

**A PAPER PRESENTATION ON THE SAFEKEEPING, CUSTODY AND  
MANAGEMENT OF COURT DOCUMENTS**

**DELIVERED BY;**

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**AT THE**

**NATIONAL WORKSHOP FOR CONFIDENTIAL SECRETARIES, EXECUTIVE  
ASSISTANTS, PROTOCOL OFFICERS, INFORMATION DESK OFFICERS,  
PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICERS AND OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF  
OF THE JUDICIARY**

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# **SAFEKEEPING, CUSTODY AND MANAGEMENT OF COURT DOCUMENTS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Nothing is more frustrating than searching for something that has been misplaced. No one is immune from such rummaging experience of going through personal possessions in search of a missing thing from time to time and isn't it funny how these things suddenly disappear at the point they are most needed? It could be your car keys when you're already running late to that very important meeting, or those shoes that will perfectly go with the outfit you have chosen for that party of the year you were invited to or even something as trivial as misplacing a pen at the point of signing that contract of your life can have the effect of passing a message of lassitude on your part and will most likely put you in a very compromising and embarrassing position. However, these situations can only occasion a temporary inconvenience with barely little or no long-term harm done.

Now, consider a different scenario where the elusive thing is a non-duplicated copy of the Will of a deceased, deposited in the probate registry of a Court, what then will be the fate of the beneficiaries to said Will in such an instance? Or where the missing document is the evidence of a sole and vital witness to a case who is now deceased. Can justice then be said to have been done and seen to be effectively done in such a case? These are some of the reasons why the importance of the safekeeping, custody and management of court documents can never be over-emphasized as it is directly linked the administration of justice.

Having seen the need for the safe keeping of court documents, it has become apposite for better understanding, to shed some light on some vital key terms before delving into the crust of the topic under discuss.

## **DEFINITION OF SOME KEY TERMS**

### **Safekeeping:**

The term safekeeping has been defined as “the act or process of preserving in safety”<sup>1</sup> or “the state of being preserved in safety”<sup>2</sup> while the Black Law’s

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam Webster online Dictionary

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

Dictionary defines the term as “the act of protecting something in one’s custody”<sup>3</sup>.

### **Custody:**

Custody is defined as “the immediate charge or control (as over a ward or a suspect), exercised by a person or an authority”<sup>4</sup>. However, this definition cannot be said to be all encompassing as one can take custody of inanimate things such as immovable properties, moveable properties or even documents which is why it is better to place reliance on the Black Law’s Dictionary which defines Custody as “the care and control of a thing or person for inspection, preservation or security”<sup>5</sup>. Custody can also be defined as “the protective care or guardianship of someone or something”<sup>6</sup>.

### **Management:**

Management is “the process of dealing with or controlling things or people”<sup>7</sup>. It is also defined as the “the act or art of managing; the conducting or supervising of something”<sup>8</sup>. While the above may be good definitions of the term, a more functional definition relevant to this paper is as provided by the Black Law’s Dictionary which defines Management as “the people in an organisation who are vested with a certain amount of discretion and independent judgment in managing its affairs”<sup>9</sup>.

### **Court Documents:**

Court documents are those materials filed in relation to a legal case before the courts. Examples of court documents are pleadings, motions, memoranda, briefs, orders and expert testimonies<sup>10</sup> a court document has also been defined as any instrument, document, paper or other record filed with and otherwise presented to or produced by a court<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Black Law’s Dictionary, 9<sup>th</sup> Ed. Pg. 1453

<sup>4</sup> Merriam Webster online Dictionary

<sup>5</sup> Black Law’s Dictionary, 9<sup>th</sup> Ed. Pg. 441

<sup>6</sup> Google search engine.

<sup>7</sup> ibid

<sup>8</sup> Merriam Webster online Dictionary

<sup>9</sup> Black Law’s Dictionary, 9<sup>th</sup> Ed. Pg. 1045

<sup>10</sup> [www.uwyo.libguides.com](http://www.uwyo.libguides.com) > Finding Court Documents. Accessed on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022

<sup>11</sup> [www.lawinsider.com](http://www.lawinsider.com) > Court Document Definition. . Accessed on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022

The thrust of this topic therefore is to provide insights on the ways to effectively protect, preserve, control and manage the court documents filed and deposited in the various Nigerian Courts.

