

State of Our Judiciary 2021

Chief Justice Janet M. DiFiore, New York Court of Appeals

Virtual message to judges and lawmakers

March 2, 2021, at Court of Appeals Hall, Albany, NY

Introduction

Welcome to the State of Our Judiciary 2021. It was almost exactly one year ago today that I delivered the 2020 State of Our Judiciary Address here at Court of Appeals Hall in Albany. Of course, this majestic courtroom was filled with our colleagues, lawyers who practice in our courts, elected officials, our partners in government, and ordinary citizens interested in our system of justice. 2021 was dawning with great promise and potential for the New York State courts. I proudly described all of the great progress we had made to improve our performance under the banner of our Excellence Initiative, and I went on to describe the many important improvements, we believed at the time, would be in store for the coming year.

I spoke about the significant reduction in case backlogs across the state, and new processes designed to further improve our efficiency and achieve better outcomes for lawyers and their clients, including our all-out effort to integrate presumptive early ADR into our statewide civil and family case management systems. And I spoke about our historic proposal to amend the State Constitution to simplify and streamline the structure of our trial courts, in order to increase access to justice for people of modest means and enable us to manage our resources in ways that respond to the changing needs of the litigants in our courts.

That was the State of Our Judiciary in late February 2020 – strong, and promising. Barely two weeks later, New York City and New York State became the national epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic, and all of our plans and expectations dramatically changed in a matter of days. The public health crisis struck with lightning speed, with every aspect of our personal and professional lives turned upside down. We suffered the loss of loved ones, friends and colleagues; the economy was savaged; and the virus forced our courts to transform how we operate and deliver our services.

While it was immediately obvious that we had to make dramatic changes in our operating model, closing the courts was never an option for us. Because New Yorkers rely on their courts for so many vital services, we never stopped hearing emergency and essential matters or delivering justice services at any point in the pandemic. Our judges, our court managers, court officers, court clerks and so many others performed magnificently, demonstrating tremendous dedication and resilience, and volunteering to preside over and staff the newly-created essential and emergency parts as we worked as fast as humanly possible to stand up a virtual court system that could ensure the broadest, safest access to justice. And because of the magnificent efforts of all these individuals, the New York State courts were able to put the public first, and honor our mission of ensuring access to justice, and upholding the rule of law.

Virtual Courts

Working on a blank slate, our judges and staff distinguished themselves as leaders in the nation, responding to a fluid, fast-moving and unpredictable situation. Our excellent leadership team, led by Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence Marks, quickly coalesced to implement smart, responsible operational changes, based on the available public health guidance, to balance court access with public safety. And most importantly, our team accepted the reality that we would be called upon to pivot, scrap our carefully crafted plans, and start all over again on a moment's notice, which we did on a number of occasions:

- On March 11th, we responded to the first confirmed cases in our state by restricting courthouse entry by high-risk individuals.
- Within days of that first order, we suspended jury operations and high-volume civil parts, and directed that court business be handled by video and telephonic conference in order to reduce courthouse traffic and prevent the spread of the virus.
- On March 16th, we temporarily postponed all non-essential court functions not requiring prompt attention, and consolidated essential and emergency matters into a limited number of courthouses.
- By the following week, we stood up virtual court parts in the high-volume New York City Criminal and Family Courts to hear essential and emergency matters.
- By April 6th, all essential and emergency matters across the state were being heard virtually.
- And by April 13th, non-essential matters were added back to our calendars, enabling judges and staff in all 62 counties to get back to work on their pending caseloads by conducting virtual conferences with attorneys to resolve outstanding issues, move cases closer to final resolution and facilitate settlements where appropriate.
- During the months of April and May, the Court of Appeals and all four Departments of the Appellate Division quickly transitioned to a virtual model and began hearing oral arguments, remotely and in-person, pursuant to proper safety protocols and with proceedings live-streamed on the courts' public websites. All four Departments did an excellent job of leveraging virtual technology to carry out their important primary, and auxiliary operations.

I say this with every ounce of humility, pride and admiration that I can muster: the transformation of our massive, complex, in-person operating model into a functioning virtual model, capable of providing court access in the broadest range of cases was an absolutely remarkable achievement – one that I will never forget. And it was accomplished in record time: through excellent planning and execution by our leadership team; with the support and cooperation of the bar and our many justice partners; and because of the incredible commitment, dedication and ingenuity of our judges and professional staff, especially our professionals in the Division of Technology.

