



11/9/2023

Dear Committee Chairs and Senators,

I offer this written testimony on behalf of CASA-NYC. CASA-NYC is a volunteer-based organization dedicated to helping children and youth in foster care receive the services and support they need to thrive in spite of their typically traumatic circumstances. Our mission is to ensure that children involved in the child welfare system have their needs met and rights protected and move out of foster care and into permanent, safe and loving homes as quickly as possible. Family court judges appoint CASA-NYC by court order to children's cases when they are concerned that a child in foster care is not getting their needs met or is at risk of languishing in foster care longer than necessary.

This committee heard testimony regarding the shortages of judges, the inability to retain and attract attorneys for child protective matters, and from judges directly calling for more court-based services for impacted families. These factors accentuate the vital role that CASA serves through our volunteer-based model, as there remain many gaps in services for CASA to fill. However, CASA's ability to provide critical services has been meaningfully impeded by OCA and NYC's failure to maintain family courthouses.

In Manhattan Family Court (60 Lafayette St.), the only major telecommunications provider that currently services the building is Verizon. Verizon has yet to install fiber optic cables in the building or area, so customers are forced to rely on DSL for internet. Internet speeds have therefore always been poor in the building for Verizon customers but the problem has become much more acute due to the reliance on video conferencing in today's world. At some point during the pandemic, our Verizon services at Manhattan Family Court were totally disrupted and they have still yet to be fully restored (one phone line was briefly restored but has since been disrupted). When I reached out to OCA for guidance and support, I was essentially told that I am on my own and was forced to attempt to resolve this issue myself. I explored getting Spectrum into the building but were told by Spectrum that someone must pay the upfront costs (potentially \$100,000) of getting fiber optic cables into the building, which was apparently a non-starter for OCA. I then learned that a provider, Pilot Fiber, was already wired into the building and servicing several other non-profits and legal services organizations. Pilot was ready and willing to take CASA on as customer, and only needed to pull cable down from the floor above our offices in order to get us online. Having dealt with the building in the past, Pilot engaged with NYC's Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS), as DCAS is responsible for the maintenance of the physical courthouse. Pilot engaged DCAS in the

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same manner they had for their other clients, only to eventually be told by DCAS's Facilities Management team that they were working to reimplement some procedures that had been neglected in the past. Pilot and I were then passed off to DCAS's Real Estate Services, which ultimately revealed that a thirteen page lease application would need to be filled out by Pilot. After Pilot completed the application, despite not understanding its applicability to extending existing services within the building, DCAS then said the following steps were required:

- Obtain approval for Pilots' scope of work from DCAS engineering team
- Draft license, circulate for internal review and send to Pilot for signature
- Pilot to provide check for a onetime fee of \$350 payable to DCAS Real Estate Services
- Pilot to provide check for security deposit in the amount of \$5,000 payable to NYC Comptroller's Office
- Pilot to provide lease application processing fee in the amount of \$25 payable to DCAS Real Estate Services
- Pilot to provide proof of liability insurance in the amount of \$2 Million per occurrence and \$4 Million aggregate. The City of NY must be named as an additional insured for the property known as 60 Lafayette Street, New York, NY
- Proof of workers compensation or a waiver.
- Once all of the above mentioned are received, then DCAS will counter sign license and send to Pilot. Access will be granted to Pilot at that point.


Ultimately, Pilot decided that for a small, local team like theirs, adding a number of one-offs into their established processes was too challenging because they were not equipped to support and track those one-offs. Originally, Pilot had an agreement in place with DCAS that also allowed them to install future tenants, which is why they already had their fiber in the building for several tenants. That agreement had since expired and the new process adopted by the city was too much for Pilot to proceed with servicing new clients.

The only way that we have been able to reconcile this lack of adequate office space within the courthouse has been to rent additional office space at our Wall St. headquarters, which has caused our Manhattan Family Court staff to split their time between offices, depending upon their daily needs. CASA also has experienced internet and space related issues in our Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens courthouse offices, though none have risen to the level of disruption that we have experienced in Manhattan. The public Wi-Fi administered by OCA does not sufficiently reach many offices or even courtrooms in the buildings and is therefore insufficient to address the deficiencies of the city's maintenance of the buildings. While

it is easy for OCA to paint this as solely a city issue, OCA clearly has an interest in making sure that the building is accessible for litigants and that service providers appointed by family court judges are in a position to fully deliver services at the point of appointment (i.e. the courthouse).

We urge OCA to take better charge of the facilities that they operate within, and ask the Senate to join us in this effort.

Respectfully,



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