



PRESS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

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Working Group on NY Courts' Pandemic-Related Practices Calls for Investment in Technology, Increased Staffing

NEW YORK—Acting Chief Judge Anthony Cannataro and Acting Chief Administrative Judge Tamiko Amaker today announced the release of a report from the Commission to Reimagine the Future of New York's Courts' Pandemic Practices Working Group's (PPWG). PPWG's report calls for, among other things, the expansion of remote proceedings, enhancement of the court system's technological capacity and an increase in court staffing. These measures will improve the delivery of justice going forward and better enable the courts to serve New Yorkers in the event of another public health crisis or other emergency. Today's report is the culmination of PPWG's extensive study of pandemic practices and policies implemented by the New York State courts as well as other jurisdictions.

Established in May 2022, PPWG is composed of a distinguished group of judges, lawyers, court administrators and others led by Judge Craig J. Doran of the Seventh Judicial District. The Working Group held all-day public hearings in Albany, New York City and Buffalo, conducted 30 remote listening sessions, heard testimony from over 300 people and organizations and reviewed thousands of pages of documents. Its

mission was to examine the court system's response to the most disruptive event in its history, and evaluate which pandemic-related procedures worked well, which did not, and which should be retained and built upon going forward.

In addition to expanding and encouraging the use of virtual court proceedings, PPWG's proposals include:

- Bringing greater transparency and consistency to the use of virtual proceedings
- Improving the functioning of remote proceedings
- Expanding alternatives for court users to access virtual proceedings and other court resources
- Improving accessibility for people who require special accommodations
- Enhancing systems for communicating with and supporting court users, including revamping the Court System's website
- Ensuring that there is appropriate public access to virtual proceedings
- Expanding the use of electronic filing
- Investing in locally appropriate modernization projects that will permit courthouses to better support virtual, hybrid and in-person proceedings
- Improving training and technical support for judges, court staff and court users
- Developing a detailed plan for responding to a future pandemic or other court disruption and a system for testing, refining and deploying that plan
- Appropriating and earmarking supplemental funds for court modernization and emergency preparedness
- Creating a permanent working group of stakeholders, external experts and internal decision-makers to help implement the above recommendations and identify future needs

"One of the key lessons of the pandemic is that, going forward, we must be prepared for unforeseeable events that threaten to impede access to justice for the many who look to our courts for relief," said Judge Cannataro, calling the report a blueprint for the future

and noting that a critical step will be restoring staffing to pre-pandemic levels. “Our judges and professional staff proved incredibly nimble when COVID caught us by surprise in early 2020 and keeping the courts functioning was a gargantuan achievement. As we work to enhance the delivery and quality of justice for all New Yorkers, I am grateful for the guidance provided by Judge Doran and the Working Group members.”

Judge Amaker, who served on the Working Group in her capacity as Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Management Support, said, “Members of the group represent many different perspectives but share the common goal of doing their best to ensure access to justice at all times and under all circumstances. This is not a report that will sit on a shelf, but a working document and vital reference as we continue to reimagine the future of our courts.”

“Having examined the court system’s pandemic practices objectively and in microscopic detail, the Working Group’s report is a clarion call that there is no going backwards. A fundamental lesson learned from the pandemic was that virtual proceedings, in appropriate circumstances, are a ‘win-win’ for all concerned. The court system cannot snap back like a rubber band to all pre-pandemic customs, habits and practices. We now know that the expansion of virtual proceedings, and additional investments in technology and staffing, will enhance access to justice, improve the experience of litigants, and save time and money,” said distinguished attorney Hank Greenberg, who chairs the Commission to Reimagine the Future of New York’s Courts.

“The Working Group reflects the professional, geographic and demographic diversity of our state. By holding three separate public hearings in very different parts of the state, as well as more than two dozen listening sessions attended by individuals in every region and from every viewpoint, the group was able to paint a clear and comprehensive picture of court operations during the pandemic and provide a roadmap for tomorrow and the day after tomorrow,” said Judge Doran.

