



American Judges Association

The Voice of the Judiciary
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AMERICAN JUDGES ASSOCIATION SUPPORTS NEW YORK JUDICIAL PAY RAISES

*Statement of American Judges Association
President Steve Leben
June 27, 2007*

New York judges have been actively seeking their first pay raise in nearly nine years—having received only two raises in the past 20 years. Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye has repeatedly called upon the legislative branch and Governor Spitzer to raise judicial salaries and to establish an independent commission to oversee future raises. Thus far, however, the judicial pay raise has been deadlocked over its attachment to campaign finance reform and other unrelated issues. The American Judges Association calls on the New York Legislature to set aside any political differences in order to provide a raise for the judiciary that is unarguably merited and long overdue.

The courts and judges of New York have quite properly been well respected from the beginning of our nation's history, through the times of great judges like Justice Benjamin Cardozo and Judge Learned Hand, and continuing to the present days of Judge Kaye and her fellow judges. New York courts and judges are highly respected for their record of innovation and service. Yet salaries of New York judges have fallen way below national averages: the National Center for State Courts now ranks the pay of New York judges 48th out of the 50 states on a cost-of-living-adjusted basis. For nine years, longer than any other judges in the nation, New York's state judges have been without even an annual cost-of-living increase to their salaries. When inflation is factored into the equation, New York judges' annual salaries are \$23,700 dollars less than they were when they last received a pay raise in 1999.

Judges in New York often make embarrassingly little when compared to the parties before them. Senior partners in New York law firms that have a minimum of ten lawyers make an average yearly salary of \$350,000 while the highest paid judge, Chief Judge Kaye, makes \$156,000. Brand-new lawyers in Wall Street firms make more than the experienced New York judges we rely upon to render justice and protect the rights of us all.

The American Judges Association is not the first entity to support judicial pay raises for New York's judges, but we wish to add our voice to those already in

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play. New York has the opportunity both to restore judicial salary levels to ones that will continue to attract—and retain—great judges who will continue to serve in the great tradition of New York history and to establish an independent commission that would help to maintain appropriate salary levels in the future. We urge the elected leaders of New York State to grant the pay raise *and* to establish the suggested independent commission that would make future salary recommendations. The justice system in New York is well worth these investments.

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The American Judges Association is the largest independent association of judges in the United States, with 2,500 members (144 of whom are New York judges). Steve Leben, president of the American Judges Association, is a member of the Kansas Court of Appeals. For more information, contact Steve Leben, AJA president, (913) 485-7192 or Shelley Rockwell, AJA association manager, (757) 259-1841.