



PRESS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

**Hon. Lawrence K. Marks
Chief Administrative Judge**

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Date: May 14, 2020

State's Surrogate's Courts Prepare for Influx of COVID-Related Cases

*Court System Also Partners with Bar Leaders to Provide Free Legal
Help in COVID-Related Matters to Family Members in Need*

NEW YORK—As New York State remains at the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic, Chief Judge Janet DiFiore and Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence K. Marks today announced that the State's Surrogate's Courts, which operate in each of New York's 62 counties and handle the administration of estates among other cases, are preparing for the influx of Coronavirus-related estate matters.

Thousands of COVID-related deaths have been confirmed statewide—and the actual number of fatalities is likely much higher—with the horrific circumstances of these deaths taking a devastating toll on surviving family members. In anticipation of a surge of COVID-related estate cases throughout New York City and across the State, these matters are being designated as essential. Effective Monday, May 18, new, uncontested estate cases involving individuals who passed away from Coronavirus-related conditions may now be filed in Surrogate's Court. Additionally, New York's Surrogate's Courts are committed to handling these critically-important cases as promptly and efficiently as possible.

“Tragically, New York State has been overwhelmed by Coronavirus-related fatalities. I have confidence that, by leveraging all resources, our Surrogate’s Courts are fully-prepared for the surge of cases involving individuals who passed away due to COVID-related causes, ensuring these matters are handled with special care and resolved as efficiently as possible,” said Chief Judge DiFiore.

To complement these efforts, the New York State Bar Association, in partnership with the New York State court system and with assistance from other bar groups, is developing a network of volunteer lawyers to provide free legal representation in New York’s Surrogate’s Courts to families who cannot afford a lawyer in these cases. Volunteer lawyers will also be available to assist families with related issues and needs.

Spearheaded by past New York State Bar Association President and long-time trusts and estates practitioner Michael Miller, this initiative—which expands on the COVID-19 pro bono network launched by the State Bar and court system to handle the surge in legal matters stemming from the pandemic and its ensuing economic impact—will match lower-income families with specially-trained volunteer attorneys. Attorneys will be available for assignment to these cases upon completion of the training, which is web-based. (For attorneys interested in volunteering, email: covidvolunteer@nysba.org)

Lauding this latest pro bono initiative, Chief Judge DiFiore said, “The New York legal community has always risen to the task in times of crisis. I am grateful to Michael Miller and New York State Bar Association President Hank Greenberg for their leadership on this vital program, and to our bar leaders and members throughout the State for their ongoing generosity in response to the immense legal needs of New Yorkers resulting from the pandemic.”

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