## **SAFEKEEPING, CUSTODY AND MANAGEMENT OF COURT DOCUMENTS**

The Judiciary is regarded as the last hope of the common man, where justice is dispensed without fear or favour. It is the impartial arbiter of disputes between citizens inter se, and between citizens and the Government<sup>12</sup>. One must therefore, consider working in the court as a privilege. It is to this end that ensuring the safekeeping, custody and management of Court documents and Exhibits are essential to the effective administration of justice<sup>13</sup>. Like the posers earlier mentioned, where court documents suddenly go missing, destroyed or even stolen due to the negligence of the court staff responsible for their safety, what then becomes the hope of the common man?

Court Employees are regarded as the engine room that keeps the Nigerian Judiciary running<sup>14</sup> as they are vested with the power and discretion to protect, preserve, safeguard, manage and even prepare some court documents. They are the image or better put, the mirror of the Judiciary and the yardstick in which members of the public measure the Judiciary<sup>15</sup>. Therefore colossal level of failure and negligent attitude of our recent breed of court staff is appalling and worrisome to say the least. Nothing is as humiliating as seeing a Judge in open court desperately searching for a document filed before his court and his registrar being unable to account for said document.

Court staff as the machineries running the temple of Justice should also consider themselves ministers called to serve this divine temple and as such must take utmost pride in the job they are called to do for without them, there sure will be no court to dispense Justice. A simple example to drive

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<sup>12</sup> Uwais, L. Muhammadu., The Future of The Judiciary in Nigeria: Challenges and Responses, UN Production Nigeria Ltd. 2013. P. 4.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.nji.gov.ng> > Safe Custody of Court Records and Exhibits accessed on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022

<sup>14</sup> ibid

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.nji.gov.ng> > the role of registrars, secretaries, court clerks and bailiffs, accessed on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022

home this point and to show the importance of court staff as a fundamental and integral part of the justice administration process is the two-month old national industrial strike of the Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria embarked on in April, 2021 which completely paralysed and shut down the entire judicial system of the Nation for 64 whole days<sup>16</sup>. It is recorded to be the longest industrial action the Nigerian Judiciary has ever witnessed<sup>17</sup> and as we all know, the effect of delaying justice, is tantamount to denying Justice. It therefore means that without the court staff, there is no court. Who then are these special class of people that wields such enormous power in the administration of Justice process?

### **WHO ARE THE COURT STAFF?**

#### **Registrars:**

Generally, a registrar is “a person who keeps the official records”<sup>18</sup> of an organisation. However, in legal parlance, a registrar is regarded as an officer of Court, entrusted with the day-to-day administration of Court, subject to the overriding authority of either a Judge or a Magistrate as the case may be<sup>19</sup>. He is directly responsible for the staff attached to each of the Courts such as the court clerk, the bailiff and messengers amongst others. He sits with the Judge or Magistrate and tends to the need of the presiding officer and the lawyers. He ensures compliance of processes, payment of fees and fines as the case may be. The Court Registrar also keeps reports of happening in the Court from times to time and minute same to the Chief Registrar for his information and necessary action when needed. He is the most central officer in any Court Registry; therefore, if Registrars can successfully perform their duties to the letter, then they are an asset to the judiciary, as they would have succeeded in aiding quick dispensation of Justice<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Premium times> Updated: JUSUN suspends Two-month old strike>

By Ameh Ejekwonyilo> 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> ibid

<sup>18</sup>Black Law’s Dictionary, 9<sup>th</sup> Ed. Pg. 1396

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.nji.gov.ng> > management and security of exhibits and Court records: role of secretaries, process staff and bailiffs.

Accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022

<sup>20</sup><https://www.nji.gov.ng>> the role of registrars, secretaries, court clerks and bailiffs.

Accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022

The primary functions of Registrars are as follows:

1. To attend at such sittings of the Court as the Court shall direct;<sup>21</sup>
2. To fill up or cause to be filled up Summons, conviction warrants, recognizance (for bail), Writ of Execution and other documents, and submit same for the signature of the Judge. A Registrar should at all times coordinate the issuance and service of Court processes, hearing notices, warrant of arrest, summons of whatever nature such as Writ of Summons, Originating Summons among others.
3. To make or cause to be made copies of proceedings when required to do so by the Judge, and to record the Judgments, convictions and orders of the Court;
4. To receive or cause to be received all fees, fines and penalties emanating from matters before the Court and act upon such order (or orders) made by the Court; all such monies paid or deposited in respect of proceedings in Court shall be deposited in the Court's account by the Registrar;
5. To perform or cause to be performed such other duties connected with the Court as may be assigned him by the Judge;
6. To ensure that the Registry and other Staff therein on a daily basis perform their functions cautiously without inhabitation. This explains the fact that the Registry is considered as the life wire of the Court;
7. A Registrar can also perform custodial duties such as marking and safe keeping of exhibits tendered in Courts, and keeping proper inventory of attached properties.
8. A Registrar ought to put in place proper and necessary arrangement towards ensuring a conducive Court sitting session on daily basis. He/she should be of a tremendous assistance in administering oath on a witness during Court session or affirming of witnesses.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.nji.gov.ng> > management and security of exhibits and Court records: role of secretaries, process staff and bailiffs. Accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022

9. A Registrar must at all times keep and guard the Record books which contain record of proceedings in each assigned matter and Court diaries from every form of manipulation by members of the public.

10. A Registrar supervises the preparation of a neat register wherein details of newly assigned matters, transferred matters, court processes filed are registered.

11. A Registrar receives application from Litigants, counsel and other members of the Public. This could be application for the Certified true Copy of a Record of proceedings, Ruling, Judgment among others<sup>22</sup>.

12. To ensure, through the Bailiff of Court, that orders or Judgments are complied with, respected or obeyed (execution);

13. In the case of a probate matters, the Probate Registrar must ensure that the proper and necessary steps are taken before the issuance of Letters of Administration, and also keep proper custody of all Wills deposited in Court<sup>23</sup>.

### **Court Secretaries:**

Judicial officers as well as the court registrar rely on their secretaries to maintain and retrieve legal documents required for specific cases. This career requires strong organizational and communication skills in addition to an ability to refrain from divulging confidential information. Many secretaries use this job as a starting point for more advanced legal positions, such as Court Administrator. Due to the relatively low requirements, in terms of qualification for Court Secretaries, a good number of them usually undergo on-the-job training after obtaining employment. Court secretaries also conduct a range of administrative duties, like answering phones and stocking office supplies. It is also very important to note that a competent, hardworking and an organized court secretary always enjoy the trust, confidence, and commendation of Judges/Magistrates, litigants and lawyers<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup><https://www.nji.gov.ng> > the role of registrars, secretaries, court clerks and bailiffs. Accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022

<sup>23</sup><https://www.nji.gov.ng> > management and security of exhibits and Court records: role of secretaries, process staff and bailiffs. Accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.nji.gov.ng> > the role of registrars, secretaries, court clerks and bailiffs.

Secretaries have no statutorily defined duties but work directly with the Judges assisting in administrative and legal tasks. Secretaries are generally responsible for:

1. Keeping and safeguarding confidential files<sup>25</sup>
2. Ensuring that proceedings of the court are neatly typed
3. Typing of copies of confidential and top secret documents, orders, rulings and judgments
4. Typing of other correspondence such as speeches and letters
5. Receiving and attending to visitors who require the audience of the Judicial Officers they are attached to
6. Receiving of phone calls from visitors, members of the public and other Judicial Officers on behalf their judicial officers and effectively relaying the information received to same and
7. Performing other duties as may be assigned<sup>26</sup>.

