

**The New York Times** Reprints

This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers here or use the "Reprints" tool that appears next to any article. Visit [www.nytreprints.com](http://www.nytreprints.com) for samples and additional information. Order a reprint of this article now.

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY  
**TERRENCE MALICK**

July 29, 2011

## New York Judges Deserve a Raise

New York State's 1,300 judges have not had a raise or even a cost-of-living adjustment for a dozen years. Their salaries now lag behind the pay of federal judges, senior assistant district attorneys and Legal Aid lawyers in New York City. In many instances, judges even earn less than their own law clerks whose salaries are set by union collective bargaining. Judges on the State Supreme Court, New York's main trial court, earn \$136,700 — \$37,300 less than comparable federal judges.

When a state commission charged with setting judges' pay heard testimony last week, a procession of lawyers and judges warned that the low salaries were making it harder to persuade highly qualified lawyers to seek judgeships and to stay on the bench. Gov. Andrew Cuomo's budget director, Robert Megna, insisted that New York couldn't afford a large catch-up raise and that any increase would require cuts elsewhere.

These are undeniably tough times. But a well-functioning court system is essential for ensuring justice and protecting the state's business climate. Because of recent budget cuts, there are already increased delays in trying civil cases and arraigning criminal defendants.

The commission will report its recommendations by the end of August and they will become law unless the Legislature votes to amend or overturn them and the governor signs the bill.

The salaries for New York's judges must be raised. But given the current economy, the \$190,000-to-\$220,000 range proposed by court administrators seems too high. Restoring parity with federal judges, with regular cost-of-living increases, is reasonable. That would cost the state an additional \$49 million next year. That is not a small sum, but it is a sound investment in the justice system.