

MESSAGE FROM CHIEF JUDGE JANET DIFIORE

January 3, 2022

Happy new year everyone! And thank you for giving us a few minutes of your time for an update on the latest COVID developments affecting our courts and the justice system.

I hope that you and your families enjoyed a happy and healthy holiday season in bringing 2021 to a close, and that you're looking forward to 2022 with hope and optimism. Over the coming year, I do expect that we will encounter some new challenges, but whatever twists and turns may lie ahead of us, we move forward confidently, knowing that we have shown ourselves capable of navigating the incredible challenges of the pandemic and that we are well-prepared to meet the justice needs of the litigants and lawyers in our courts.

In the short term, of course, we are charting a safe course through this latest surge in COVID-19 infections caused by the Delta and Omicron variants, and guided by the updated public health protocols we have put in place we will continue with our in-person

proceedings while, of course, monitoring the metrics very closely, assessing the situation in each courthouse and staying ready to pivot quickly to make any and all appropriate adjustments necessary to respond to problem areas or new public health guidance.

We are working closely with our Administrative Judges and court managers to calibrate and find the right balance between “in-person” and “remote” proceedings in order to continue managing our dockets and delivering justice services as efficiently, effectively and safely as possible. In this regard, all judges have been encouraged to use their discretion to schedule remote court appearances where “going virtual” would help reduce unnecessary foot traffic in our facilities, and in the event that some courts and stakeholder agencies experience staffing pressures due to necessary isolation and quarantine.

As you know, on December 27th the CDC announced important revisions to its public health guidance concerning the recommended isolation and quarantine periods for individuals testing positive for COVID and individuals exposed to someone with COVID. In response to the new guidance, a detailed memo from Nancy Barry and Justin Barry was circulated to all judges and nonjudicial personnel on December 29th describing the changes that we have made to our COVID protocols in order to ensure consistency with the latest CDC guidance. I

encourage you to review the memo and familiarize yourselves with the revised protocols.

And now, to start the new year off on a high note I want to welcome to the Bench today 110 newly-elected and newly-appointed judges who are attending the Judicial Institute's "Virtual New Judges Seminar for 2022." This large class of new judges may be joining the Bench at an unusual time in our history, when we're relying on a hybrid model of in-person and remote court operations, but the Dean of the Judicial Institute, Judge Kathie Davidson, and her staff have put together an excellent, 8-day training program to help these judges make a smooth transition to their new positions.

And their introduction to the Bench began this morning with a message from me, a message addressing the importance of public service and the paramount importance of maintaining public trust and confidence in a fair and impartial judiciary. And our programming continues with informative sessions led by Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence Marks as well as our three Deputy Chief Administrative Judges, Edwina Mendelson, Norman St. George and Deborah Kaplan, all of whom will share the wisdom and experience they have acquired over the years and provide updates on the challenges we face and the

opportunities we have before us to strengthen our court system and continue our commitment to equal justice for all.

Sessions will continue into next week, with judges, lawyers, law professors and experts instructing on how to achieve operational and decisional excellence in judicial assignments, including essential case management skills in the context of our new hybrid court model, intensive domestic violence training in recognition of the pandemic-related increase in family violence, important primers and updates on substantive and procedural areas of the law, and, of course, judicial ethics. So, please join me in extending a very warm welcome to our newest judges.

And let's also extend a warm welcome to the 56 new Court Officers who graduated from our "Court Officer Academy" on December 22nd, and who are starting their careers this week in the New York State courts in the Third, Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Judicial Districts. Based on the superb training they have received, and the supervision and guidance that will be extended to them over the course of their service, I have every confidence that our newest Court Officers will bring honor to our court system while carrying out their mission of "serving and protecting" the public.

I want to commend our Chief of Public Safety, Michael Magliano, our Chief of Training, Chief Joseph Baccellieri, and the Academy's outstanding team of instructors for safely administering an intensive four-month, in-person training program without experiencing a single case of COVID-19. Kudos to the instructors and the graduates for their careful and disciplined efforts.

And as wonderful as it is to start out the new year with such an infusion of talent and energy, we also acknowledge the inspiring efforts of our judges, court staff and justice partners who routinely go above and beyond the call of duty to make a positive difference in the lives of our litigants. An excellent case in point is the partnership between the New York City Family Court and the New York State Mentoring Program, which matches teens in foster care with caring one-on-one adult mentors who are committed to helping their mentees overcome the daunting personal and economic challenges they face as they age out of the foster care system.

The volunteer mentors in this program from the law firm of Willkie Farr & Gallagher and the consulting firm of Marsh & McLennan have generously devoted hundreds of hours to help young people set positive goals for the future, make healthy life choices, acquire

essential skills and education, and build confidence and self-esteem. And during the long and difficult months of the pandemic, their encouragement and support of these young people made an enormous difference in keeping them on a positive trajectory. Let me highlight just a few of the many success stories:

- Guillermo obtained his GED, and is now enrolled in college.
- Omar obtained his GED, has started therapy and has a job.
- Josselyn not only received her “Green Card,” thanks to “Lawyers for Children,” but she also earned an Associate’s Degree and is already working toward her Bachelor’s Degree.
- Brandon is enrolled in college and has a job.
- And Christina is in college and currently working towards independent living.

The mentoring model pioneered in the New York City Family Court has shown so much promise that we plan to expand the program this Spring to reach more young people in foster care, particularly Spanish-speaking youth. And the model was recently adopted in the Monroe County Family Court, under the direction of Judge Stacey Romeo.

I want to thank all of our extraordinary partners: the New York State Mentoring Program; the Administration for Children’s Services; The Legal Aid Society; Lawyers for Children; and, of course, the generous volunteer mentors at Willkie Farr & Gallagher and Marsh & McLennan, led by Willkie Farr partner Mitchell Auslander, who is so dedicated to this wonderful program and has really made a difference in the lives of these young people. Also, our special thanks to Anne-Marie Jolly, Administrative Judge of the New York City Family Court, and Karen Lupuloff, Supervising Judge of the New York County Family Court, for their commitment to successfully guiding and growing the program, which we hope to expand statewide with the support and participation of our family justice partners.

Finally, I want to congratulate Justice Adam Silvera, who has been appointed Administrative Judge of the New York County Supreme Court, Civil Term, effective January 18th. Justice Silvera, who had been serving as an Associate Justice of the Appellate Term, First Department, is an energetic and innovative leader and a judge who has distinguished himself at every step of his judicial career -- a career that includes service as a Judge of the New York City Civil Court; a Judge of the New York City Family Court; an Acting Supreme Court Justice assigned to the “Integrated Domestic Relations Part”; and an elected Supreme Court

Justice serving as our New York City Asbestos Litigation Coordinating Judge.

Justice Silvera's broad range of experience and innovative leadership style will serve him well as he takes over the day-to-day management of one of our busiest courts of civil jurisdiction. He succeeds Judge Deborah Kaplan, who has been doing double duty since being appointed Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for the New York City Courts in October. We thank Judge Kaplan for her tireless service, and we welcome Judge Silvera to our leadership team.

So, once again, Happy New Year, and as always, thank you all for listening, and for remaining disciplined in doing all that you can and should be doing to keep yourselves and those around you safe.