Today's report also noted that, though the virtual court model adopted out of necessity during the pandemic offered a significant benefit to court users and should be expanded for suitable matters, substantial challenges remain in addressing the needs of those lacking access to technology.

Additionally, with respect to the Working Group's proposal to devise a detailed plan for future emergencies, the report stated that "no plan to address the challenges and opportunities from the pandemic will be effective if there are not enough skilled people to implement it."

Further, the Working Group members in their final report paid tribute to the New York State court system judges and staff whose herculean efforts kept the courts running amid the pandemic, working "long hours, nights and weekends for months to ensure the most critical matters were addressed," also observing that the delay in processing "non-essential" matters "left thousands of New Yorkers effectively shut out of the court system, unable to pursue matters 'essential' to them."

The full report is available at online at

<https://www.nycourts.gov/LegacyPDFS/press/pdfs/NYCourtsPandemicPracticesReport.pdf>

A membership roster of the Working Group follows.

Pandemic Practices Working Group

Chair

Hon. Craig Doran, Supreme Court Justice, 7th Judicial District

Co-Chairs, Hearing Subcommittee

Scott B. Reents, Cravath, Swaine & Moore LLP

William Silverman, Proskauer Rose LLP

Reporter: Scott Reents

Members

Hon. Tamiko Amaker, Acting Chief Administrative Judge and Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Management Support, Office of Court Administration

Nancy J. Barry, Chief of Operations, Office of Court Administration

Mark A. Berman, Partner, Ganfer Shore Leeds & Zauderer LLP

Jessica Cherry, Assistant Deputy Counsel, Office of Court Administration

John V. Cremo, Deputy Attorney General, State Counsel Division, New York State Office of the Attorney General

Michael DeVito, Manager, Office of Record Production, Office of Court Administration

Hon. Alicea Elloras-Ally, Family Court Judge, Kings County

Hon. Patria Frias-Colón, Supreme Court Justice, Kings County

Hank Greenberg, Shareholder, Greenberg Traurig

Hon. Craig Hannah, Supervising Judge, Buffalo City Court

John Healy, Assistant Attorney General, Criminal Enforcement and Financial Crimes Bureau, New York State Office of the Attorney General

Adrienne Holder, Attorney in Charge-Civil Practice, The Legal Aid Society of NYC

Seymour W. James Jr., Partner, Barket Epstein Kearon Aldea & LoTurco, LLP

Melinda Katz, District Attorney, Queens County

Porter Kirkwood, District Executive, 6th Judicial District

Leanne Lapp, President, Chief Defenders Assoc. of New York, Ontario County Public Defender

Roger Juan Maldonado, Partner, Smith Gambrell & Russell

Mary McQueen, President, National Center for State Courts

Hon. Edwina G. Mendelson, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Justice Initiatives, Office of Court Administration

Lillian M. Moy, Executive Director, Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York

Hon. James P. Murphy, Administrative Judge, 5th Judicial District

Carolyn G. Nussbaum, Partner, Nixon Peabody LLP

Lauren Sang-Hee Owens, Associate, Dreyer Boyajian LLP

Hon. Shannon Pero, Justice, Town of Greece

Anthony R. Perri, Deputy Counsel, Office of Court Administration

Lisa Preston, Chief Clerk, Monroe County Supreme and County Courts

Hon. Stan L. Pritzker, Associate Justice, Appellate Division, Third Dept.

Hon. Raymond L. Rodriguez, Acting Justice of the Supreme Court, Kings County

Christine Sisario, Chief of Technology, Office of Court Administration

David Slayton, Vice President - Court Consulting, National Center for State Courts

Edward A. Steinberg, Partner, Leav & Steinberg, LLP

Hon. Carolyn Walker-Diallo, Administrative Judge, New York City Civil Court

Mike Williams, Chief Clerk, Suffolk County Family Court

Oliver Young, Counsel, Barclay Damon, LLP

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