Of course, technology can only partially supplant the human element, and because we know and value the face-to-face interactions that are absolutely essential to the delivery of justice, as soon

as we completed our transformation to a virtual court model, we began our work to prepare for the safe resumption of appropriate in-person operations. And following all available public health guidance, we retrofitted our courthouses and implemented extensive safety measures to protect the health of everyone entering and working in our buildings, including: COVID screening and temperature checks; social distancing protocols; ... installation of acrylic barriers; strict cleaning and sanitizing standards; and disciplined use of PPE.

Our commitment to, and consistency in following the best safety practices and public health guidance paid off quickly and enabled us to resume some in-person proceedings. We resumed the empanelment of grand juries, and we were able to restart a limited number of in-person civil and criminal jury trials across the state. And then, what we always knew was possible, or even likely, the virus made a resurgence, and we were compelled to pause our jury trial efforts once again in mid-November.

At the present time, we are still conducting the vast majority of court business virtually, but with the second wave of the virus subsiding we are in the process of summoning trial jurors back to our courthouses in order to resume a limited number of in-person civil and criminal jury trials statewide. And while we have empaneled at least one sitting grand jury in every county of the state, we are incrementally expanding that number where there is a demonstrated need for additional panels. We are confident in our ability to safely resume in-person operations based on the experience we have gained, and on the lessons we have learned over the last year.

Looking back on our successful transformation to a virtual court model, it has become clear that one of the most important factors in our ability to function effectively is the robust e-filing system we have in place allowing lawyers and litigants safe and reliable access to our in-person and virtual courts. And our expansion of e-filing during the pandemic, including to the New York City Surrogate's Courts last June, and the high-volume New York City Housing Court last October, had an immediate, positive impact on operations that will now be of lasting benefit to the litigants and lawyers in those courts.

In order to capitalize on the demonstrated benefits of e-filing, and on the recommendation of the Commission to Reimagine the Future of New York's Courts, we have submitted a legislative proposal to provide the Chief Administrative Judge with broader authority to implement new e-filing programs. As we prepare for a likely surge in post-pandemic court filings, we are hopeful that the Legislature will agree that this is the right time to give the officials who are most familiar with the needs of our courts, particularly the lower criminal and civil courts that serve millions of low-income New Yorkers, the broadest possible authority and discretion to expand the efficiency and convenience of e-filing to meet those needs.

History has taught us that in every crisis, opportunity for positive change can be found. And for all of the tragedy and disruption, our experiences over this last year have indeed served as the impetus for positive innovation. Our virtual court model, which started as a stopgap solution to safely meet the demand for our services during a historic pandemic, has shown itself to be a transformative opportunity for the future of our courts. And we will continue to work with our technology experts, the bar, all of our stakeholders, the Commission to Reimagine the Future of

New York's Courts and the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice to maximize our expertise and strengthen our capacity for effective and appropriate virtual operations.

Court Operations

So, where are we today? Today we are remotely conferencing well over 20,000 cases per week: narrowing disputed issues; settling cases; referring matters to virtual ADR; hearing motions; and conducting over a thousand virtual bench trials and evidentiary and fact-finding hearings each week.

Since early April, we have conducted almost three-quarters of a million virtual case conferences. Over 230,000 of those matters were settled or otherwise disposed of, and over 80,000 decisions were issued on motions and undecided matters. And we have conducted over 10,000 virtual bench trials and evidentiary and fact-finding hearings since the beginning of November.

In addition, every individual arrested and held in custody since the beginning of the pandemic has been expeditiously arraigned by a judge. In the New York City Criminal Court, 65,000 virtual arraignment proceedings were conducted over the past 10 months, and another 93,000 arraignments were conducted in the City and District Courts outside New York City over that same time period.

Our Family Courts have also been incredibly busy. Over the past 10 months, there were almost a million virtual appearances by litigants, lawyers and stakeholders statewide.

And in the New York City Civil Court, nearly 90,000 matters were disposed of, and just over 1,700 virtual trials were conducted.

While the pandemic has temporarily paused the positive momentum we have built over the last five years under the banner of our Excellence Initiative, these numbers clearly show that our judges, staff and leadership team have never stopped working to advance the goals of operational and decisional excellence in courts throughout the state.

