

NEW YORK
CITY BAR

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Hon. David A. Paterson
State Capitol
Albany, New York 12224

Dear Governor Paterson:

On behalf of the New York City Bar Association, I applaud your decision to place the long-neglected issue of judicial salaries on the special session agenda for November 29. In particular, we support the establishment of a commission to evaluate and adjust judicial salaries.

Throughout the state, New Yorkers must have access to the high quality judges they deserve and expect. An important step to ensuring that access requires the Legislature to increase salaries for state judges. The City Bar supports increasing the salaries of all state judges, including housing court judges, who had been excluded in past proposals.

New Yorkers now face a greater degree of economic distress than in any period since the Great Depression, and the inevitable result is that court caseloads have become even more staggering. Under these circumstances, the challenge of delivering speedy and effective justice to all parties - a fundamental responsibility of government - has never been greater. And this challenge is falling squarely on the shoulders of our state's judges.

Despite this, state judges have not received a salary increase since 1999, and many judges are compensated at a level less than the salary of first year law firm associates. While we cannot expect judges to be paid the top dollars they could earn in the private sector, we must provide enough compensation to attract outstanding lawyers and retain them as judges, and to make clear the respect with which we hold this branch of government. By contrast, our current approach does not even provide salary increases that match inflation.

The City Bar supports the creation of a commission because it sets up a mechanism to periodically review and increase judicial salaries. It is of benefit to no one to continue to have lingering uncertainty regarding judicial salaries. To force judges to lobby the Legislature after going years without an increase, before eventually receiving an increase that may not even make up for past years, is neither an effective nor efficient manner to determine judicial salaries.

Thank you for your attention to this issue. We hope that the Legislature will promptly adopt this recommendation.

Respectfully,



Samuel Seymour

cc: Members, New York State Assembly and New York State Senate