



**SUFFOLK COUNTY
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Suffolk County Court Employees Association

NYS Public Protection Hearings Jan. 30, 2018

My name is William Dobbins, President of the Suffolk County Court Employees Association. Thank you again for letting me speak at the NYS Public Protection hearings this year. I come to you, as I have done the last couple of years, searching for your help in getting enough funding so that our courts could once again operate at full staffing levels. We have not been at full staffing since the workforce reduction on 2010. We are literally holding on by the skin of our teeth.

As indicated in the name of our organization, the members of my association work in the Courts in Suffolk County. Over the last year, Suffolk County has become known nationwide as a result of the horrible MS13 activity we have all heard about. In fact, the lifeless bodies of the young people who were slaughtered by MS13 were found less than a mile from the courthouse in Central Islip. The MS13 problem in Suffolk County is so bad that it has gotten the full attention of County Executive Bellone, Governor Cuomo, Attorney General Sessions , and President Trump. To my amazement, the MS13 problem in Suffolk County has not gotten the attention of the people who hold the purse strings for the Office of Court Administration. The reality is that MS 13 is in our backyard. They are very active in the community surrounding the courthouse and they are, without a doubt, active within our court facilities. They are a force to be reckoned with. Their very presence in our court buildings is very intimidating to the people who use our courts, especially victims and potential witnesses. That being said, our Court Officer staffing levels are still below what they should be. We have approximately 22% fewer court officers than we had in 2010. In the environment that we work in, that very fact is disgraceful. With the MS13 activity in our courthouses, we should have 22% more staffing than we did in 2010. We need your help.

Our courts, as I have indicated in previous years, are a den for criminal activity. The best way to limit the criminal activity is through the presence of uniformed Court Officers. We don't have enough officers to patrol the hallways, bathrooms, or stairwells. We barely have enough officers to staff courtrooms. The Governor has been very vocal about his desire that Judges remain on the bench in their courtrooms from 9 until 5 everyday. With court officer staffing

the way it is, it is virtually impossible for that to happen. The security supervisors are continually shuffling Court Officers from one post to another so that Judges can take the bench. Due to lack of security staffing, Judges are lucky if they can get on the bench by 10:00.

Last year, Judge Marks indicated that the courts would be hiring 200 Court Officers Statewide. That sounded like a step in the right direction. What he didn't tell you was that the 200 new officers would barely make up for all the court officers that were eligible to retire last year. The Office of Court Administration is fixing the problem with band aids and band aids don't last forever. We need the Office of Court Administration to spend more money to hire well more than 200 Court Officers in the 2018/19 fiscal year.

The abysmal Court Officer staffing problems are not the only staffing problems we have in Suffolk County. We need more Clerks, Court Reporters, Court Assistants, Senior Court Office Assistants, and many other staffing positions that were lost through the workforce reduction of 2010. Chief Judge Janet DiFiore boasts of her Excellence in the Courts Initiative. On the NYS Courts website, the Chief Judge says that she is "committed to achieve and maintain excellence throughout the court system giving the people of New York the level of justice services they have a right to expect". Without appropriate staffing levels, Judge DiFiore's Excellence in the Court's initiative is just a fantasy. Long lines at the front doors of the Courthouse due to the lack of Security Staffing at the entrances does not exude an image of Excellence in the Courts (especially on a cold January day). Long lines at the information windows due to lack of staffing does not exude an image of Excellence in the Courts. The use of tape machines instead of actual court reporters due to lack of staffing, does not exude Excellence. If Judge DiFiore wants to demonstrate Excellence in the Courts, she must start by increasing staffing levels.

This is the third year that I have had the privilege to speak at these hearings. We laid the issue of backlogs and lack of funding at your feet 2 years ago. This year the Governor indicates that he is concerned about backlogs as well. The backlogs cannot be solved without sufficient staffing and monetary resources. The Courts have been neglected far too long. The legacy that former Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman left behind when he retired is a court system plagued with short staffing and large backlogs. Chief Judge Janet DiFiore can fix this if she is provided with the resources.

Please help us.