

MESSAGE FROM CHIEF JUDGE JANET DIFIORE

June 21, 2021

Thank you for giving us a few minutes of your time for an update on the latest COVID developments affecting our courts and the justice system.

Last week, we welcomed back the return of 19 certificated Supreme Court Justices. We are pleased and delighted to have these seasoned jurists back in their courthouses, doing what they do best: using their experience and skills to resolve cases and deliver fair and timely justice to the lawyers and litigants appearing in our courts.

On their first day back last Tuesday, the Justices wasted no time in making their presence felt, immediately trying cases, presiding over calendars, hearing motions and conferencing matters. Many of the returning judges also participated in two days of training last week to prepare for the assignment of selected Family Court matters to their dockets, and we very much look forward to their service and positive

contributions in addressing the backlogs and increased demand for services in the critically important Family Court.

While the certification process was long and tortuous for all involved, we are greatly relieved that the Judiciary's fiscal circumstances have not only changed, but have improved to the point where we can welcome back these experienced and dedicated Justices to help our court system resume the great progress we were making under the banner of the Excellence Initiative before the pandemic struck. As we move forward into what we are certain will be a new and better normal for the courts, we will be counting on our returning Supreme Court Justices to help us meet the challenges that lie ahead of us.

I want to thank the returning judges for their patience and perseverance, and for their extraordinary commitment to our court system. We have missed their presence and productivity, but we are excited to welcome them back!

And speaking of commitment, I want to take a moment to highlight the dedicated judges and court professionals who serve in our 300-plus problem-solving drug treatment, mental health and veterans' treatment courts across the state. These folks deserve our gratitude and appreciation for deftly navigating all of the in-person restrictions and operational challenges presented by the pandemic, and they never stopped working to find new and creative ways to provide life-saving treatment services to the litigants appearing in their courts,-- litigants whose struggles with addiction were only heightened by the anxiety and isolation caused by the pandemic. In fact, since the beginning of the pandemic, our judges and staff have made it possible for nearly 4,000 New Yorkers to complete their respective treatment court programs.

And last Wednesday, in the Criminal Term of the New York County Supreme Court, Administrative Judge Ellen Biben presided over a moving "Recognition Ceremony" for 20 graduates who successfully completed their treatment program in the Supreme Court's "Alternatives to Incarceration Part." Judge Biben, who presides over the ATI Part, congratulated the graduates and their family members, and celebrated their successes. Several of the graduates spoke about the opportunity they have been given to turn their lives around, and

about the strong and inspiring encouragement they received from Judge Biben, and the dedicated court professionals, defense lawyers and treatment providers who were there for them throughout the difficult months of the pandemic, ensuring that they received the critically important services provided through the ATI part to assist in their recovery.

We join in congratulating the graduates, and extend our thanks and appreciation to Judge Biben and her staff, as well as the many justice partners and stakeholders, including District Attorney Cyrus Vance and his staff, the defense bar and the Center for Court Innovation, whose collective commitment to providing life-changing treatment services is making a positive difference to reduce recidivism and strengthen the fabric of our communities. So, thank you to all of them.

Last Wednesday, we kicked off our Virtual 2021 Judicial Seminar with an excellent program and presentation headed by Secretary Jeh Johnson, who gave a most insightful overview of his findings and recommendations, and then joined Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence Marks and Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Edwina

Mendelson for a panel discussion on our progress in effectuating the reforms called for in the Equal Justice Report.

I want to thank the Judicial Institute's Interim Dean, Sherry Klein Heitler, and her terrific staff, for doing a great job of providing high quality professional education and training to our judges and staff over the last 16 months; and, of course, for putting together an excellent and comprehensive curriculum for this year's Judicial Seminar, consisting of more than 50 different programs to be presented over the course of the Summer, informative and thought-provoking programs addressing the unique times we are living in, as well as a full panoply of substantive law programs and legal updates.

And to give you a sense of the depth and variety of this year's Seminar, here are just a few of programs we are presenting: Recognizing and Responding to Improper Conduct and Bias;... Disability Accommodations in the Courts;... Reimagining Courts and Technology;... Managing Your Stress and Anxiety to Stay Healthy on the Bench;... Legalized Recreational Marijuana and Impaired Driving;... Identifying and Serving Survivors of Human Trafficking;... Settlement Conference and Mediation Skills;... Trying Cases Using Virtual Evidence;... Best

Practices for Conducting Summary Jury Trials;... and, of course, the usual legal updates on: criminal, civil, family, housing and matrimonial law.

I want to thank the many judges and court professionals who devote their time to present these programs and share their knowledge and skills with their colleagues across our court system. Professional training and education are at the heart of our Excellence Initiative, and our efforts to advance the knowledge and skills of our judges and court professionals will redound to the benefit of the entire court system, especially, and most importantly, to the litigants and lawyers who turn to us for fair, efficient and high quality justice services.

Now, as many of you know, the month of June is “LGBTQ Pride Month,” and among the programs and events scheduled in honor of Pride Month is a very special tribute to our dear friend and colleague, Associate Court of Appeals Judge Paul G. Feinman, who sadly passed away, much too young, this past March 31st. On Tuesday, June 22nd, from 12:30 to 2 PM, we will gather, in person, in the rotunda of the New York County Courthouse, at 60 Centre Street, to honor Judge Feinman’s memory and storied career as a lawyer and distinguished

trial and appellate judge and as a pioneering role model for LGBTQ lawyers and judges in New York State and across the nation. The ceremony will be broadcast live on YouTube for those who cannot join us at the courthouse in lower Manhattan, and I hope that you will tune in to honor the memory of this very fine man and wonderful servant of the law.

I want to thank the Co-Chairs of the Richard C. Failla LGBTQ Commission, Judges Anthony Cannataro and Joanne Winslow, the Commission's members, and its Executive Director, Matthew Skinner, for organizing this very special tribute in honor of Judge Feinman.

I thank you for "tuning in," and once again urge you to remain disciplined in doing all that you can and should be doing to keep yourselves and those around you safe. Thank you.