In addition to the operational initiatives we have put in place in response to the changing public health environment, we have also implemented changes with the dual purpose of: streamlining general civil practice in the long term, and limiting unnecessary personal appearances to slow the spread of the virus in the short term. Effective February 1, 2021, the Uniform Civil Rules for the Supreme Court and the County Court were amended to capitalize on recent advances made to improve litigation in the Commercial Division of the Supreme Court. The new amendments are the result of the exhaustive work of our Advisory Committee on Civil Practice; public comment we received; and review by two working groups of leading judges and practitioners whose experience and sound judgment informed the Administrative Board's final decision to adopt the new rules. We acknowledge and appreciate the care and attention devoted to this initiative in support of our Excellence Initiative. And we thank them all.

Notwithstanding our very best efforts, it is not surprising that the pandemic has taken a toll on our dockets and caused backlog in some of our courts. Let me assure you: we have been

proactive in our response, examining and reexamining every process; practice; and protocol we have in place. And where the current court structure has allowed us the flexibility to make appropriate adjustments, we have taken creative steps to reconfigure our processes in order to provide access to the courts; move cases to resolution; and avoid the build-up of backlogs.

Family Court

In the New York City Family Court, where the work has been extremely stressful, and non-stop, judges and staff have performed with skill; grace; and commitment. Eleven virtual intake parts were created citywide to handle tens of thousands of emergency and essential matters, ensuring immediate access to justice services in matters involving temporary orders of protection; high-stakes emergency removals of abused or neglected children; and juvenile delinquency petitions.

In January, we established a volunteer protocol for judges from other courts to take on newly-filed custody and visitation matters in the New York City Family Court in order to reduce the backlog of these cases and enable Family Court Judges to get through their remaining dockets more expeditiously. Stepping up to assist our judicial colleagues has always been a hallmark of the professionalism shown by our judges, and never more so than this past year, over 40 acting and elected Supreme Court Justices volunteered to take on and preside over these Family Court matters. Kudos to each of these judges and their staff.

Criminal Matters

Likewise in the criminal courts, new initiatives have been put in place. Focusing on the unsettling backlog of unindicted felony complaints awaiting grand jury presentation in New York City, a number which has doubled over the last year, we created new Unindicted Felony Parts. Since early January, the judges in these parts have remotely conferenced over 4,000 cases, disposing of approximately 33% of the cases heard. I want to thank the District Attorneys in New York City, the defense bar and the judges and staff in these parts for demonstrating that it is possible to work together to responsibly drive down our backlogs, and provide timely justice to all parties.

Civil Matters

And back, for a moment, to underscore the point I made earlier about creating positive outcomes from a crisis. Last Spring, when the filing of new cases in our courts was temporarily suspended, we had our judges and staff prioritize the large backlog of undecided civil motions pending in Supreme Court in order to be in a position to process cases more efficiently upon our return to full operations. In total, judges decided almost 20,000 motions in just a few months. The backlog of motions in the courts outside New York City was eliminated in very short order. In New York City, where the volume of pending motions made the challenge more difficult, the backlog was slashed to almost zero by early Fall. Today, I am pleased to report that the number of fully submitted, undecided motions is at the lowest level we have seen in decades. And going forward, we are committed to maintain that level of efficiency.

Opioid Treatment Courts

The enormity of COVID-19 has affected every aspect of our lives, including our mental health and emotional well-being. So it comes as no surprise that the pandemic has sadly contributed to a record number of opioid-related deaths. The work in our problem-solving courts has taken on a heightened sense of urgency, and our judges and staff have rolled up their sleeves and found creative ways to continue providing life-saving treatment services for those struggling with addiction, - and we have established three new Opioid Treatment Courts in Queens, Oneida and Montgomery Counties, increasing to 23 the number of opioid treatment courts now in operation statewide. I want to thank our Office of Policy and Planning and all of our problem-solving court judges, coordinators, case managers, staff and stakeholders for their ingenuity and dedication in meeting the specialized needs of the litigants in these unique courts. There has never been a greater call for these services in our communities across the state.

