

STATEMENT OF FELIX D. ARROYO
SUFFOLK COUNTY REGISTER OF PROBATE & FAMILY COURT

APRIL 3, 2017 AT 1:00 PM

EDWARD BROOKE COURTHOUSE

I want to begin by thanking my family, friends, and supporters for standing with me as I fight this unjust and unwarranted suspension.

I stand here today as the first and only person of color ever elected to serve as a Register of Probate in Massachusetts. Additionally, I am the only Latino ever elected to a county wide position in Massachusetts. I am grateful to the over one hundred and thirty thousand people in Suffolk County who placed their trust in me by way of their votes and elected me to do this vitally important job.

I am confident that in spite of the efforts of those behind this unjust suspension and secretive investigation that I will be vindicated and will soon be back doing the job I was elected to do.

Our democracy depends on transparency and the media provides that even when some in positions of power prefer to act in secret and behind closed doors. While I have repeatedly called for this investigation to be transparent and open to the public, that demand has been rejected by those behind this unjust suspension. However, the media has been diligently working to expose the truth, a truth that those behind this unjust action would have preferred the public did not know. Your reporting has brought to light the institutional racism that I encountered and have been fighting since my first day in office.

I inherited an office with a well documented history of mismanagement and cronyism. My efforts to end the practices of the past were met with resistance and in some of the worst ways possible. On my first day on the job I inherited one hundred percent of the staff. Some of the staff that I inherited or who were later placed in my office by trial court administrators intentionally sabotaged my efforts to reform this office. Additionally, their racist and sexist actions have not only impacted me and their co-workers, but the entire judicial process and the residents of Massachusetts. I thank the media for exposing this truth.

I have a message to those who have participated in these acts of racism, sexism and sabotage. Everyone must be held accountable for their actions and when I return will do all in my power to ensure you are held accountable for yours. While I hope the Trial Court Administrators will support me in those efforts, I do not need their support or permission to do what is right. I have the support of the voters of Suffolk County and I work for them.

There is no valid argument in support of racism and sexism. The women and people of color victimized by it are not responsible for it nor do they deserve it. To those who were the victims of their racist and sexist actions I want you to know that I will continue to stand with you and I am inspired by your resilience. Those behind these actions need our silence to succeed. Those of you that have told your story, I thank you. I also thank the media for protecting their identities, a request you have reported that they made of you out of their concern for retaliation. Sadly, my unjust suspension validates their concern.

In addition to the despicable actions of some of the staff I inherited or who were placed in the Registry by trial court administrators, the Registry is severely understaffed and under resourced. As reported by the media, the staff is sixty six percent the size it was just ten year ago. My requests to hire additional staff and to even fill some of the vacancies have been repeatedly denied by the trial court administrators who have complete control of the budget. They have even denied me the ability to fill all four executive level positions allowed to me by Massachusetts statute. Each denial came with their claim that they did not have the resources. Yet suspiciously, when their handpicked replacement of me was placed in the Registry the trial court administrators found the resources to give her a significant pay raise, an executive team of her choosing, fill vacancies and to outsource some of the work.

I have over forty years of experience as an educator, executive and elected official and I have dedicated my life to the pursuit of social, economic and racial justice. I am proud of what I have been able to accomplish throughout my career but my work is not done. My experience as a manager and my commitment to social, economic and racial justice make me uniquely qualified to lead the Suffolk County Registry of Probate and Family Court. This Registry has handled over thirty thousand case files in my two years in office. Those cases files represent real people. The vast majority of them, upwards to ninety percent of them are pro se, meaning they do not have a lawyer and usually because they cannot afford one. To the users of the Registry I say, I see you, I hear you and I am on your side. You deserve a Registry that properly serves you and treats you with respect and dignity.

In spite of all of the obstacles and lack of genuine support of the Trial Court administrators we have had some significant victories. Some examples of those victories is that in just two years I have been able to double the diversity in the Registry and the registry now has staff that can serve the public in Spanish, Portuguese, French, Cape Verdean Creole and Haitian Creole. While this does not mean my reformation of the office is complete it does represent progress and I will build on this progress when I return. Reforming the registry is not just nice, it is necessary. I will continue my efforts to reform the Registry when I return with or without the support of the trial court administrators. The users of the registry and the residents of Suffolk County deserve no less.

I have never backed down from the fight for social, economic and racial justice and I won't start now.

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