

MESSAGE FROM ACTING CHIEF JUDGE ANTHONY CANNATARO

November 14, 2022

Greetings, this is Acting Chief Judge Anthony Cannataro, and I would like to take a few minutes today to bring everyone up to date on an important change to the leadership of our court system that will be taking place in the coming weeks.

As many of you know, Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence K. Marks has announced that he will retire from the Judiciary, effective at the end of this month. Judge Marks has enjoyed an extraordinary 31-year career in the New York State courts . . . , capped by his seven-plus years of stellar service as the Chief Administrative Judge responsible for the day-to-day operation and administration of one of the largest and busiest court systems in the world [, – with an annual budget of 2.4 billion dollars; . . . more than 3,000 state and local judges; . . . and over 15,000 nonjudicial employees working to deliver justice to millions of New Yorkers in more than 300 court locations in all 62 counties of New York State].

As Chief Administrative Judge, Judge Marks worked hand-in-hand with Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman, and then with Chief Judge Janet DiFiore, as he took on the responsibility of implementing countless operational and policy reforms over the years that have greatly improved the quality of justice in our civil; . . . criminal; . . . family; . . . and surrogate's courts across the state.

The list of Judge Marks' accomplishments and contributions are too numerous for me to catalog, but I would be remiss if I did not highlight his leadership role in:

- Implementing the "Excellence Initiative," which in just 3 ½ years dramatically improved the efficiency of court operations statewide, and slashed our case backlogs to historic lows;
- Integrating presumptive early ADR as a component of our statewide civil case management systems;
- Adopting historic equal justice reforms aimed at eradicating racism and implicit bias and at fostering a more equitable and inclusive court system;
- Eliminating barriers to court access and expanding access to justice for low-income New Yorkers;

And, of course, no one will ever forget Judge Marks' herculean efforts during the pandemic, when he worked 24/7, alongside Chief Judge DiFiore and our court leadership team, to guide and inspire our judges and court staff in transforming our massive, in-person operating model into an effective virtual model that was able to provide the public safe and effective access to justice during tumultuous times. Our institution was very fortunate to have such a skilled, knowledgeable and experienced leader to help us navigate the many complex operational and public health challenges presented over the last 2 ½ years. And Judge Marks did it with his signature calm temperament and unflappable demeanor: always deliberate; . . . professional; . . . focused; . . . and positive.

Judge Marks is widely respected in the legal community for his public service, and for dedicating virtually his entire professional career to a single agenda: improving how our court system functions and delivers justice for the benefit of the people we all serve. He deserves our enduring thanks and admiration for his excellent service as Criminal Justice Counsel in OCA Counsel's Office; . . . Special Counsel to the Chief Administrative Judge; . . . Administrative Director of OCA; . . . Judge of the Court of Claims and sitting Justice of the Commercial Division; . . .

First Deputy Chief Administrative Judge; . . . and, of course, as one of the longest-serving Chief Administrative Judges in state history.

On a more personal note, words cannot adequately express my admiration for Judge Marks and his lifetime of selfless and dedicated public service. And, although it feels a bit bittersweet, I congratulate him on his well-deserved retirement.

But even though we will miss Judge Marks, I could not be more excited or pleased to have this opportunity to announce that Judge Tamiko Amaker will assume the duties of Acting Chief Administrative Judge on December 1st.

Judge Amaker is a highly experienced and talented leader who is well-prepared to serve as the Acting Chief Administrative Judge. Since January, she has been the Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Management Support of the Unified Court System, a role which has entailed working with Chief Administrative Judge Marks on the day-to-day administration and operation of our trial courts statewide, . . . and working closely with our statewide leadership team to address the

remaining challenges of the pandemic and resume the outstanding forward progress we were making under the Excellence Initiative.

Judge Amaker also continues to serve as the Administrative Judge of the New York City Criminal Court, where, for several years, she has done a superb job of leading the court's judges and staff in streamlining operations; . . . dramatically improving the performance of that very busy court, . . . safely guiding the Criminal Court through the pandemic; . . . and successfully planning and organizing our efforts to restart criminal jury trials across New York City.

As Acting Chief Judge, I very much look forward to working with Judge Amaker, . . . and continuing to work with the other members of our seasoned; . . . competent; . . . and committed statewide leadership team of Deputy Chief Administrative Judges: Edwina Richardson-Mendelson; . . . Norman St. George; . . . and Deborah Kaplan; and the Presiding Justices of our four Appellate Division Departments— Rolando T. Acosta, Hector D. LaSalle, Elizabeth A. Garry, and Gerald J. Whalen. I appreciate their support in connection with Judge Amaker's interim designation. And I am proud that our court system leadership continues to reflect the diverse populace that our courts serve, as

Judge Amaker will be the first black woman to serve as our state's Chief Administrative Judge.

As we await the nomination and confirmation of our next Chief Judge, I can assure you that our experienced team of court system leaders is unified and laser-focused on the goals of maintaining — and, where possible, enhancing — the provision of fair, timely and accessible justice services to all New Yorkers.

So, I hope that you will join me in congratulating and thanking Judge Marks on his spectacular career, and in welcoming Judge Amaker to her new role.

I would also like to take a minute to recognize the hard work of the Pandemic Practices Working Group of the Commission to Reimagine the Future of New York Courts, and to provide an update on the Group's progress. Formed this past May by former Chief Judge DiFiore, . . . and led by Supreme Court Justice Craig Doran and Commission Chair Henry Greenberg, . . . over the last several months, the Pandemic Practices Group has been undertaking a thorough and multifaceted review of the practices and protocols implemented to keep our courts

running and delivering justice throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The Group's on-going evaluation and study will assist us, among other ways, in determining which changes and procedures benefitted court users and increased the court system's ability and efficiency in delivering justice. This will, in turn, facilitate our assessment of which measures should be continued and incorporated into normal practice going forward.

The Pandemic Practices Group has tirelessly endeavored to fulfill its mission, and has held public meetings throughout the state . . . in Buffalo, Albany, and New York City. The Group has also hosted more than thirty Remote Listening Sessions.

The public meetings — the most recent of which occurred just a few weeks ago — allow for open and honest conversations between judges, court administrators and personnel, and members of the community and bar regarding the benefits and drawbacks . . . pros and cons . . . of various procedures and technological innovations adopted or expanded by the courts during the pandemic. The Pandemic Practices Group has heard testimony from almost 100 witnesses during these public meetings . . . , including representatives of state and local bar

associations, public defender and District Attorneys' offices, legal services organizations such as Legal Aid, the Empire Justice Center, and the New York Civil Liberties Union, as well as other interested stakeholders. In addition to identifying measures that should be retained, the meetings have helped us identify areas of concern to stakeholders that may require more immediate action, continuing refinement, or further study.

I have no doubt that the Office of Court Administration and the Pandemic Practices Group are committed to considering the legal community's feedback, . . . and I know that the Practices Group takes very seriously its mission to evaluate the best way forward for all who rely on and interact with the justice system. We thank the distinguished and dedicated members of the Pandemic Practices Group and the Commission to Reimagine the Future of New York Courts for their determined and diligent efforts. And, we look forward to hearing its eventual recommendations.

In closing, please accept my thanks for your continued hard work, and for your ongoing efforts to stay disciplined and responsible in keeping yourselves, and those around you, safe and healthy. Thank you.