

# Arms woe in courts

## 60,000 seized last year

### EXCLUSIVE

By DAVID HAFETZ

The halls of justice or potential corridors of carnage?

Unfazed by metal detectors or armed officers, New Yorkers arrived at the 28 state courthouses in the city last year with an astonishing arsenal of lethal weapons — including more than 8,375 guns, 29,347 knives and 25,000 scissors and razor blades.

"It's mind-boggling, absolutely," said Chief Administrative Judge Jonathan Lippman of what he believes is a rising mountain of weapons confiscated by court officers.

In Brooklyn, officers watch over a collection of deadly contraband seized during metal-detector screenings — a box full of knives, meat cleavers, Chinese throwing stars and even a machete.

One visitor was caught with a sliding dagger ingeniously attached to the back of his belt buckle.

Amid this avalanche of arms, and in the wake of recent killings in an Atlanta courtroom and the murder of a federal judge's family in Chicago, state officials last week announced a "soup to nuts" review of courthouse security — the most extensive study since the Sept. 11 attacks.

Officials insist New York's courthouses are safe. The most recent shooting happened in 2002, when a bullet was fired into the ceiling as a convicted drug dealer struggled to wrest an officer's gun.

But the statewide system, which handles 4 million cases a year, is a powder keg as criminals and des-

### Danger zone

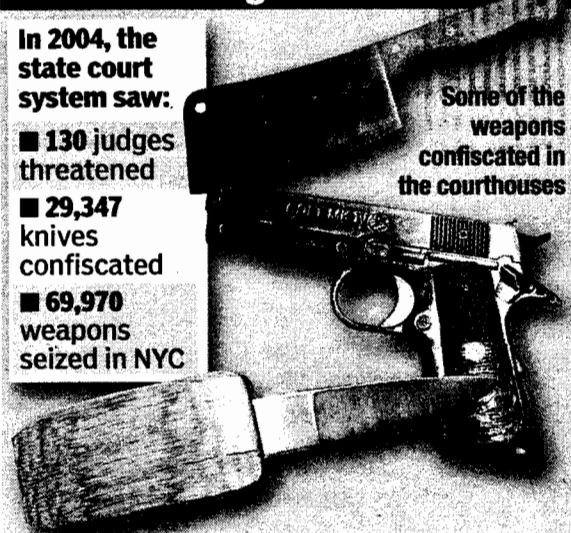
In 2004, the state court system saw:

■ 130 judges threatened

■ 29,347 knives confiscated

■ 69,970 weapons seized in NYC

Some of the weapons confiscated in the courthouses



perate people enter courtrooms by the thousands each day.

Last year, more than 400 disturbances and fights were reported in courthouses around the state, said Matthew O'Reilly, the state's chief of public safety for courts.

O'Reilly said 12 prisoners tried to escape at courthouses and 385 people were arrested for assaults and other crimes. The state investigated 130 threats against judges.

Last month in The Bronx, a brawl broke out during two defendants' sentencing. By the time it ended, six officers were injured, one supervisor was repeatedly kicked while on the ground and six people were in handcuffs.

"It was wild there for a few minutes," said Maj. Mark Bodde, who runs security for Bronx State Supreme Court.

Lippman said that despite a raft of new security measures, more people appear to be carrying weapons — both legal and illegal — to court.

"It shows the danger, and also the comfort people can take from the fact that the job is being done," the judge said of the seized weapons.

Officials say New York already has security measures in place that likely would prevent a shooting like the one in Atlanta.

They said officers never carry their guns when entering a holding pen or while in close contact with uncuffed prisoners. They said officers also avoid one-on-one situations with prisoners, keep inmates rear-cuffed during transportation and use holsters with three snaps, making it harder for anyone to make a surprise grab for their weapons.

Still, Lippman said, "We shouldn't be sitting on our duff."

Lippman said everything is on the table for review, from officer staffing levels to policies for prisoner transport and emergency courthouse "lockdowns." A 15-member state committee will issue its report early this summer.

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