



NEW YORK STATE SUPREME COURT OFFICERS ASSOCIATION, INC. I.L.A. – A.F.L. – C.I.O.

Good day Chairpersons and Senators. It is once again a privilege to be able to address our legislature on behalf of the 2,500 active and retired members of our organization. While we all wish this was under different circumstances, the effort to address this crisis and how it affects every corner of our state is encouraging.

The severe challenges we currently face and those to come are mountainous and distressing to say the least but I want to point out a couple of issues and concerns for our members. This is important as the voice of our overall membership, but, also the success of the Unified Court System as a whole represents the improved safety and health of our Officers. These are suggestions or solutions for areas where the response has lagged.

During a great many conferences and inquiries, the Unions representing 16,000 court employees were told that a priority for protecting us was the installation of Plexiglas. We have all witnessed similar installations in our neighborhoods and towns, yet many of our facilities are still without this additional level of protection. It has been four months since the initial discussion on this safeguard and even with the most gracious understanding of the current difficulties, we cannot fathom why so many businesses and services are outfitted with the Plexiglas while we continue to await it. I ask that this become a priority as more and more of your constituents begin to conduct their civic business in our courthouses. I sincerely hope that this body address this with administrators to fast track a safety measure that was introduced in April. It is for everyone's protection.

Another major matter causing worry amongst our members is the level with which the cleaning protocols are being followed through. As you may know, the Unified Court System does not own the buildings housing our courts, this leads us as tenants to be subject to the rules of the landlords. In the case of New York City, these facilities are cleaned by the Department of Citywide Administrative Services. There is massive unease that the cleaning protocols are not being completed as laid out in many memos and documents. This is not to say that buildings are not being cleaned at all, but that the real difficulties lie in verifying their completion. Perhaps the enormity of space and a shortage of personnel leads to this becoming an issue. Without question, public buildings are tough to maintain, however, there must be a much clearer line of communication between landlord and tenant during this

period of time that lends itself to peace of mind for all who use the court's facilities. This is crucial to be addressed as the increase in foot traffic begins.

In a similar way, the installation of HEPA filters that are new and up to all proper specifications need to be the standard. As with the reopening of schools and businesses, this must be addressed immediately. We cannot afford to begin procedures now and just like the previously mentioned issues be waiting for action all the while possibly providing a less than ideal environment for the health and safety of our members. Every precautionary measure not taken is inviting illness into our workplaces and homes.

One other matter I would like to speak about is the current policy on notification of ill and/or symptomatic individuals. With the return of Grand Jurors last week, the memorandum addressing this important step included language that "...no notification to other jurors should be made prior to receipt of a positive test result." This continues a practice that we have opposed since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. Everyone in contact with a symptomatic individual should be notified immediately most specifically our Officers who may then, in turn, have had contact with many other Officers and court users throughout a given time period. This is the main tenet behind the contact tracer program from the Governor's executive orders. The simple solution to so many of these types of issues is for the agency to provide its employees access to the quick result COVID test. It eliminates all of the uncertainty of waiting for results and contact tracing becomes a secondary protective tool. The increase of court users is bound to present many infection challenges, but by making available this level of testing a priority we can be ahead of the curve instead of finding ourselves trying to flatten it again.

Thank you for your time today. Most people understand the complexities of public life that are ahead of us and it is my sincere hope that some simple changes can put us on a pathway to a realistic return to in person operations in the safest possible manner for every one of us.