### **Court Clerks:**

This is an official in charge of the records of the court. He is tasked with maintaining the schedule of cases, files and documents used by the court<sup>27</sup>. A Court clerk sits with the Judge/Magistrate and attends to the need of the presiding Officer and the Lawyers<sup>28</sup>. His work is done under the supervision of the Court Registrar and includes:

1. Preparation of the cause list

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Accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.nji.gov.ng> > management and security of exhibits and Court records: role of secretaries, process staff and bailiffs.

Accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022

<sup>26</sup> ibid

<sup>27</sup> ibid

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.nji.gov.ng> > the role of registrars, secretaries, court clerks and bailiffs. Accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022



2. Arrangements for court sitting
3. Mention of cases
4. Keeping in safe custody record books, register of cases filed, exhibits, cases disposed of amongst others
5. Endorsing case files after court sitting
6. Marking of all exhibits

Court Clerks are encouraged to be friendly and polite to members of the public, counsel and litigants as they are mostly the first point of contact in instituting actions. They should therefore try to portray the best image of the judiciary at all times. They may also be of tremendous assistance in the interpretation of Court proceedings to litigants or witnesses in Court whenever the need arises<sup>29</sup>.

### **Bailiffs:**

Black's Law Dictionary defines a bailiff as "A Court officer who maintains order during court proceedings"<sup>30</sup>. It alternatively defines it as "a sheriff's officer who executes writs and serves processes"<sup>31</sup>. The Federal Capital Territory High Court Civil Procedure rules has charged bailiffs and other special categories of court staff with the service of originating processes when it stated that service of originating processes shall be made by a sheriff, deputy sheriff, bailiff, special marshals or other officers of the court<sup>32</sup>. The sheriffs are empowered to appoint such number of bailiffs as may be necessary<sup>33</sup> which goes to show the indispensability of bailiffs in the administration of justice. The duties of bailiffs in the various courts are as follows;

1. To effect the service of all court processes on litigants, counsel or an established body be it a Writ of summons, originating summons, petitions, applications, affidavit, statement of claim, statement of defence amongst others appropriately.

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<sup>29</sup> ibid

<sup>30</sup>Black Law's Dictionary, 9<sup>th</sup> Ed. Pg. 161

<sup>31</sup> ibid

<sup>32</sup> Or. 7 R 1 of the FCT. HCCPR. 2018.

<sup>33</sup> S. 5 of the Sheriff and civil process Act of 1945.

2. To effect service of Court order(s) on parties to a suit even on appeal.
3. To make depositions of proof of service of any court process served by him, stating vital information as to who accepted service of the process(es), place and time service of the said process(es) were effected promptly.
4. To keep a daily record in a Court register of all the processes issued and served by him.
5. As an officer in the temple of Justice the bailiff is to ensure that Orders and Judgments of the Court are duly executed.
6. The bailiff must be an honest and diligent officer of the court as he may from time to time be summoned to the open Court by a Judge or Magistrate to give account of the service of court processes.
7. As an officer of the Court is expected to assist during auction sale of the attached properties of a Judgment debtor.
8. A bailiff in carrying out the order of the court to vacate a premises or building, must take inventory of all the property found in the premises in the presence of a Police officer especially where the door or doors of the premises was forcefully opened<sup>34</sup>.

In **EMEKA V. OKAFOR & ORS**<sup>35</sup> Honourable Justice KUDIRAT MOTONMORI OLATOKUNBO KEKERE-EKUN of the apex court on the importance of a bailiff carrying out his statutory duty in accordance with the Rules or Order of Court, stated as follows;

“I refer to *Odutola Vs Kayode* (1994) 2 NWLR (pt.324) 1 @ 19 - 20 G - A, where Olatawura, JSC (of blessed memory) stated thus: "This case has brought out clearly the statutory and honest duties required of a bailiff: to serve in accordance with order of Court. Where personal service is ordered,

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.nji.gov.ng> > the role of registrars, secretaries, court clerks and bailiffs.

Accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022

<sup>35</sup> (2017) LPELR-41738(SC)

he must serve that person personally. Where a substituted service either by pasting at the last known abode of the person required to be served, or by publication in a newspaper is ordered, any other service which is not in accordance with the clear and unambiguous language of the Court is ineffectual. Bailiffs are officers of the Court. Any dereliction of duty in the discharge of their duties will cause unnecessary delay in the administration of justice. A false return of service on the part of the bailiff may lead to an attempt to deceive the Court. This in itself is an abuse of that order." Per KUDIRAT MOTONMORI OLATOKUNBO KEKERE-EKUN, JSC (Pp 54 - 55 Paras B - A)

Having effectively outlined the various court staff and the duties they perform, it is pertinent at the juncture to consider the roles they play in the safekeeping, custody and management of Court documents.

### **THE ROLE OF COURT STAFF IN THE SAFEKEEPING, CUSTODY AND MANAGEMENT OF COURT DOCUMENTS.**

The role of the various court staff in the administration and dispensation of justice can never be over-emphasized neither can their contributions towards attainment of justice be quantified. You will agree that the first contact between a court user and the court is the Registry and whatever a court employee does in his or her capacity affects the quality of justice as well as the perception and confidence of the litigants of the various courts<sup>36</sup>. Therefore, court staff are encouraged to perform their various functions and carry out their duties with all sense of diligence, dedication and grace as the administration of justice literally rest in their hands.

Court registrars are the most important officers of court as they are responsible for the day to day running, management and organisation of the court registry as well as being charged with the supervision of all other staff of the court. Therefore, bulk of the work of protecting, preserving and maintaining of court documents, rest on the shoulders of the registrars. However, there are various rules which places the custody and care of

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.nji.gov.ng> the role of registrars, secretaries, court clerks and bailiffs.  
Accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022

specific document in some specific staff which means all staff of the court is responsible in one way or the other for the safekeeping, custody, and management of court documents.

The safety and proper management of court documents and exhibits should be of paramount importance considering the role it plays in ensuring the effective administration of justice. As such, there should be proper security to ensure that such records and documents are free from violation by men and other forces of nature. Court documents should be kept in a safe place to prevent them from being stolen, mutilated, burnt or torn. One can only imagine the effect of a leaking roof, where water wipes the writings in a record book or important document or destroys it. How can a court of record then speak without records? Proper care should be taken to ensure protection from attack by termites, rats, fire<sup>37</sup> etc.

Court staffs should ensure that documents are stored in Safes and drawers so as to allow for proper security. Plastic files or other spill-proof materials should also be used in saving documents.

The proper officers vested custody of any court document or record should be identified. When an Officer of court engages in the duty of managing and securing documents in his custody, he ought to ensure that there is a proper list, by fashioning out a filing system that will secure these documents and make them easy to identify.

A Registrar in the discharge of his duties must ensure that court documents and exhibits, which are in his custody, are properly kept and maintained. He ought to mark every exhibit distinctly and endorse it with;

- a. Title of the suit in respect of which it was tendered
- b. Date and signature
- c. Ensure that it remains in proper custody until the end of the trial

Court staff should ensure a clear delineation of old cases and record books that should be appropriately archived.

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<sup>37</sup> <https://www.nji.gov.ng> > management and security of exhibits and Court records: role of secretaries, process staff and bailiffs.  
Accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022

There should be a Register for exhibits especially in criminal cases where an exhibit may not necessarily be attached to the court process and who shall identify the type of exhibits, place an identification mark on said exhibit, assign a serial number and register the date of admission into evidence.

This orderliness is a sign of good management skills and will ensure the proper functioning of the Court. Important court documents that are damaged or misplaced may stall the progress of proceedings or lead to a miscarriage of justice. It should be mentioned here that the Chief Registrar should provide instruments needed to effectively carry out these duties<sup>38</sup>.

