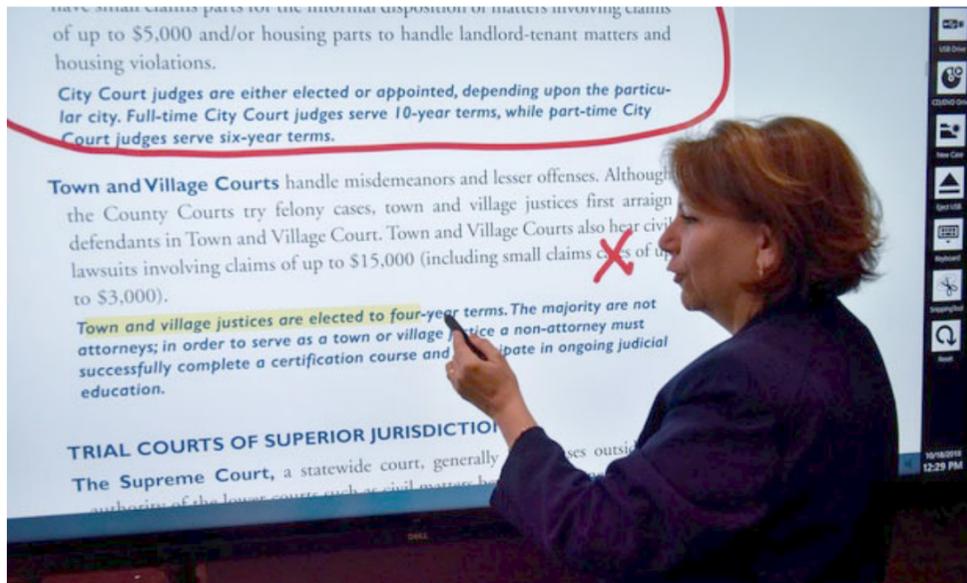


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Justice Saliann Scarpulla in her technology-enabled courtroom at 60 Centre Street. The goal is to provide an almost paperless courtroom. (Photo: David Handschuh/NYLJ)

In an Effort to Be the Premier Court in the World, NY Is Investing in the Commercial Division

BY SUSAN DESANTIS

New York courts want to be the go-to venue for settling international disputes, and officials are investing in whizbang technology that has the potential to transform commercial trials.

The technology debuted in state Supreme Court Justice Saliann Scarpulla's courtroom, Room 208 at 60 Centre St., this month. Scarpulla, who is tech-savvy, is helping the Office of Court Administration work out the kinks before other courtrooms are upgraded.

"We are committed to taking the fullest advantage of technology to help us adjudicate the challenging disputes that 21st-century litigation can present," said Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence K. Marks. "This is particularly true for complex commercial litigation. But it is also true for other categories of cases, including Family Court matters as well as a range of other types of litigation, civil and criminal."

Bringing the most up-to-date technology to a courthouse built in 1927 and whose facade is synonymous with the widely popular TV series "Law and Order" presented challenges. The building, which is owned by New York City, is protected by landmark status and the court system is required to preserve its intricate woodwork, beautiful artwork and historic elements.

"It needs to reflect both the rich and deep history of the law in New York state but also reflect the current philosophy of making litigation more user-friendly, less expensive and more efficient," Scarpulla said.

At a cost of \$40,000, the courtroom was outfitted with an 86-inch screen to display documents, a podium with a document viewer and a USB port and smaller screens for the attorneys

and the judge. The jury box was expanded to make room for a wheelchair, and jurors with difficulty hearing or seeing are able to serve with technological assistance.

"Touching the screen or using a stylus on the screen, the 86-inch screen is set so that the attorneys can highlight info on the screen, mark up documents and save them as marked-up documents or let the markup go," Scarpulla said. "We have laptops that the attorneys provide and we bring up the flash drive to the jury so they're not inundated with giant boxloads of documents. So we can promise a juror that they're not going to be here for six months looking through documents."

The attorneys have the option of connecting their personal laptops so they don't need notes and there is software that hooks into the large screen so that an attorney can attend a conference by Skype. An attorney at the podium can scan any document not on the flash drive at the last minute. There is a separate USB port if the attorneys feel their documents are too confidential for the court's Wi-Fi.

"It's much cheaper and smarter to bring a flash drive into court than to hire three or four people to bring in 30 or 40 boxes of documents, which has happened in my courtroom," she said. "Three people were needed to bring the documents in and one or two people to go through them and pull out documents as needed during the trial."

Recently, Scarpulla spoke to about 80 commercial judges from the around the world at an international forum in the Southern District of New York. She said none had the amenities available in courtroom 208.

"We think it's important to have the right technology to give the business community in New York the sense that we could compete with the best courts in the world," she said.



Justice Scarpulla. (Photo by David Handschuh/NYLJ)



Photo: David Handschuh