

**MESSAGE FROM CHIEF JUDGE DIFIORE
ON CORONAVIRUS EMERGENCY**

March 20, 2020

I wanted to take a moment to reach out to our court family and bring everyone up to date on the impact of the coronavirus on the New York State courts.

First and foremost, I hope that you and your families are staying safe and healthy during these difficult days.

I know that this is a time of anxiety and disruption for all of us, in our personal and professional lives,-- but it's important that we remain positive,-- and that we focus on what we can do to keep our families safe;... what we can do to support each other in our communities;... and what we can do to prepare for the better days that lie ahead.

As you know, our courts are critical to the functioning of our society,-- and even more so during a public health crisis like this one,-- when the public needs to know that:

- our government is working for them;
- our courts are open to deliver justice;... to preserve public safety;... and to resolve public health issues on an expedited basis;
- and, importantly, that the rule of law remains fully in effect.

For these reasons, our court system remains open to handle all essential and emergency matters.

Our goal is to ensure access to justice,-- and,-- at the same time,-- protect the public and our judges and staff by containing the virus. The steps we have taken to carry out this dual responsibility are in line with the latest information and recommendations issued by our public health officials,-- and are designed to contain the spread of the virus. --

By postponing nonessential court proceedings, we have dramatically reduced the number of people in our courthouses and sought to eliminate the person-to-person contact by which this virus spreads. We have also employed video and teleconferencing whenever possible,-- in order to conduct our essential business in ways that limit personal contact.

As two examples of our efforts,-- all arraignments in the New York City Criminal Court are now taking place by videoconference,-- and all detained youth in the New York City Family Court are appearing by video as well.-- We are grateful to our Division of Technology staff for their tireless efforts to make this happen on very short notice.

We are truly grateful to the judges and staff who continue to report to work to make sure that essential justice services are being provided. Thank you for your service,-- and for putting the public first.

And we are most grateful for the outpouring of volunteers who have offered to preside over, and staff, these essential parts going forward. You have made us proud,-- and you have brightened what has been a very difficult time. Thank you.

We certainly appreciate the unequivocal support and cooperation we have received from lawyers in the public and private sectors,-- and from the stakeholder agencies who appear in our courts every day. --

And I want to assure all of you that we have an excellent team working around the clock,-- headed by Chief Administrative Judge Larry Marks, who has been absolutely tireless;... Deputy Chief Administrative Judges Silver and Caruso;... our Administrative and Supervising Judges;... and our top nonjudicial leaders in public safety;... court operations;... counsel's office;... human resources;... technology;... and public information – all of them doing exactly what needs to be done on a daily basis to keep the courts open,-- while mitigating the impact of the virus on court users, on our judges and staff, and the public at large.--

I have been in touch with the Governor on a regular basis,-- and Judge Marks and the rest of our team are in touch with, and monitoring, all communications from public health leaders and our counterpart officials in state and local government.

We will keep you informed of all relevant developments,-- so please,-- continue to check our website for daily news and updates.

We have also established a coronavirus hotline -- 833-503-0447 – in order to answer all questions from the public.

One thing that is very clear to me,-- is that we are dealing with a fast-moving, quickly changing situation,-- and our planning and response efforts necessarily evolve from week to week, and day to day, based on the actions taken by state and federal leaders, and the latest information and recommendations

issued by public health authorities. That is why it is important to stay informed by checking your email and our website.

It is also important that you keep us informed about your health status.

Not only are we concerned about each of you, but we must be concerned about the general population,-- and stopping the virus's spread. If you receive a positive COVID-19 test result, it is imperative that you notify your district executive or chief clerk immediately, so that we can determine whether other court personnel and members of the public may have been at risk of exposure, and need to be notified.

If you are experiencing flu-like symptoms and have been assigned to work in a court that is open for essential business, please do not report to work and contact your supervisor immediately.

If you are not required to report to work, please follow the advice and recommendations of our public health authorities and continue to practice social distancing in order to slow the rate of spread.

This is an unprecedented situation, and we are all doing our best to cope with the disruption of being unable to report to work;... pursue our normal routines;... and operate our courts at full capacity.

Knowing our dedicated judges and staff the way I do,-- I suspect that you are all anxious to contribute and do your part. Rest assured you will be called upon at the appropriate time,-- and we will have our hands full once this crisis is over. If there is one thing we've learned over the years,-- it's that the economic

consequences and legal fallout of any societal crisis,-- especially one of this magnitude,-- will be manifested, and felt in our court dockets.

We will be ready to meet the challenge.

Once again, thank you.-- It is an enormous privilege, and a high honor to work with all of you as we continue to provide critically needed justice services,-- while keeping judges, staff, our families, and the public safe and healthy.

Thank you, stay tuned . . . and stay safe.