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Good morning Madam Chairperson. Thank you for the privilege of allowing me to speak before this Joint Legislative Committee On Public Safety. A year ago I appeared before this esteemed body and spoke about the significant problems our courts in Suffolk County are facing.

Unfortunately, as I sit here before all of you today, I am sad to report that not much has changed since then. Our courts are still significantly understaffed and service to the public is suffering greatly.

Our new Chief Judge, Janet DiFiore, took over as the leader of our court system last year boasting of her Excellence Initiative, yet nothing has changed in the way the Office of Court Administration (OCA) does business to show support for that initiative. Judges still can't take the bench on time because there are not enough Court Officers or Court Clerks to staff Court Parts. People wait on seemingly endless lines in order to enter our court buildings because we don't have enough Court Officers to oversee our magnetometer stations. Our Court Officers are our first line of



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defense at the entrance of every court building. Court Officers shortages have left us extremely vulnerable

I say that because I was here last year and heard what Judge Marks had to say to you when he was asking for more money in the court budget to account for the raises that the judges had been awarded by the Commission on Judicial Compensation in the fall of 2015. When OCA had submitted their budget request for fiscal year 2016-2017, they had been unable to account for the judicial raises because they did not know at that time what the raises would be. Once Judge Marks became aware of how much more compensation the judges were going to receive on April 1, 2016, he made a pitch to this legislative body for an increase to the budget to pay for the judges raises. One of your colleagues asked Judge Marks how he would pay for the judge's salary increase if he did not get the increase to the budget he was seeking. His response was very troubling. He said that he would have to reduce staffing through attrition. In the end, OCA did not get the increase to the budget they were seeking and they had to find other ways to pay for the judge's new salaries. I firmly believe that this is the reason that our courts are still significantly understaffed. Judge Marks is doing exactly what he said he



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would do. As people are retiring, their vacated positions are not being filled fast enough.

I spoke to Judge Marks recently and he told me that in 2011 the courts had 2000 job vacancies. He said that currently the courts have 1750 vacancies and that hiring trends are moving in the right direction. I just don't see that happening in Suffolk. In 2011, my union had roughly 900 members. When I became President of this Association in June 2015, we had 848 members. A year ago, we had 820 members and as of Dec. 31, 2016 we have 804 members. Since 2011, we have lost approximately 100 positions. We have more vacancies in Suffolk County now than we did in 2011, clearly contradicting any notion that hiring trends are moving in the right direction. There is no doubt that the courts are hiring to fill some positions but people are retiring faster than vacancies can be filled and as far as I can tell, this trend will continue. OCA is funding the increased judicial salaries by reducing staffing through attrition, just as Judge Marks said he would do. They are not filling the vacancies that they should be filling.

If OCA believed that staffing was a priority they would be filling vacancies a lot faster. Unfortunately OCA decided to focus their attention on



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paying for the judge's salary increases rather than pay for staffing that would help our courts operate more efficiently and expeditiously, as well as advance Judge DiFiore's Excellence Initiative.

In the meantime, our courts are not safe. Court Officer staffing levels are lower than they ever have been before. In Suffolk County we have more than 25% less court officers that we have ever had. God forbid something really terrible happens and a lot of people get hurt because we refused to recognize that we need more security staffing. Other staffing needs are being neglected as well. Our Chief Clerks have to play a game of "Tetris", reassigning staff from one assignment to another in order to staff courtrooms. Generally people are moved from back office positions to take care of the immediate need of opening courtrooms. As a result the back office work does not get done, and court orders do not get processed. Is this the way our courts should be operating? I don't think that Judge DiFiore believes that this is the way the courts should be functioning. When is the paradigm going to change?

Today I am here to speak on behalf of the 804 members of the Suffolk County Court Employees Association. We need your help. Our voices have



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been silenced for too long. Help us to get more funding for our courts. Helps us to implore OCA to spend their resources appropriately. Help us so that our courts will be a safer place for our employees and the public. Help the heartbeat of the courts so that new life can be pumped into a court system that has been neglected for way to many years. Help Us!