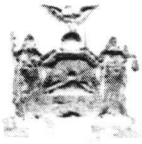


Chief Judge of the State of New York



Janet DiFiore

July 16, 2020

Hon. Bill de Blasio
Mayor
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

I write to correct the numerous inaccuracies you levied against the court system in your public statements at today's press conference. Contrary to your assertions, the criminal courts in New York City are not, and have never been, closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. By misrepresenting the current state of the courts, you disrespect the exceptional work being done by hardworking judges and court employees throughout the city and damage the work we do to provide access to justice to all New Yorkers and promote the rule of law.

Once it became clear this past March that in-person court proceedings posed an immediate threat to the health and safety of the thousands of individuals comprising the criminal justice system and the public at large, the tireless efforts of our judges and staff led to the establishment of a virtual court system that has since allowed every essential matter to be heard without interruption. This has ensured due process and access to justice for New Yorkers throughout even the darkest days of this unprecedented public health emergency.

Through virtual appearances, the New York City Criminal Court, since mid-March, has conducted nearly 19,000 arraignments, 34,000 additional criminal proceedings and over 600 felony preliminary hearings. During the same time period, the criminal term of Supreme Court separately held another 11,360 virtual conferences and proceedings citywide.

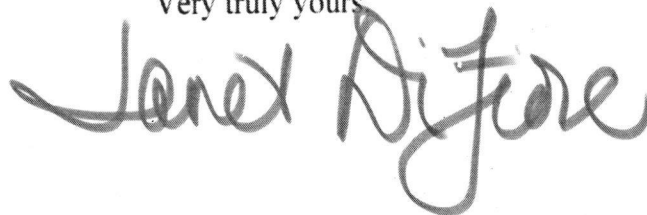
The courts have since tracked Governor Andrew Cuomo's metrics and progressed with the rest of the state through the deliberate phased process that has allowed New York to emerge from this crisis. Last week, the courts in New York City entered Phase 3 and have held in-person proceedings in every borough. Also, as part of Phase 3, summonses for grand jury service were sent out in anticipation of grand juries being convened across the city in the first half of August.

By carefully planning for the safe return and eventual increase of in-person operations, we have retrofitted dozens of courtrooms and installed plexiglass barriers to ensure safe social

distancing. We are also implementing staggered scheduling to limit overall traffic, requiring entrance screenings with temperature checks and mandatory PPE, and increasing cleaning and sanitizing regimens. We are working with the District Attorney's Offices, the defense bar, law enforcement partners, and our own epidemiologist to continuously assess and minimize risks so that we can build on the hard-fought progress we have achieved while always remaining open and ready to serve the public.

Although we share your goals of a safer and stronger city, your plea for a "functioning and open" court system wholly ignores the reality that the courts have not only always remained open, but have excelled and adapted in ways that were unimaginable only a few months ago. We will continue to do so to serve justice and promote the common good for the people of this state and city, and would appreciate your correcting the inaccurate record you made today and getting the facts straight going forward. New Yorkers expect and deserve nothing less.

Very truly yours

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Janet Rife". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed text "Very truly yours".