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'Raise' objections

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The state's judges will get a 27 percent pay hike -- their first in a dozen years -- after a vote yesterday by a state commission that was appointed to break the logjam over judicial pay.

But the pay hike, to be phased in over three years, was actually panned by the New York State Bar Association -- which had called for even larger raises.

Under the plan approved by the state's Judicial Pay Compensation Commission, Supreme Court judges will see their salaries rise from the current rate of \$136,700 to \$174,000 in 2014, roughly what US District Court judges earn.

The panel agreed to an initial boost to \$160,000 in April and two additional hikes of \$7,000 in each of the following two years. The seven-member panel voted 4-3 for the raises, with the three dissenting votes cast by members who wanted even larger increases.

Pay hikes for 1,300 judges will go into effect automatically unless the Legislature and Gov. Cuomo act to block them.

Cuomo budget director Robert Megna testified before the commission earlier this summer that "even a modest" raise for judges would widen New York's chronic budget deficits and that "the spending is not affordable."

But the state's chief judge, Jonathan Lippman, told The Post he expects the increase to go through. Judges' pay has traditionally been tied to increases for state legislators, who haven't upped their own base pay in 12 years.

State Bar Association President Vincent E. Doyle III noted the cost of living has increased by 40 percent since 1999 and said "salary stagnation" makes it "harder to attract and retain talented judges."

"I think it's a very defensible, modest increase in the context of not having an increase in so many years," Lippman said.

"You could argue, gee, in these difficult times nobody should get raises. But in these difficult times, it's most important that you have a quality judiciary. You're coming dangerously close to eroding one of the hallmarks of our democracy."

Lippman noted that most state workers have seen their salaries grow by about 40 percent since 1999, while judges haven't gotten a penny more.

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