In summary, the role of court staff in the safekeeping and custody of court documents are;

1. To be responsible for the orderly and systematic arrangement of court documents;
2. To account for each and every court document filed or deposited in the court.
3. To request for and obtain the necessary tools and instrumentalities used for the effective running of the registry.
4. To be responsible for the maintenance of the tools and instrumentalities used in the safekeeping of documents.
5. To ensure that files are catalogued and arranged in an orderly fashion to allow for easy accessibility.
6. To ensure that important files and documents are locked in secured shelves and saved so as to prevent theft, alteration, damage and mutilation.
7. To provide backup files for these documents and records in order to be fully prepared to face any unforeseen circumstance or contingency.
8. Access to court documents and exhibits must be restricted
9. Court staff must shun all forms of corruption and corrupt practices in the course of performing their duties.

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<sup>38</sup> ibid

## **THE NEED TO EMPLOY DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN THE SAFEKEEPING, CUSTODY AND MANAGEMENT OF COURT DOCUMENTS.**

There is a general glamour for the digitalisation of the entire judiciary for an effective and efficient justice administration system. In December, 2021, the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Ibrahim Mohammad Tanko (as he then was) in the event of the commissioning of a digital Court room for the Federal High Court sitting in Abuja, charged stakeholders on the adoption of digital technology for an effective and efficient Justice delivery in the country<sup>39</sup>. The digital courtroom is one of the nine pilot projects undertaken by the National Judicial Council (NJC) to metamorphose the Nigerian court from papers to Electronics<sup>40</sup>.

In most advanced nations, such as in North America, Europe, Asia (particularly in China) and a few Middle Eastern countries like Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, several manual procedures in courts have been phased out and replaced by digital/electronic processes<sup>41</sup>. While in Nigeria only Lagos, the Federal Capital Territory and a few other states have partially adopted a digitalised judicial setting.

Employing digital technology in the maintenance of court records and documents, filing of pleadings and orders, the presentation and preservation of exhibits and evidence and the storage of court documents will be the best thing to happen to our judicial system in recent times as it will completely reform and transform our judiciary to match up with best global practices.

The advantages of a digitalised judicial system and its aid to our court staff are too numerous to be exhausted in this paper. One can only imagine the ease of work when the filing of court processes is done through an entirely digitalized process, where court records and documents are completely saved in computer drives and savers. The ease of searching and retrieving such documents, the volume of documents that can be properly and effectively saved through this process, the reduced risk of documents been mutilated and destroyed, the security ensured by saving such documents

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<sup>39</sup> The Guardian Newspaper > CJN urges adoption of digital technology For effective justice delivery.> published on 17<sup>th</sup> December, 2021.

<sup>40</sup> ibid

<sup>41</sup> Premium times newspaper> Digital Technology: powering the Administration of justice > by lyene Ibanga >published on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December, 2021.

with passwords and passcodes and the general efficient performance of the entire staff workforce. An entirely computerised judiciary, will make for happy court staff which in the long run, will make for an effective and efficient Justice system and the speedy administration of Justice.

### **CHALLENGES FACING THE SAFEKEEPING, CUSTODY AND MANAGEMENT OF COURT DOCUMENTS.**

The challenges and constraints bedevilling the safekeeping, custody and management of our court documents are too blaring to go unnoticed and some of these includes;

1. Understaffing of the registry of most courts which makes for an overworked and weary workforce;
2. Lack of adequate training on safekeeping, custody and management of court documents and records. Most court staff do not understand record lifecycle from case initiation, active case maintenance, case disposition and post disposition procedures;
3. Lack of modern storage facilities and functional archives;
4. Poor salary and welfare packages which drives court staff to accepting inducement from litigants to manipulate Court records or to conceal facts;
5. The corruption and existence of bad eggs among the rank and file of court employees. No lawyer or litigant who wants his file to be promptly attended to will cease to attest to “mobilisation” of the court staff to have it done. It is appalling that at every point of the filing process, one may have to “mobilise” a court staff before he can lift his pen and this has gradually become the norm and tradition of our courts which nobody is taking about. How ironic it is that for a system which claims to uphold the pillars of justice, one has to engage in unjust practices in order to attain justice.
6. Lack of digitalisation of the record keeping system of our courts and the entire judiciary as a whole;
7. Lack of funding to provide for adequate working equipment such as computers and office stationeries to aid the various court staff in the effective discharge of their duties;

8. The attitude of some counsel and litigants who fail to adhere to lay down rules and procedures;
9. Lack of proper security manning the court registry.

