

Court Officers Benevolent Association Of Nassau County

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Good Afternoon,

I am Peter Piciulo, President of the Court Officers Benevolent Association of Nassau County. We represent 93 non-judicial of the Unified Court System, and I thank you for inviting me to speak on behalf of our members.

Mr. Chairman and all ranking members, I would like to address the health and safety of the court staff, attorneys, judges, jurors, litigants and the measures taken by OCA and the Unified Court System to reduce the spread of Covid-19 in our courthouses.

Our courthouses were closed to the public except for emergency and essential cases on March 17th. All courthouses except for one were closed. Nassau County entered a Phase I reopening May 29th at which time each court building was reopened. OCA and the UCS did not properly prepare for the reopening. Everything was done on a last-minute basis even though they had 2-1/2 months to prepare. Our walk-thru was a (what will be), not a completed model.

There was initially a shortage of hand sanitizer, sanitizing wipes and PPE. Sanitizing wipes still are needed so the window clerks can wipe down the counters throughout the day. PPE is still distributed in a manner that dissuades many employees from getting it. The internal controls set by OCA are in the security offices. All other departments must go down to ask for a new mask and other PPE instead of their own supply held in their supervisor's office.

Plexiglass was not fully installed when the buildings were reopened. It is still not in place in 95% of the courtrooms. It is on only a few of the judge's benches. There is absolutely none in place to protect the court clerk, court reporter, attorneys, or litigants. It is not in place in any of the back offices. The courtrooms are not ready to start jury trials in our opinion.

Very little has been done in the way of social distancing markers. There are some floor markers in each building, mainly at the entrances and some of the information windows. When it comes to the courtrooms and waiting areas, seats are marked with a small piece of painter's tape. Public bathrooms have not been addressed at all.

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All throughout this process, when it comes to Beaver St., OCA has not included the Union. They have been off the grid! There has been very little communication on their part. Many of our concerns have gone with no response. On May 12th there was a list of concerns sent by all the Unions to OCA that was never responded to. It took three weeks, after the Phase One reopening, to receive guidance from OCA on the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, EFLMEA and EPSLA. There are still issues remaining with how they administer it.

We have asked for a full report on all the HVAC systems and what filters are being used and these requests have gone unaddressed. We have been told that the registers are being disinfected every Friday and fresh air increased. There is a chronic problem with the HVAC system in the Nassau Family Court that has not been repaired for two months now.

When it comes to the Family Court, the halls and courtrooms are too small to properly social distance. The courtrooms are now set up to accommodate 10 people when they should only hold 5-7 with the social distancing protocols. One of the busiest courts in the county, it cannot have litigants safely wait in the halls for their case to be called. The halls are less than six feet wide. All litigants must wait outside of the building unprotected from weather. This courthouse should be shuttered as it is unable to follow COVID-19 social distancing guidelines.

Respectfully Submitted,



Peter A Piciulo
COBANC President