



PRESS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

**Hon. Tamiko Amaker
Acting Chief Administrative Judge**

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Acting Chief Judge Cannataro Delivers 2023 State of Our Judiciary Address

ALBANY, NEW YORK—Appearing before a small group of court administrators at the Court of Appeals, Acting Chief Judge Anthony Cannataro presented the 2023 State of Our Judiciary, highlighting the many achievements made over the past year by courts statewide, underscoring the hurdles facing the court system going forward and providing insight into the measures being taken to address these challenges.

“I am honored to bring the leaders of our court system together today in our magnificent courtroom here in Court of Appeals Hall,” said Judge Cannataro, in opening this year’s address, noting that the past two State of Our Judiciary addresses were presented virtually due to the pandemic. Describing 2022 as “a year marked by transition,” he said, “We have transitioned to a court system that is restoring its calendars to pre-pandemic numbers; making every effort to cut down on pending case backlogs that accumulated during the pandemic; and modernizing procedures to capitalize on technological advances that enhance our efficiency and increase access to justice,” adding that despite the “uncertainty ... regarding the ... transition in court leadership,” “Our judicial and nonjudicial personnel continue to deliver high-quality justice services daily to all who enter New York’s courthouses.”

Initially focusing his address on court operations, Judge Cannataro said, “With the resumption of full trial capacity late last summer, our ascent from pandemic-related backlogs picked up steam in 2022 and our courts resolved more than 2.1 million cases across the state.” He reported on the progress made in moving criminal cases forward, highlighting several initiatives to reduce case backlogs, including a program in the Seventh Judicial District that has been successful in reducing older pending criminal cases and New York City’s dedicated gun parts, which have reduced the City’s inventory of pending gun possession cases by 33 percent. On the civil side, Judge

Cannataro reported that almost 8,700 trials were commenced in local civil courts last year—a 44 percent increase over 2021. He also spoke of the reductions made in the volume of older pending civil cases, especially in Supreme Courts outside New York City; and of the increase in Family Court case dispositions since 2021 “despite an almost 20 percent rise in new filings.”

Additionally, Judge Cannataro emphasized the achievements made over the past year by the court system’s Appellate Division, including the Fourth Department’s 100 percent reduction of case backlogs caused by the onset of COVID; and the Second Department’s—the State’s busiest appellate court—nearly 50 percent reduction in its criminal appeal caseload between 2019 and 2022. “At every single level, New York’s courts have demonstrated an impressive dedication to overcoming challenges and delays attributable to the pandemic,” he said, acknowledging there is more progress to be made and that the court system’s leadership team, judges and nonjudicial employees “are conscientiously endeavoring to maximize efficiencies and shift resources to ... keep our dockets moving swiftly.”

Regarding the court system’s workforce, Judge Cannataro lamented the courts’ personnel shortages, largely due to the pandemic, that have “left us struggling to adequately staff our courtrooms with court officers, court reporters and interpreters, and to ensure that our IT Departments are able to meet the technological needs of our judges and back-office personnel.” He noted that the court system’s recent budget requests seek “to facilitate a return to pre-pandemic staffing levels,” stating, “Justice delayed is justice denied, and it is imperative that we have sufficient staff support for our courts to deliver justice expeditiously.”

Judge Cannataro today also discussed the challenges faced by New York City’s universal access program—which provides low-income tenants access to legal representation in Housing Court—reporting that the New York City Housing Court is working closely with the City’s Office of Civil Justice, the mayor, institutional service providers, the Bar and law schools on this issue. “We are committed to supporting creative strategies to augment the availability of legal representation in housing proceedings to enable the speedy resolution of disputes and minimize resort to eviction,” he said, adding that “many courts around the state have undertaken measures to facilitate increased access to self-help resources and legal representation in housing disputes.”

Judge Cannataro devoted a portion of his address to the pivotal role of technology in the court system’s progress to date and going forward, stating “We have made substantial strides in streamlining our case management systems, particularly in our criminal courts. This gives trial courts more tools to aggressively manage their dockets and facilitates quicker and more standardized reporting of case information.” Later, emphasizing technology’s part in advancing the court system’s mission, he added, “The march to modernize and update our courthouses endures. We are embracing virtual appearances and proceedings where appropriate ... Virtual options lessen costs ... for

the parties; reduce litigant time away from home, work and family; and ease the burdens on attorneys practicing in multiple courts and geographic locations—especially in rural areas experiencing attorney shortages.”

He also spoke extensively of the work being done to address scheduling and other problems in the Family Courts identified in the Franklin H. Williams Judicial Commission’s recent report, vowing to “continue refine our operations for the benefit of New York families.”

With mental health a much-discussed issue in these times, Judge Cannataro today raised the topic, announcing the court system’s formation of a blue-ribbon panel to review and implement the recommendations of the National Judicial Task Force to Examine State Courts’ Response to Mental Illness, which has developed tools, trainings and best practices for state courts to promote systemic and community-level change in responding to mental and behavioral health issues in justice-involved individuals. “Far too often, individuals with unaddressed or untreated mental and behavioral health problems end up in our courtrooms ... we have an obligation to provide effective and appropriate competency procedures and diversion options to reduce the likelihood of incarceration and increase the rate of recovery,” he said, noting that the court system has over 300 problem-solving courts, including 42 Mental Health Courts, around the state working toward these goals.

During today’s address Judge Cannataro also underscored the court system’s ongoing efforts “to deliver equal justice to every person and entity that comes before our courts.” Consistent with the recommendations outlined in Jeh Johnson’s Equal Justice Report, he reported, “We have created and distributed mandatory bias training for judges, nonjudicial staff, court officers and uniform personnel ... We have similarly adopted anti-bias training requirements for mediators, arbitrators and neutral evaluators involved in court-sponsored alternate dispute resolution programs ... Through scores of programs ... we have continued to raise awareness among our workforce; implement programs ... to strengthen the humanity and dignity in interactions between court personnel and litigants; and guard against the blight of racism both in, and outside, of our courtrooms.”

In closing, Judge Cannataro, alluding to “the unprecedented events surrounding the Chief Judge selection process,” thanked “every single member of our court system family for continuing to fulfill their duties with the utmost professionalism,” later adding, “Since its founding, New York’s ... court system ... has supported the essential pillars of our democracy by delivering fair and impartial justice without regard to political persuasion or the headwinds of public opinion ... This, our judiciary has done since its founding and, this, I am confident we will continue to do.”

The video of Judge Cannataro’s address and a full report are available online at: <https://ww2.nycourts.gov/admin/stateofjudiciary/>