



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brad Hoylman-Sigal

# **"Sorry, We're Closed": Elected Officials Demand Re-Opening of Midtown Community Court to Help Address Quality of Life Crimes and Recidivism**

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NEW YORK — To help address rising complaints in quality-of-life crimes and recidivism, elected officials, community leaders, and representatives from business improvement districts called on the NYS Office of Court Administration (OCA) to fully-reopen the Midtown Community Court (MCC), the nation's first community court and a joint effort of OCA and the Center for Court Innovation.

Despite repeated requests from elected officials, MCC is currently operating only one day a week. OCA, the court's administrative arm, has still not announced a concrete timeline for their return to full operations five days a week.

Over the last quarter century, MCC's model of problem-solving justice has led to effective responses to low-level crime, contributing to drops in both crime and use of jail. MCC connects people accused of low-level offenses – such as shoplifting, drug possession, and prostitution – with services and diversion programs that can address the root causes of crime and reduce recidivism. Reopening MCC full time will help improve access to justice and quality of life for all New Yorkers.

State Senator Brad Hoylman, Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said, “Without Midtown Community Court, we're fighting quality of life crimes and recidivism with one hand tied behind our back. It's time for OCA to fully reopen MCC so their proven methods to prevent repeat offenses can be utilized during this trying period for our neighborhoods.”

With MCC operating in-person only one day a week, people are falling through the justice system's cracks. From January to June of this year, 1,000 cases that would have been arraigned and served with co-located services at MCC were redirected downtown, causing unnecessary confusion and stress. To further confuse people navigating the system, a judge mandated 600 of those relocated downtown to an alternative to incarceration program housed at MCC, sending them back uptown.

New York needs MCC to operate at full capacity to help strengthen our justice system and solve our most persistent community problems. The Court sentences low-level offenders to perform community restitution, and links them to on-site social services like drug treatment, job training, and mental health counseling in order to address underlying problems, such as homelessness, unemployment, and substance abuse. Their mission is to give offenders innovative and tailored support to avoid repeat offenses.

Congressman Jerry Nadler said, “The Midtown Community Court (MCC) is one of the best tools New York City has to divert low level offenders in the criminal justice system by providing creative, restorative sentencing alternatives. Its continued limited operation restricts New Yorkers from accessing the crucial justice resources and social services the MCC provides to the community and I join with my fellow elected officials in calling on the Office of Court Administration to work expeditiously

to fully reopen this community court.”

Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine said, “The Midtown Community Court is proven – by outside evaluators – to stem recidivism by addressing the root causes of crime, so every day the Office of Court Administration waits to reopen MCC full time robs New Yorkers of community-oriented justice solutions and quality-of-life improvements. MCC turns offenders’ lives around and provides critical support services that reduce crime, so reopening MCC must be OCA’s top priority.”

Assembly Member Linda B. Rosenthal said, “As history has demonstrated, incarcerating people for crimes of poverty and low-level drug offenses is not the answer. For years, Midtown Community Court has tirelessly worked to connect people accused of low-level crimes to emergent services and diversion programs as a way to thoughtfully reduce recidivism and improve quality of life conditions. However, pandemic-related closures have left the most vulnerable in our communities without much-needed intervention. We depend on Midtown Community Court to battle the systemic inequities that plague our criminal justice system, while keeping our streets and neighbors safe. I, along with the community, call on the Office of Court Administration to once again open the Court to the public.”

Assembly Member Richard Gottfried said, “The Midtown Community Court has been proven to reduce crime and incarceration. Re-opening the court full time would be a major step in improving local quality of life issues and bringing important services back to the neighborhood.”

Council Member Gale A. Brewer said, “The Midtown Community Court provides critical social supports and diversion services to individuals accused of low-level offenses to address the root causes of crime and reduce recidivism. It is an innovative and effective court that has improved the lives of individuals while reducing the troublesome quality of life issues that plague many communities. I stand with State Senator Brad Hoylman and colleagues to call on the Office of Court Administration to fully reopen the Midtown Community Court.”

Lisa Rivera, President and CEO of New York Legal Assistance Group, said: “As an organization fighting for fair and equal access to civil legal services for New Yorkers experiencing poverty, NYLAG supports Senator Hoylman and other State and City elected officials in calling on the Office of Court Administration to fully reopen the Midtown Community Court (MCC). MCC and the City's other community courts

provide vital, local access points for New Yorkers seeking legal services within their communities. Its closure puts up yet another barrier to justice for New Yorkers who are most in need."

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