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UPDATED: In Split Vote, Commission Votes to Raise Judicial Pay

A special pay commission has voted, 4-3, to gradually raise the \$136,700 salary of State Supreme Court justices to the \$174,000 now earned by federal district judges. The justices would earn \$160,000 as of April 1, 2012; \$167,000 as of April 1, 2013 and \$174,000 as of April 1, 2014. Other state judges' pay would also be raise proportionately.

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The raise was considerably less than the substantial and immediate increase of between \$192,000 to \$220,000 that had been supported by court administrators, judges, bar groups and others. Under the proposal, there would be no raise at all in 2015.

Former City Comptroller William C. Thompson Jr., chairman of the pay commission, said the objections raised by three of the seven members that the raises are inadequate to compensate judges for the almost 13 years they have gone without raises have some validity.

But he added that the grim economic realities of New York state made it incumbent on the commission to come up with a raise schedule that would not shock the state Legislature and Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and compel them to reject the pay hikes.

"I think the members of this commission understand that we might not be... the final word on judicial raises," Mr. Thompson said at today's final meeting of the commission at 25 Beaver St. in Manhattan. "Our decision will be reviewed by the Legislature and the governor and if it's felt that it is too out of line with the fiscal realities it could be overturned, and I think that would be disastrous to a Judiciary that has waited for over a decade for raises."

The plan will go into effect unless the Legislature and the governor take the affirmative step of rejecting it.

The plan calls for no retroactive raises or automatic cost-of-living adjustments. Nor does it revise the relationship of the salaries of different kinds of judges.

Mr. Thompson and Mr. Cuomo's two other appointees to the commission, William Mulrow, an investment adviser with Blackstone, and Richard Cotton, general counsel of NBC-Universal, all voted for the recommendation. Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver's appointee, health care executive and former Assembly Democratic majority leader James Tallon, also voted for the recommendation.

Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman's two selections to the commission, Robert Fiske Jr. of Davis, Polk & Wardwell, and Kathryn Wyld, president of the Partnership for New York City, voted against the recommendation as did Mark S. Mulholland of Ruskin Moscou Faltischek in Uniondale, the pick of Senate Republican Majority Leader Dean Skelos.

Mr. Fiske said Supreme Court justices should get immediate raises to at least \$195,000 a year. Mr. Mulholland proposed immediate pay increases to \$192,000 a year.

Ms. Wyld said she did not find the numbers proposed by Mr. Thompson to be unreasonable given the state of the economy, but she worried that they were inadequate to show how valued judges are to the state and the legal system of New York.

The commission will go out of existence after transmitting its final report to the Legislature and the governor on Monday. A new commission will be appointed to recommend salary adjustments for the four years starting in 2016.

Today's recommendations cover 1,200 state-paid judges. Town and village court justices are not affected by the commission's recommendations.

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State panel recommends 27 percent pay raise for judges (Updated)

Posted by: [Jon Campbell](#) - Posted in [Uncategorized](#) on Aug 26, 2011

A state panel today recommended phasing in a 27 percent pay raise for state judges over the next three years, which would give them their first salary increase in 12 years.

Under the state Special Commission on Judicial Pay's plan, which will formally be released Monday, state Supreme Court judges will have their annual pay bumped up to \$160,000 in April 2012, with \$7,000 raises to follow in each of the following two years.

That salary would put them in line in 2014 with federal district court judges, who make \$174,000 annually. State Supreme Court judges currently earn \$136,700.

Other judges in the state courts system, such as county court judges, whose salaries range from \$119,800 to \$136,700, would see their salaries rise by the same percentage increase over the three years.

The commission approved the proposal by a 4-3 vote in a meeting in New York City today. The recommendations will be law unless the state Legislature decides to overturn the raises.

The new salaries would take effect April 1.

"I think the message we're trying to send is yes, we care about our state's judiciary, but there's a larger world," said Bill Thompson, former New York City comptroller and chairman of the commission. "It's a difficult balance where we're at right now."

In a law pushed last year by former Gov. David Paterson's administration, the commission was created to make a formal recommendation on the contentious issue of judicial pay. With appointees from all three branches of government, the panel began its discussions last April.

State judges had long called for a raise, having gone without cost-of-living adjustments since 1999. But Robert Megna, Gov. Andrew Cuomo's budget director, had urged the commission to use caution, saying that issuing raises of 40 percent or more—as some judicial groups had been calling for—could throw off the state's precarious finances.

Previously, the state Legislature had to approve of raises for the judiciary, and lawmakers' raises had been tied to raises for judges. The panel separated that link; lawmakers haven't had a raise since 1999 either.

The commission will be re-formed in four years.

The seven commission members were split on the formal proposal, with three — Mark Mulholland, Robert Fiske, and Kathryn Wylde — voting against it. **Update:** Mulholland said the raises didn't go far enough, while Wylde said the raises were reasonable, but that she was concerned it didn't send the right message to judges. Fiske said he didn't support the phased-in approach.

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3

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