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Report: Two advocate raises for New York's judges

by Jessica M. Karmasek

NEW YORK (Legal Newsline) - At least two members of New York's Special Commission on Judicial Compensation are pushing for raises for more than 1,200 state judges.

Monday was the commission's third public meeting. The commission was established last year by former Gov. David Paterson and, according to its website, is an independent body "tasked with examining, evaluating and making binding recommendations with respect to judicial compensation for New York State's judges."

The commission has seven appointed members -- three are designated by the governor, two by the chief judge of the New York State Court of Appeals, one by the president pro tempore of the New York State Senate and one by the speaker of the New York State Assembly.

According to The New York Times, commission members Robert B. Fiske Jr. and Mark S. Mulholland are in favor of a raise for state judges, who have gone since 1999 without any salary increase.



Fiske

At Monday's meeting, Fiske proposed that pay for state Supreme Court justices be increased to \$195,754 from \$136,700. Meanwhile, Mulholland proposed their salaries be upped to \$220,000, the Times reported.

Fiske and Mulholland also supported raises for trial and appeals judges, according to the Times.

Last month, the Brennan Center for Justice sent a letter to the commission, urging it to recognize that annual salaries for judges and justices of New York warrant adjustment and should be increased to a fair level.

"We are concerned that because New York's judges have not received any cost-of-living salary adjustment (or any other increase) in more than a decade, judicial salaries in the Empire State have fallen behind those of federal judges and judges in our sister states -- and in some cases even behind those of judges' own law clerks. Once the highest paid judges in the country, New York's are now, on a cost adjusted basis, the lowest paid," Michael Waldman, executive director of the center, wrote to the commission's chairman, William C. Thompson Jr.

"We fear this stagnation in judicial compensation may hinder the ability to retain the talented jurists responsible for the distinguished reputation that New York's judiciary has long enjoyed."

Waldman said the center is "keenly aware" of the current economic climate and the fiscal difficulties facing New York and, in particular, its courts.

"Our judiciary faces a staggering budget shortfall as it strives to meet the challenges associated with providing swift and fair justice to the public," he wrote.

However, resources for all court services must be increased, Waldman said.

The full commission is expected to make its recommendations by Aug. 28.

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