

Parties try to protect judicial endorsements

By Deborah Pines

Staff Writer

The fight over the legality of Westchester Democrats and Republicans endorsing the same slate of judicial candidates during a three-year period continued yesterday in legal papers.

Lawyers for the major parties argued for upholding an Albany judge's Oct. 17 decision that deemed the "cross-endorsement" agreement legal.

The citizens' group seeking to overturn that decision has a month to answer yesterday's papers before argument will be scheduled before the state's mid-level appeals court in Albany.

The group, the 9th Judicial Committee, claims the agreement, reached last year, is illegal chiefly because it disenfranchises voters by giving them no choice in seven races in 1989, 1990 and 1991.

The group also claims participating candidates agreed illegally to consult with the political parties before making appointments.

The parties have said the agreement was legal and was intended to get the most qualified candidates and prevent unseemly campaigning.

Jay Hashmall, a lawyer for the Democrats, and Guy Parisi, a lawyer for the Republicans, yesterday argued against a reversal sought by the committee's lawyer, Doris Sassower, before the state Supreme Court's Appellate Division, 3rd Judicial Department.