

MESSAGE FROM CHIEF JUDGE JANET DIFIORE

July 18, 2022

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.

As you probably know by now, I announced last week that on August 31st I will be leaving my position as Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals and the State of New York in order to pursue new opportunities in my professional life.

Serving as your Chief Judge has been the greatest honor and privilege of my professional lifetime, and I look forward at the appropriate time to expressing my gratitude and appreciation to all those who have contributed to the remarkable progress we have made as a court system over the last 6 ½ years.

In the meantime, you can be certain that over the next six weeks I will be working every single day with our leadership team, and with all of you, to maintain our forward progress, and ensure that the next Chief Judge inherits a strong and vibrant court system in every respect.

And speaking of forward progress, I want to highlight some positive developments for the future of our court system, including

recent legislation creating additional judicial positions across the state, including four new judgeships in the New York City Family Court that are urgently needed to help us meet the pressing justice needs of vulnerable families and children in that overburdened court. We are grateful to our partners in government for providing us with these additional judicial resources and excited that Governor Hochul has signed the bill into law.

And next Tuesday, July 26th, our next class of 89 Court Officers will graduate from our “Court Officer Academy” and begin their careers in our courthouses across New York City and in the 9th and 10th Judicial Districts where they are very much needed to provide essential security services and ensure that our court parts, including all of our trial parts, are fully staffed and able to operate at 100% of capacity.

In my message of June 20th, I spoke about our virtual jury selection pilot, which has provided us with an exciting glimpse of how remote technology is set to transform the future of court operations. On July 6th, 43 New Yorkers out of a group of 45 who were summoned for jury duty reported for service online using our Microsoft Teams platform, an amazing 96% turnout rate. Over the course of the morning, 6 regular and 2 alternate jurors were selected to participate in a one-day, in-person negligence trial that took place the following day in New York County Supreme Court. The virtual selection process,

including orientation, took less than four hours to complete and was remarkably smooth and glitch-free.

Kudos to everyone who played a role in developing and executing this innovative pilot to modernize and improve the jury selection process for the benefit of all New Yorkers, including Judge Bill Taylor, our Administrative Judge in the 7th J.D., who presided over the virtual selection process and the ensuing trial; former New York City Deputy Chief Administrative Judge George Silver; current DCAJ Deborah Kaplan; Administrative Judge Adam Silvera; County Clerk Milton Tingling; Statewide Jury Coordinator, Jessica Simard; DOT Director Christine Sisario; and, of course, the many court professionals who worked so hard to make this program a success.

We are grateful to the 43 New Yorkers, especially those selected to serve as jurors, who participated in the pilot, and to the attorneys in the case, Eric Flores and Jason Paris, for doing an exceptional job of representing their clients as part of this exciting reform to improve the convenience and efficiency of jury service for all New Yorkers.

We could not be more pleased with the initial results of the pilot, and we look forward to replicating it across several urban, suburban and upstate locations before preparing a comprehensive report with recommendations for broader, long-term implementation.

So, now, after 2 ½ difficult and challenging years our court system is back on a positive trajectory. And after working so hard and enduring so much to get to this point, we owe it to ourselves not to get careless or let our guard down when it comes to COVID-19. With the latest Omicron subvariant, BA.5, spreading rapidly and causing the highest positivity rate we've seen in many months, this is a good time for each one of us to reevaluate the precautions that we're taking on a daily basis to keep ourselves and those around us safe and healthy, and to re-commit ourselves to being careful and disciplined in our approach to the virus.

So thank you all for tuning in to this week's message, and thank you for doing all that you can and should be doing to keep yourselves and those around you safe and healthy.