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Governor Paterson Signs Legislation Creating Commission on Judicial Compensation

December 10, 2010

Governor David A. Paterson today was joined by Chief Judge of the New York State Court of Appeals Jonathon Lippman; Assembly Speaker Silver; President of the New York State Bar Association Steve Younger; Chair of the Fund for Modern Courts Victor Kovner; and distinguished members of the New York State judiciary as he signed legislation establishing a special Commission on Judicial Compensation.

"This legislation will go far toward making the New York State bench a magnet for the nation's best and most qualified judges," Governor Paterson said. "The people of New York State are entitled to a strong and able judiciary that dispenses fair justice in our courts. And our judges are entitled to fair compensation. Today, I am pleased to report that a 12-year roadblock to the fair adjustment of judicial salaries has been removed."

Chief Judge of the New York State Court of Appeals Jonathon Lippman said: "A permanent commission dedicated to judicial compensation is a very positive development for the future of an independent and strong Judiciary in New York. It will allow Judges to meet their financial obligations as public servants, and ensure that New York will always attract and retain the highest quality jurists. On behalf of the New York State Unified Court System, I express my deep appreciation to Governor Paterson for his leadership and to the legislative leaders for their support in achieving passage of this historic legislation."

The bill signed today, Governor's Program Bill No. 333, creates a special Commission on Judicial Compensation focused on ensuring judicial compensation is reflective of the incredible responsibilities and levels of expertise required of all those who preside over a New York State court.

Every four years the Commission will examine, evaluate and make recommendations with respect to judicial compensation. The Commission will determine what the judicial salaries shall be and will make recommendations to effect the changes to salaries. These recommendations will become effective the next fiscal year, and the recommendations of the Commission will have the force of law.

The Commission will include seven members: three appointed by the Governor, one each appointed by the Temporary President of the Senate and Speaker of the Assembly and two appointed by the Chief Judge of the New York State Court of Appeals. In determining the salary level, the Commission will consider such factors as overall economic climate; inflation; levels of compensation received by other private and public employees; and the State's fiscal condition.

Salaries for New York State Judges were last adjusted in 1999, and as a result, judicial salaries have become an increasing subject of controversy in recent years. Since the last judicial pay increase, New York State judges' salary levels have fallen precipitously behind those of their peers in other states, and New York currently ranks near the bottom of national judicial salaries.

Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver said: "In the past, the Assembly, under the tireless leadership of Judiciary Chair Helene Weinstein, has worked with Chief Judge Lippman, his predecessor, Chief Judge Kaye, the Governor and our colleagues in the Senate to develop legislation that assures New York's judges compensation that is commensurate with the breadth of their responsibilities while taking into account the reality of the State's finances. The Commission bill proposed by the Governor, passed by the Legislature in extraordinary session, accomplishes both of these goals. I hope it will demonstrate to the men and women who serve in our judiciary how much we value the challenges they are facing and the outstanding work that they do."

Senate Majority Conference Leader John L. Sampson said: "This legislation represents a victory for New Yorkers because it will ensure the State is able to attract and retain the most talented jurists for the bench. The Senate Democratic Majority has long advocated for and previously passed legislation to create an independent commission that would fairly evaluate judicial compensation. Unfortunately, New York lags far behind other states in this regard, and that deficit impacts all New Yorkers. I was pleased to work with Governor Paterson and Assembly Speaker Silver to advance this important legislation that will improve the quality of our court system. The Senate Democratic Majority can be proud of our successful efforts to bring more diversity and fair pay to the bench to improve the quality of justice for all New Yorkers."

Former Chief Judge of the New York State Court of Appeals Judith Kaye said: "In this season of celebrating miracles, I include enactment of the new judicial compensation law, hopefully bringing to an end the travesty, and worse that New York State judges have endured. With celebration goes congratulation, starting with Chief Judge Jonathon Lippman, Governor David A. Paterson, who convened the special session resulting in passage of the bill, to the legislative leaders and members, to the bar for its steadfast support-particularly the law firms that so nobly and effectively pressed the issues through the courts-and above all to the judges for their perseverance and dedication to the public despite these many frustrating, angering years."

Stephen P. Younger, President of the New York State Bar Association, said: "For more than a decade, our judges have expertly handled expanding dockets, while seeing their pay diminished due to the lack of fair and adequate pay raises. Our judges have gone far too long without any adjustment in their pay. With the signing of this bill, New York will finally have a permanent mechanism that will ensure that our judiciary never again goes through a decade-long drought, without a sound way to adjust their pay. I applaud the Governor for signing this bill today, commend the Legislature for passing this landmark legislation, and thank Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman for his tireless advocacy on behalf of the judiciary."

Victor A. Kovner, Chair of the Fund for Modern Courts, said: "The signing of the Quadrennial Commission legislation rights a wrong that has existed for more than a decade which has left the judiciary, upon whom we depend to protect our fundamental rights and liberties, unprotected in terms of their basic compensation."