



New York State Unified Court System

Office of Court Administration

Hon. Joseph A. Zayas
Chief Administrative Judge

Hon. Norman St. George
First Deputy Chief Administrative Judge

Justin A. Barry, Esq.
Executive Director

April 02, 2025

Deanna Logan
Director
Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice
1 Centre Street
New York, NY 10007

By electronic mail and U.S. mail

Re: Prioritization of a Capital Plan Scope Development for 900 Sheridan Avenue

Dear Ms. Logan:

I look forward to meeting with you and your team on April 3, 2025 to discuss the conditions at 900 Sheridan Avenue (Bronx Family Court and Bronx Criminal Court). As I indicated in my April 2, 2024 letter (attached here), completing a Capital Plan Scope Development (CPSD) for 900 Sheridan Avenue is one of two top priorities for the Unified Court System. (Our other top priority is the renovation and repair of the Harlem Community Justice Center.)

As detailed below, the current facility that houses the Bronx Family Court and the Bronx Criminal Court is woefully inadequate and insufficient to meet the needs of those courts and the people of the Bronx. There is a lack of sufficient space to serve the hundreds of thousands of court users that visit annually. The chronic roof leaks and flooding, broken elevators and escalators, and accessibility issues within the building make it extremely difficult for litigants to receive the service's they are seeking in a timely and suitable manner. In sum, the 900 Sheridan Avenue courthouse decrepit, undignified, not accessible and is simply not an appropriate space to administer justice.

We greatly appreciate the City's ongoing work in developing suitable spaces for families to resolve their court matters. Over the course of the past twenty-two years, New York City has built, significantly refurbished or submitted plans to build Family courthouses in four boroughs – Queens (new construction 2003), Brooklyn (new construction 2005), Manhattan (remodeled 2006) and Staten Island (planning for new construction underway). Only the Bronx continues to operate with a family courthouse that remains essentially the same as it was when completed in 1977. While Bronx Family Court was able to take over more of the space in the building that it continues to share when Bronx Criminal Court moved some of its operations to the adjacent Hall

of Justice, the building is showing its age, and it is not built to handle Family Court operations fifty years later.

To facilitate our conversation next week, please see below a list of the problems that need to be addressed at 900 Sheridan Avenue.

Inadequate space

- Bronx Family Court has approximately 300,000 court users and 325,000 staff, attorneys, and agency employees visiting each year. Due to the high volume, there is often a line outside the building that wraps around the block. There is no additional space in the lobby to add magnetometers to allow faster access to the building.
- *Help Center*: The Help Center does not have adequate space to accommodate the number of court users it assists daily. The Help Center has approximately 81,000 visitors annually. The line frequently reaches into our lobby which presents security concerns and can impede access to the elevators. Security staff help manage and maintain the line to avoid disruptions and to ensure safety to both court users and staff. Because of limited space, not enough seating is available, and litigants often stand.
- *Courtroom space*: There is not adequate courtroom space for all our jurists. Two court-attorney referees (hearing officers) routinely share smaller rooms (formerly single person offices) designated as courtrooms. The room size does not permit in-person hearings and trials due to the size, resulting in jurists searching for open courtrooms when another judge/part is down to hear in-person cases and/or conduct virtual proceedings. In-person proceedings are regularly adjourned due to a lack of courtroom space.
- *Court attorney office space*: To ensure adequate chambers space for judges, the Court has relocated court attorney offices. In some instances, 2-3 court attorneys share an office which makes conducting virtual conferences difficult.
- *Court attorney conference room space*: Multiple court parts share one conference room which limits the number of in-person conference court attorneys can hold.
- *Employee lunchroom*: The main employee lunchroom has been repurposed into a courtroom which leaves little options for court staff to find a space to eat other than their desks, which are sometimes public facing.
- Many waiting areas across different floors get filled beyond capacity throughout the day, particularly in areas where juvenile delinquency proceedings take place.
- The operations office for the public safety staff is not large enough to accommodate all the supervisors. Only three people can view the lobby and the screens at the same time.
- The Criminal Court side of the building is also in dire need for more space. Criminal Court also needs two large office areas to house its Alternative to Incarceration (ATI) providers. Two courtrooms where these offices were located were ceded to the Family Court. These ATI providers must be in the same facility as the arraignments, which are held at 900 Sheridan Avenue. Criminal Court staff also needs additional back-office areas, including additional locker room space, a shower facility for female court officers, a dedicated lactation room, a mail room, additional conference rooms, designated

attorney-client conference rooms, an additional robing room, and a larger space for the arraignment clerk's office.

