§ 731. Appointment of hearing officers. 1. The chief administrator of the courts shall appoint a panel of small claims hearing officers selected from persons requesting to serve as such hearing officers who shall have submitted resumes of qualifications. Hearing officers to be appointed to the panel shall be qualified by training, interest, experience, temperament and knowledge of real property assessment and valuation practices and provisions of state and local law governing the making of assessments, but need not be attorneys at law. The chief administrator of the court shall randomly assign a hearing officer or hearing officers, or may assign a judicial hearing officer designated pursuant to article twenty-two of the judiciary law, to conduct an informal hearing on the petition for review with the applicants for small claims and a representative of the assessing unit which made the assessment sought to be reviewed. Hearing officers assigned shall be familiar with the assessing unit in which the real property subject to review is located, and shall not possess any conflict of interest as defined by the public officers law with regard to the petitions to be heard. Hearing officers shall be compensated for their services in accordance with a fee schedule to be established by the chief administrator of the courts. For purposes of subdivisions two and three of this section and the other provisions of this title, the term "hearing officer" shall include a judicial hearing officer.

2. A hearing officer shall disqualify himself or herself from a hearing where such officer possesses a conflict of interest as defined by the public officers law. Such hearing officer shall also disqualify himself or herself from a hearing where such hearing officer has a direct or indirect interest in any property for which a petition has been filed. For the purposes of this title, a hearing officer shall be deemed to have a direct or indirect interest in any property for which a petition has been filed when the hearing officer, spouse, or any of his or her minor children:

(a) is the owner of such property; or

(b) is an officer, director, partner or associate of a law firm or real estate firm which has a financial interest with the owner of such property.

3. Where a hearing officer disqualifies himself or herself, such hearing officer shall notify the chief administrator of the court who shall reassign the case to another hearing officer.