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**MAYOR DE BLASIO, CHIEF JUDGE DIFIORE AND COMMISSIONER BRATTON  
ANNOUNCE ROLLOUT OF NEW TOOLS TO REDUCE UNNECESSARY  
WARRANTS**

*Reforms aim to reduce failure-to-appear rate in summons court by clearly explaining where and when defendants need to appear and expanding appearance options*

**NEW YORK**—Mayor Bill de Blasio, Chief Judge of the State of New York Janet DiFiore and NYPD Commissioner William J. Bratton today announced the citywide rollout of new tools to simplify summons procedures. Adding these tools will help reduce the number of open warrants, which will allow the City to focus more police and court resources on serious crime.

“New York City continues to prove that we can have both more safety and fewer arrests,” said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. “The changes we are rolling out today will help New Yorkers avoid unnecessary warrants – an important step toward a fairer criminal justice system. These changes will also make sure we stay safe by allowing police to focus on threats to public safety.”

To learn more about the changes to the summons process and to [see the new form, click here](#).

The new summons process reforms include a redesigned summons form, text-message court date reminders and flexible scheduling of appearance dates. Decreasing the failure-to-appear rate will lead to a reduction in the issuance of subsequent warrants which often result in additional exposure to the criminal justice system.

“These steps we are taking will lead to more people who have been issued summonses appearing in court, and consequently fewer warrants being issued. This will result in a fairer and more efficient summons process overall. We are appreciative of the cooperation and collaboration of the Mayor’s Office and the Police Department in developing and implementing these important measures,” said **Chief Judge of New York State Janet DiFiore**.

“Reducing the number of warrants for failing to answer a summons will allow our officers to dedicate more time and effort in addressing other public safety issues,” said **Police Commissioner William Bratton**.

“Improving the quality of justice in New York City is sometimes as much about simple fixes as sweeping reforms,” said **Elizabeth Glazer, Director of the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice**. “Simply providing information in an understandable way and making it easier to meet court order obligations will have an effect on reducing warrants: a redesigned summons form and access to information on the web that highlights what court people should go to and when they should appear; ensuring the courts are open when people can go will improve fairness and affect, for the better, hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers every year. The Courts and NYPD have been critical in this process, committing to using science to drive system changes. Their partnership has advanced the City’s commitment to avoid unnecessary arrests while ensuring that law enforcement resources are reserved for public safety priorities.”

The changes rolling out today aim to solve a pressing problem in summons court: nearly 40 percent of people issued summonses fail to appear, which resulted in the courts issuing 135,143 warrants in 2015. Since warrants can only be cleared if an individual physically appears before a Criminal Court judge, the former system often led to individuals with unanswered summonses being subsequently arrested and brought to court. This process often places an unnecessary burden on the individual issued the warrant and also requires police and court resources to resolve. A high warrant rate can also undermine the public’s confidence in the fairness and effectiveness of the criminal justice system. Streamlining the process for answering summonses is part of the City’s larger strategy to create a fairer criminal justice system that reduces both crime and the unnecessary use of jail.

Designed in partnership with national experts and behavioral scientists, the changes rolling out citywide include:

A revised summons form used in all precincts

- Designed through a partnership between the City, the Courts, and behavioral design lab ideas42, and with funding from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, the revisions to the form include:
  - Research-based formatting and language that emphasizes important information – such as what will happen if defendants do not appear – and that encourages summons recipients to show up in court or plead by mail;
  - New field for summons recipient’s phone number, which will be used to send individuals text and phone call reminders;
  - Information about the new automated phone system and website;
  - New field for race/ethnicity, so that the City can track more summons demographics; and
  - Translated copies of the summons form and FAQs in multiple languages on the new summons website.

A new automated phone system and [website](#) to provide real-time information and allow online payment

- The [new website](#) and automated phone system will allow summons recipients to access their cases, view their court appearance date and make payments online for summons fines, surcharges and fees.

A phone-based reminder system to help ensure defendants appear in court

- This week, the Courts will begin testing a number of different reminders citywide, using both robocalls and text messages to remind defendants of their court dates. ideas42 will conduct a study to determine the most effective methods, which will then be scaled up citywide.

Flexible appearance dates and evening hours to make appearing in court easier

- In a pilot program launched this week by the Courts in Manhattan North, individuals who have received summonses will be permitted to appear any time in the week leading up to their court date. The court will also be open until 8:00 PM on Tuesdays. If these pilots increase court appearances, the programs will be scaled up citywide.

“Our criminal justice system is in desperate need of reform, and there are many things that can be done to improve it,” said **State Senator Michael Gianaris**. “The reduction of unnecessary warrants will certainly help make things better, and I applaud all those involved in today's announcement.”

“The major reforms announced today by Mayor de Blasio, Chief Judge DiFiore and Commissioner Bratton are so significant,” said **Assembly Member Luis Sepúlveda, Chair of the Subcommittee on Transitional Services**. “They will lead to far fewer missed court dates thereby helping keep formerly incarcerated individuals on a productive path after returning to the community, while freeing up police officers to be back on the beat instead of at court appearances.”

“The new, simplified summons form is a perfect example of how behavioral science can make a meaningful difference for policies and programs in an inexpensive, uncomplicated way,” said **Alyssa Fishbane, Managing Director of ideas42**. “We're grateful to MOCJ, NYPD and OCA for allowing us to apply our expertise to recreate and improve this solution, which we believe will prove to be much more user-friendly and effective for New Yorkers as well as reducing unnecessary pressure on our criminal justice system.”

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