



**Testimony  
on  
Budget and Staffing Reductions in the Judiciary**

**Presented Before:**

Assembly Standing Committee on Judiciary  
Chair, Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz

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**Testimony Presented by:**

Scott Gartland  
President, CSEA Local 333

Diane Hansen  
President, CSEA Local 330

I would like to start by thanking Chair Dinowitz and distinguished members of the New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Judiciary for the opportunity to testify here today.

The Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA) represents nearly 6,000 members across the Unified Court System (UCS) in almost every non-judicial title. From court officers to court reporters to court assistants to Judges Secretaries and clerks; from mental health attorneys to coordinators; from Long Island to the Canadian border, our members staff city, county, State Supreme, Appellate term, and Court of Claims courts. Without CSEA members, judges would sit in court rooms with no one to record the proceedings, call and organize calendars, draft their decisions, or guard the lives and well-being of judges, members of the public and prisoners. Simply put, courts in New York cannot function without CSEA members.

CSEA members working on the frontlines during this pandemic understand how devastating this crisis has been more than most. CSEA members have continued to perform their public service as long as courtrooms have been open. They continue to do their duty to ensure that the people's work is done. CSEA continues to work with the UCS to address ongoing health and safety concerns relating to the cleanliness of court houses, PPE and protective equipment, and the safety of court personnel.

We also understand the financial impact that the COVID pandemic has had on New York, which was the epicenter of the disease for months. While there have been no layoffs to date in FY21, we know that the situation entering FY22 is dire, with the latest Financial Plan update showing an expected 10% cut to court operations. This would amount to a \$300 million cut.

The last time the Judiciary faced cuts like this was the 2011-12 budget, when the courts faced a loss of \$170 million. The cuts made during the Great Recession had a massive impact on court operations and still echo today. Hundreds of CSEA members were laid off, and court staffing plummeted to levels that were incompatible with case loads. In the years since, most of these positions still have not been filled. In fact, the court system is down roughly 1,600 employees from 2010-11.

Even before COVID hit, courts could not function with fewer non-judicial personnel without endangering the people's business. At the peak of the economic recovery, courts were still unable to hire as many personnel as needed to keep up with the pace of the increasing volume of cases, and additional courts were created to address specific needs. The UCS itself recognized this fact. We would point to comments made by Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence Marks during November 2019 legislative hearings where the Judge stressed that the court system can't afford to lose additional employees.<sup>1</sup>

COVID has made matters worse by creating a backlog of cases in many courts. Staffing cuts would only exacerbate this problem and further slow the court's business.

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<sup>1</sup> November 21, 2019 Joint Public Hearing on Court Consolidation - Albany

CSEA understands the difficult financial position the State finds itself in, and has strongly advocated with our Federal representatives on the need for additional aid to New York State. If federal aid is forthcoming, CSEA encourages that sufficient funding be provided to the courts to ensure their continued operation.

There will likely be no easy decisions in State Fiscal Year 2021-22, but we must do all that we can to ensure that we don't let this crisis drag our state down for years to come. CSEA can say with confidence that millions of New Yorkers from one end of the State to the other depend on our members to assist them in every type of civil and criminal case that exists. We also can say with confidence that any position that gets laid off will have their absence felt by their co-workers in the form of an additional work burden and by the public in terms of additional wait time for justice.

Thank you for allowing CSEA the opportunity to speak here today. I look forward to working with you to ensure that the Unified Court system can weather this storm without making lasting and devastating cuts to our courts.