ADR

On the civil side of our house, the continued expansion of ADR has been one of the bright spots in our work to keep the courts functioning well. In fact, throughout the pandemic our judges and staff have relied on virtual ADR to great effect to resolve cases and move their dockets forward, and settlement rates have been consistent with our in-person models. Of the nearly 20,000 civil and family disputes referred to virtual mediation in our Community Dispute Resolution Centers, 73% were successfully settled. In the Monroe, Broome and Erie County Family Courts, presumptive mediation of custody and visitation cases is off to an excellent start, with a 75% settlement rate; and a new virtual “Child Permanency Mediation Program” was just launched this January in the New York City Family Court to promote better outcomes for children and families.

Presumptive mediation was also recently implemented, successfully, in the New York City Small Claims Courts, where volunteer neutrals from the Community Dispute Resolution Centers, law schools and bar associations facilitated settlements in 52% of mediated cases. And last month, in Manhattan Small Claims Court, we established a nationally innovative “Online Dispute Resolution Pilot Program” that provides unrepresented parties with a user-friendly digital forum, featuring an automated negotiation process to guide parties in reaching a fair settlement in their cases.

We know and understand that ADR will play a key role in providing court access and helping us safely and efficiently process our dockets as we emerge from the pandemic, and we remain 100% committed to implementing our model of presumptive early ADR in order to transform the old culture of “litigate first,” to the new culture of “mediate first” in all appropriate cases.

Equal Justice

So, while 2020 has indeed presented unique and difficult operational challenges for us to manage through, not all of the challenges we faced involved operations. 2020 will also be remembered as a turning point nationally in matters of racial justice. When the killing of George Floyd last May was followed a few days later by a racist Facebook posting by one of our employees, I turned to former Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson, a nationally respected lawyer and public

servant, and asked him to examine our system and lead an independent, no-holds-barred review of our courts to help us identify, and eliminate from our institution, - any and all forms of racism, bias and disparate treatment of our colleagues.

Secretary Johnson and his team at Paul Weiss issued a comprehensive report with a set of practical recommendations that we have fully embraced, and are now in the process of implementing, in a manner that is designed to be inclusive, open and transparent. As Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals and the State of New York, and on behalf of our entire court system, I have made a solemn, unshakeable commitment to achieve a policy of zero tolerance for racial bias and discrimination. Our approach to bias, discrimination and harassment is, and will be, for as long as I have the privilege of serving as your Chief Judge, zero tolerance.

Providing equal justice under the law is at the very heart of our mission as a court system. Public trust and confidence in the fairness of our justice system is essential to our mission, it is our very reason for being, and it is incumbent upon each one of us, judges, court professionals and public servants, to ensure that every person who appears before us, and every colleague we work with, is treated with fairness, with dignity, and with respect. There can be no higher priority for us, and we will lead by example at every level, and from every position we hold. That commitment starts at the top, and I wholeheartedly embrace my responsibility.

Access to Justice

Fairness and access must be carefully fostered in all aspects of our work. During this year's 11th Public Hearing on Civil Legal Services we learned, not surprisingly, that despite the best efforts of legal service providers the pandemic has increased and intensified the legal problems facing low-income New Yorkers in eviction; domestic violence; unemployment; consumer debt; and other areas that disproportionately impact low-income families and communities of color. While we heard many positive reports about how remote technology is connecting low-income litigants with the courts and legal service providers, we also heard about the stark "digital divide" facing so many New Yorkers who are unable to take advantage of the new virtual infrastructure because of a lack of adequate data plans; smartphone minutes; high-speed Wi-Fi; or basic computer equipment.

And we are working to bridge that digital divide, to bridge the divide through innovative initiatives like the "Faith-Based Remote Access Centers" located in houses of worship in Westchester County in the Ninth Judicial District, a smart, and special collaboration with faith leaders to establish safe and convenient locations where unrepresented litigants can receive remote legal services; file court papers; and participate in virtual court proceedings. And our Office for Justice Initiatives is partnering with the Center for Court Innovation to expand this clever court access solution to our Community Court locations across New York City.

For more than a decade now, we have been fortunate to have the Permanent Commission guiding our efforts to ensure meaningful access to justice for all New Yorkers, and in this year of reduced funding for civil legal services, the Commission's extraordinary work could not be more critical. Especially exciting is the Commission's latest initiative enlisting the support of the business community. Our newly-created "Business Council for Access to Justice" consists of General

Counsel and leaders of prominent business organizations who have committed to use their unique experience and expertise to assist us in closing the justice gap in our state, and we look forward to working with the Council in new and creative ways.

