

Laura Taylor Swain Remarks on Receipt of NYCLA Conspicuous Service Award  
on Behalf of the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York

The Water Club  
April 6, 2022

I found that having a name late in the alphabet was sometimes a plus in school, when I might not have done every bit of the homework, but there is definitely a disadvantage in following three brilliant Chief Judges who each have said it all.

Mr. Haig, President Chang, and distinguished leaders of NYCLA, the bench and the bar, thank you for recognizing the service of the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York during this long pandemic. Our service had to be conspicuous because we are a public institution. It was emphatically so because, very early on, my predecessor chief, our unit executives and our judges decided that we had to carry out, as accessibly, comprehensively and safely as possible, our constitutional responsibilities. An expert epidemiologist was retained, courtrooms were redesigned, judges quickly (some not so quickly) became familiar with remote audio and visual technologies, and arrangements for remote appearances and legal consultations for detainees were negotiated and implemented. Probation and Pretrial Services Officers' location monitoring and key in-person supervision contacts were maintained as necessary to protect the public, and our units adopted innovative virtual methods of supervision and access

to services, including the use of smartphones. An in-house AV staff member programmed sophisticated entry screening machines that interact with QR codes on phones. We have stayed true to this vision of a court providing justice virtually and in person throughout these two years, including conducting jury trials since September of 2020.

None of this would have been possible without the brave and very conspicuous service of the many court employees who had to work on-site in our courthouses to keep our operations going, including by meeting arrestees and people discharged from custody to install monitoring equipment, and by providing support and organizing equipment for those operating remotely. Still more court employees and judges had to pivot quickly to replicating, and then transforming, everyday workflows to ensure continued, genuine access to justice. You -- our partners, the members of the bar, faced and embraced similar challenges in a world changed overnight, and you kept up with your clients and with us, advocating virtually and in person and making sure that the circumstances faced by those in confinement were conspicuous as well. Thank you.

And perhaps the most conspicuous response to the call for public service was by the citizens who responded to jury service summonses. We were as transparent as we could be about their duties and the conditions under which they would serve, we ensured distancing and masks, changed our procedures on cell phone retention

and meals, and they came – over 4,000 of them and counting. Over 1,500 have been selected to serve. They have provided positive feedback, and their steady, loyal and engaged presence in the courthouse has been inspiring.

We, the community of public servants working in the Mother Court, have had the opportunity and challenge of providing public service that is essential to the rule of law and the health of our democracy in an unprecedented time in our country's history. We thank NYCLA, which immediately turned to technology to continue its mission of support and education of the bar and the community, and which underwent its own physical transition during the pandemic, for recognizing us. And we thank all of the members of the legal community who work with us to uphold the rule of law and ensure fidelity to the mission of equal justice.