She also serves as a Member of the Board of Trustees of the Franklin Food Bank, supporting initiatives that address food insecurity and strengthen local families and communities.

Before becoming County Surrogate, Cortes built a strong record of public service and community leadership. She served as a councilperson and communications liaison for the North Brunswick Township Council beginning in 2020, strengthening transparency and outreach between local government and residents. From 2017 to 2020, she was a member of the North Brunswick Township Board of Education, where she chaired the Community Relations Committee and expanded engagement between schools and families. She also served as a member of the Board of Trustees for Middlesex College, reinforcing her long-standing commitment to education and workforce development.

Alongside her public service, Surrogate Cortes built a distinguished media career spanning nearly three decades. She held leadership roles at major national and international news organizations including Fox News, ABC News, and the Associated Press. As Director of Digital Media and Entertainment at the Associated Press, she became the first Latina director in the company's 170-year history, managing a global news division, overseeing an \$85.2 million P&L budget, securing partnerships with Warner Brothers, Sony, and Disney, and leading digital media and long-term strategic planning initiatives.

In recognition of her leadership and public service, she is the recipient of the 2025 County Service Award from the New Jersey Association of Counties, along with additional honors recognizing her service and community impact.

A dedicated advocate for wellness and balance, Surrogate Cortes is also a World Major marathoner, viewing long-distance running as an extension of her leadership

philosophy—requiring discipline, resilience, preparation, and endurance. A first-generation Hispanic American and proud daughter of immigrants, she was born and raised in New York City before moving to North Brunswick in 2004. She has called North Brunswick and Middlesex County home ever since and lives there with her family, remaining deeply connected to the community she serves. She credits her upbringing and the values instilled by her immigrant family. Service, hard work, and community responsibility as the foundation of her commitment to public service and her belief in serving people first.