Leaks and flooding

- 900 Sheridan Avenue has two sources of leaks: the roof and the sewer lines.
- *Roof leaks*: There are active leaks throughout the courthouse and in many courtrooms from the roof. DCAS has redirected several of the leaks from inside courtrooms to employee hallways. However, when it rains there are active leaks:
 - on the 9th floor in multiple chambers, the back hallway and the adoption courtroom,
 - on the 8th floor including two courtrooms and multiple offices,
 - on the 7th floor including several courtrooms, back hallway and offices,
 - on the 1st floor in the Help Center,
 - on the Lower Main Level in multiple courtrooms, offices, hallway, and officer locker rooms.
- Many of the areas with leaks have reported a musty smell and possible mold. (In these areas, DCAS replaces the ceiling tiles that are damaged, and dehumidifiers are placed in many offices and locker-rooms to help abate moisture and any possible mold growth.)
- On the 10th floor, where the engineers are located, there is also extensive flooding due to roof leaks. DCAS has installed tarps to collect and redirect the leaks away from the heating and cooling systems for the building.
- Several of the roof setbacks were leaking and have been patched, which abated the leaks for a short time. However, those areas that were repaired are now leaking again. The setbacks were patched a second time and are currently not leaking. However, the contractors stated the repairs would only be a temporary fix until the roof was replaced.
- *Sewer lines (Lower Main Level)*: When the area receives significant rainfall, the Lower Main Level floods extensively, rendering the nine child support courtrooms, the child support clerk's office, the NYC Department of Social Services child support office, the Family Legal Care office, the Parent Support Program office, and several court officer locker-rooms inoperable. Further, it causes the toilets to backflow, and sewage seeps through various locations on the Lower Main Level.
- *Sewer lines (Parking Garage)*: Significant rainfall also leads to the judges' parking garage flooding with water shooting out of the drains located several feet above ground level throughout the garage. The space is pitched, and this renders the lower half of the garage unusable, and judicial parking must be relocated. The NYC Department of Environmental Protection previously installed a floodgate on the sewer line in the garage which did lessen the flooding. However, the floods are still severe when it rains heavily.

Broken elevators & escalators

- *Public Elevators*: There are 6 public elevators utilized by the Family Court and Criminal Court. It is not uncommon for one to three of the elevators to be out of commission simultaneously, which causes a delay in court users arriving to their courtrooms on time

and is an egress safety issue. Further, it is not uncommon for court users and employees to become trapped in the elevators during these service disruptions.

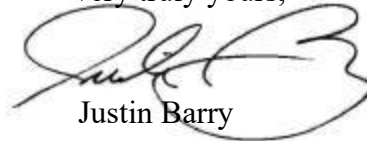
- *Judicial Elevators:* There are 2 judicial elevators that require a security card for entry. The circuit panel to the security card keypads broke in 2019 and have not yet been repaired. Due to the growing size of the court, several offices that are in secure hallways had to be repurposed into courtrooms. Therefore, it is not uncommon for court users to find their way to these elevators when leaving these courtrooms. The judicial elevators, like the public elevators, are also frequently out of commission.
- *Escalators:* Escalators are throughout the building are regularly non-functional, some for years.

Lack of accessibility

- *Help Center:* The entrance to the Help Center cannot accommodate newer, wider wheelchairs. Staff will meet these court users outside the Help Center to address their questions. However, this is done in a public area which is not the best solution when sharing sensitive information such as order of protection requests. The widening of the door has been added to the second-floor project that is currently underway, but there is no timeline for when the work will be done.
- *Third floor:* The public bathroom doors and hallway doors are not ADA compliant and do not allow for wheelchair access.
- *Judges' garage:* The judges' garage is not wheelchair accessible to enter or exit. The issue was most apparent last year when the fire alarm stopped all elevators from operating. A court user using a wheelchair was on the 9th floor and had to wait for close to two hours to exit the building.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss our concerns and priorities. Given the scope of the problems at 900 Sheridan Avenue, we hope the City can proceed expeditiously to approve a Capital Plan Scope Development for a new facility for the Bronx Family Court and Bronx Criminal Court.

Very truly yours,



Justin Barry

cc: Hon. Joseph Zayas
Hon. Norman St. George
Shawn Waterman
Mindy Jeng