Regarding pro bono service, we certainly owe a debt of gratitude to the thousands of lawyers and law firms whose generous pro bono service has eased the pain of the pandemic for so many New Yorkers. As one example, the State Bar's "COVID-19 Pro Bono Recovery Task Force" has recruited over 1,000 pro bono lawyers to assist New Yorkers with a host of pandemic-related legal problems, a noble and inspiring effort, highlighted by the outpouring of hundreds of lawyers who stepped up and worked with our Surrogate's Courts to provide free legal assistance in probate matters to individuals and families who lost loved ones to COVID-19. And I want to thank the many lawyers who nobly answered the call to service, and responded to their professional and ethical obligation to meet the legal needs of struggling individuals and families during the pandemic. On behalf of all New Yorkers, we thank them for their service.

Judiciary Budget

I turn now to our fiscal well-being. New York State is facing an unprecedented budget deficit. The Judiciary has not been spared, and we have not sought to avoid our responsibility of sharing in the sacrifices being made by the rest of state government. We have already absorbed an unprecedented reduction in planned spending for the current fiscal year, a reduction of nearly \$300 million, or 10% of our current operating budget.

In order to achieve cost savings of that magnitude, we had to make some very difficult decisions, - including: instituting a strict employee hiring freeze; ... deferring certain payments into the future; eliminating all non-essential discretionary spending; suspending our JHO program; and, for this year, denying all but three of the applications of Supreme Court Justices who requested certification to remain on the bench for additional two-year terms beyond age 70. The sum of these actions has allowed us to survive the \$291 million reduction made to our current year's spending, and it has allowed us to move forward without laying off any members of our court staff.

Looking ahead to the coming Fiscal Year that begins next month on April 1, we have submitted a budget that seeks to maintain our current Fiscal Year's appropriation level, but that continues the 10% reduction in the current spending plan. We are urging our partners in government to approve our request without further reduction. We are at a precarious crossroads for the stability of our system. We are at a place where any additional reductions in our budget will lead directly to layoffs, a circumstance that will harm court operations, and reduce court services at the worst possible time when: our staffing levels are already deeply depleted; our backlogs are growing; and a surge in court filings is coming.

And to be crystal clear regarding our staffing levels: even without layoffs, we expect that by June we will have 1,000 fewer employees than we had last March. This is a result of the strict hiring freeze we were compelled by circumstance to implement, and which prevents us from backfilling vacated positions created by ordinary job attrition. In fact, if the freeze continues for much

longer we can expect our nonjudicial staffing levels to drop to numbers last seen in the 90s. This is a daunting prospect for all of us.

And make no mistake: the impact of layoffs, aside from the human toll that would exact on our staff members losing their jobs in the middle of a historic pandemic in which we are experiencing high levels of unemployment, the impact of layoffs would be felt most acutely in our high-volume criminal, family and housing courts the very courts that serve predominantly low-income New Yorkers and minority communities, folks who have already suffered deeply, and disproportionately, from COVID-19.

We lived through this same scenario a decade ago when the state experienced its last budget crisis. And New Yorkers suffered not only the short-term impact of immediate reductions in court services and operating hours, but the long-term impact of case backlogs that delayed justice for millions of low-income families; small businesses; and others for years after. We cannot afford to go down this road again, and we will make every effort to maintain the most important of our services, and stand up for access to justice for all New Yorkers.

With all that said, we are confident that the spending plan we have advanced in this year's budget request, while certainly austere, will enable us to meet the courts' basic needs. And we are hopeful that the state's fiscal condition will improve, and that an infusion of funding, including assistance from Washington, will redound to the benefit of the courts, enabling us to maintain the staffing levels necessary to provide quality justice services to all New Yorkers who rely on our court system.

But, of course, we cannot, and we do not, operate on hope. Until conditions actually improve in a concrete way, we must plan and prepare for continued challenging times, and we do so with the confidence of knowing that our judges and our court professionals have demonstrated, beyond any doubt, that they have what it takes to meet whatever challenges the future may hold in store for us.

