

Editorial: Judicial salaries: Consider the times

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Just how large a raise should New York state judges get after 12 years without one?

That is the question the Judicial Compensation Commission has to answer in the next few weeks. The panel, created last year, has to decide in August what level of compensation the state's 1,200 judges — city, county, family, surrogate, Supreme Court and Court of Appeals — will receive for the next four years. Under the compromise worked out to take the politics out of judicial pay, the recommendations will be effective April 1, unless blocked by the state Legislature.

There has been no lack of suggestions on how high to hike salaries. Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman makes \$156,000; associate judges on the Court of Appeals, \$151,200; appellate judges \$144,000, and Supreme Court judges, \$136,700. But without raises in more than a decade, their salaries have fallen out of line with private practice attorneys and judges in other states while caseloads have risen dramatically.

Given the cost of living in the Big Apple, the New York City Bar Association says Supreme Court justices need a 55 percent hike, to \$212,000, to be on the same level as other big-city judges, the New York Times reports.

The New York County Lawyers' Association, looking to minimize the impact of a large hike in tough fiscal times, figured that a \$60,000 raise would raise the state budget "by less than 55 one-thousandths of one percent."

The Office of Court Administration offered a range of possibilities, from \$192,000 to \$220,000, for a Supreme Court justice, providing a 40 percent to 60 percent hike, which may not meet with approval from lawmakers who themselves have gone without a pay raise for several years. Sen. John J. Bonacic, chairman of the Judiciary Committee, told the Times that a \$220,000 salary "may not be consistent with the tough environment that's going on right now."

Judges will be looking to make up for lost pay over the last 12 years, but the panel should consider that too large a hike in a single year, when other austerity measures are slashing programs and state aid, may meet with public and legislative resistance.

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