## **RECOMMEDATIONS**

It is not in doubt that the Nigerian Judicial system has made laudable and commendable reforms over the years which can be seen in the improvement of the practice and procedures employed in the enforcement of justice. States like Lagos state and the Federal Capital ought to be applauded for taking the front role seat in matters of judicial reforms. However, our judiciary is still heavily lacking in some areas of administration and record keeping technology. Advances in information and communication technologies provide the opportunity for governments throughout the world to improve the delivery of information and services to citizen aimed at streamlining public sector functions and to increase output which the Nigerian judiciary can't afford to be left behind. To this end the judiciary should:

- i. Develop policies, procedures, systems, and structures to ensure the maintenance of the integrated records and archives management programme, as well as migrating from analogue to digital,
- ii. To uphold continuing judicial education to ensure better performance and instil greater confidence in officers of the court,
- iii. Continuous training and retraining of court staff in organisational and management skills
- iv. Employment of professionals and qualified personnel who knows what it takes to handle the work of a court staff.
- v. Ensure all tools are available for proper management and safe custody of records and exhibits such as establishment of modern and functional archives to ensure effective coordination,
- vi. With the aid of information communication technology, the provision surveillance systems within the court premises and



provision of CCTV cameras in the various record shelves and saves to detect any tempering of documents,

- vii. Development of plans and backup procedures to deal with loss of court documents, records and other emergencies.
- viii. Enhancement of salary and welfare packages will lead to greater job satisfaction and better impact the justice delivery by the Court employees,
- ix. To change from the old order of doing things that have been inimical to effective justice administration and appreciate new innovations that are in line with international best practices<sup>42</sup>.

Worthy of mention is the provision of the Code of Conduct for Judicial Employees as it relates to confidentiality of information<sup>43</sup>. It provides that a Court Employee is accountable for confidential information entrusted to him and shall not speak to the media or grant interview in his personal capacity. He/she shall not disclose to any unauthorised person any confidential information or give out any official document of the judiciary in any form without authorization<sup>44</sup>.

## **CONCLUSION**

It will be ill mannered of me to leave this podium without first acknowledging and appreciating the Administration of the National Judicial Institute, his management team and education committee of the Institute for this rare privilege and opportunity to address a very vital and integral category of staff of the judiciary. I consider myself greatly honoured to be part of this intellectual gathering of judicial staff.

As earlier demonstrated, ensuring the safekeeping, custody and management of Court documents and Exhibits are as essential to the

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.nji.gov.ng> > Safe Custody of Court Records and Exhibits

Accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022

<sup>43</sup> Rule 1(B) Code of Conduct for Judicial Employees of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (which came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2004)

<sup>44</sup> Rule 1(B)[1-3]

effective administration of justice as every other Justice administration process.

The court system in Nigeria, should like every other court in the developed world thrive and blossom on confidence, trust and the belief that justice works. For this system to actually work its supports staff must ensure they do their duties effectively at all times. As mentioned earlier the Secretaries, court clerks and the Bailiffs all work under the court registrar who manage the administrative duties of the court. It is paramount for the Court registrar to know that his or her level of efficiency and discipline rubs off on the other support staff under him/her. There is need to be proactive in taking decisions on behalf of the court and to ensure that any form of justice delay is not found on the part of the court. If he/she demands prompt delivery his support staff knows failure to do so would attract sanctions/ penalization hence they would be forced to comply and carry out their duties diligently<sup>45</sup>.

Finally, it is often said that whatever is worth doing, is worth doing well therefore court staff should take great pride in their work as the machineries running our temple of Justice.

I thank you all for your time.

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<sup>45</sup> <https://www.nji.gov.ng> the role of registrars, secretaries, court clerks and bailiffs. Accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022