

**Testimony of Imogene V. Jones, President New York State Court Clerks Association to the Joint
Legislative Budget Committee on Public Protection January 25, 2022**

Good afternoon. I am Imogene V. Jones, President of the New York State Court Clerks Association. It is an honor to address you today

The Court Clerks Association is composed of women and men working for the Unified Court System in one of nineteen supervisory peace officer titles including Senior Court Clerk and on up to Deputy Chief Clerk located within the City of New York.

With over 1,300 active and well over 1,000 retired members, the Court Clerks Association is one of the largest of the eleven employee associations within the Unified Court System of the State of New York. Our office is located in Tribeca, at the core of The Big Apple.

I have been employed by the New York Courts for 32 years. I started as a Court Assistant and have worked my way up to Senior Court Clerk through competitive exams. Today, I urge you to look favorably on the budget bills affecting the Court System. The system is suffering from years of starvation budgeting. I keep hearing that the State has money this year. Please – let's pay for the past deficits and repairs first and then cover new "needed" programs.

The Covid-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on the entire court system. As with many of our society's institutions, years of neglect, the failure to maintain infrastructure and the failure to cohesively implement modern technology has made it very difficult for the Courts to deliver service as expected and deserved. Despite the circumstances, throughout the pandemic, Court Clerks have done their jobs.

Our foremost challenge has been the loss of employees. The Courts are currently suffering from unacceptable back logs because no one is there to do the work. Please remember – whereas we prioritize cases involving life and death – justice delayed is justice denied. In 2020 our membership was just under 1600 members and as of today's date our active members total 1332. In recent years we had over 1700 members. This incredible loss of personnel, coupled with the salary compression of our titles with those of lower civil service titles, has led to incredibly bad morale. It is long past time for the UCS to re-allocate our titles and pay us accordingly.

The basic infrastructure – the Court houses and Court rooms in New York City - are in deplorable condition. The buildings are crumbling. The basements, where records are often stored, are dank. Old and broken furniture needing to be replaced. The HVAC systems are wholly inadequate. These buildings are the responsibility of the City of New York. The State of New York should hold the City accountable for these failures and if necessary make the improvements and charge back the City - the same as the City would do to a homeowner for a dangerous sidewalk condition.

The Court System's technology consists of outdated computers, printers, scanners and other equipment. The WiFi service – which modern civilization takes for granted – is spotty, slow and inadequate. The video formats for remote hearings- although thought to be secure- are clunky compared to available freeware. Which leads me to commenting on the software. Too many applications are incapable of cross referencing and communicating with each other. An address updated in Family Court should automatically update a record in criminal court.

It is probably easy for you to listen to this and think "but this is Government; what do you expect?" I will tell you what I expect: I expect the tools to do my trade, I expect to work in a safe environment, and, I expect to be paid for the full value of my work. Thank you for the opportunity to be heard.