Court Simplification

And finally, as you can appreciate, managing the largest, busiest and most complex court system in the country is a challenge in ordinary times, but managing this system as currently configured through a global pandemic has underscored for all of us the urgent, and undeniable need to simplify and streamline our trial court structure, a structure that is outdated; inefficient; and directly impacts, in the most harmful ways, the interests of people of modest means and our communities of color.

Secretary Johnson's Equal Justice Report exposed many areas of concern for us, and among the most damning was his finding that the conditions in our "under-resourced" and "over-burdened" high-volume housing courts; family courts; civil courts; and criminal courts, have a dehumanizing effect on the predominantly low-income and minority litigants who appear there, creating the demoralizing perception, and I fear, in many cases, the unacceptable reality, of a second-class system of justice for people of color in this state.

Our constitutional proposal to simplify the structure of our trial courts will go a long way toward addressing these undeniable disparities in our present system and put us on a par with our more enlightened sister states, by creating streamlined statewide superior and municipal courts that will provide us with the flexibility necessary to allocate our resources most efficiently, -- in order that we be able to provide first-class services for every litigant who comes to our courts.

In the year 2021, with our dockets building and expected to explode in courts like our New York City Housing Court, it is simply wrong, and it is wholly unacceptable and disrespectful to the people we serve, to continue to offer bogus justifications to preserve a court model that has not been updated since 1962; a model that prevents us from applying our resources quickly and flexibly in response to the demonstrated needs of our litigants; and a model that has the appearance, if not the effect, of serving the interests of a very few over the interests of the many. This is not the best that we can offer the people of this great state. We can, and must do right by all New Yorkers.

Our proposed amendment to Article VI of the New York State Constitution has garnered the unprecedented support of a coalition of over 100 organizations, including judicial associations; bar associations; legal services organizations; and business groups. It has received the support of Governor Cuomo and many members of the Legislature. And while the pandemic temporarily interrupted our progress toward achieving first legislative passage of our proposal in 2020, we remain absolutely committed to working with the leadership and members of the Senate and the Assembly to achieve first and second legislative passage, followed by what we anticipate will be strong voter approval in November 2023.

As Secretary Johnson aptly noted in his Equal Justice report, the problems in our high-volume courts are so extensive and systemic in nature that the Judiciary alone does not have the power to make the necessary changes. Rather, “[t]his is a matter for all three branches of New York State government,” requiring “greater legislative and executive support for the judicial branch, at both the state and local level.”

I have every confidence that the smart policy and lawmakers in this state will take every demonstrated lesson learned from this pandemic, and turn it for the good. We are all motivated and primed to take full advantage of these lessons learned, and we are ready to put the interests of the people first. The right plan has been proposed. It should be passed by the Legislature. Let’s all work together to get this done.

Confronting the Challenges Ahead

We know that we have many challenges to meet before we move forward into a new post-pandemic normal, and we know that it is not going to be easy. But we have shown that we know how to do this work. We know how to move cases through our system with speed and purpose; we know how to tackle backlogs by using real-time caseload data; we know how to manage our dockets aggressively to eliminate unproductive appearances and wasteful adjournments; we know how to reassign judges and reallocate our resources to increase our trial capacity; we know and understand the power and potential of presumptive early ADR to reduce our caseloads on the

front end; and now we know how to use the power of virtual technology most effectively to further improve court efficiency and access in the future.

Our judges and staff have gained new expertise and skills, and we are eager and excited to apply the lessons we have learned to move our courts forward and resume the great progress we were making under our Excellence Initiative, when our courts were functioning better; case processing was improving all across the State; backlogs and delays were diminishing; and litigants, lawyers and court users were at the forefront of our efforts to achieve operational and decisional excellence.

Conclusion

Although this has been a tragic year in many ways, and we obviously mourn and cherish the memories of those we have lost, we can, and we should, look back on the last year with great pride and a sense of accomplishment. Moving forward, we have every reason to look to the future with confidence and optimism. No words can adequately describe my appreciation for the unwavering dedication of our Judges and professional staff. I have been humbled, inspired, and completely awed by their strength and resilience in meeting the needs of our litigants, - and by their commitment their absolutely shining commitment to our mission of delivering justice, and upholding the rule of law.

I close by expressing my gratitude and appreciation to them, and by acknowledging the magnificent contributions of our partners in the bar, - the dedicated lawyers who never stopped serving the needs of their clients or supporting our court system through each and every challenge we faced. Thank you for your support, and thank you for your service.