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## Panel's Chair Says Judges Made Strong Case for Raise

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The chairman of the judicial pay commission said yesterday that the state's judges have raised valid concerns about the personal toll of having gone more than 12 years without raises, and about the threats to the quality of state courts that the pay drought has created.

William C. Thompson Jr., the former New York City comptroller, said several judges who spoke at the hearing of the Commission on Judicial Compensation (NYLJ, July 21) on Wednesday "passionately" expressed their desire to continue in public service on the bench in spite of going since 1999 without salary increases.

"But at the same time, they want to...sustain a middle-class lifestyle," Mr. Thompson told the "Capitol Pressroom," a government and political interview show broadcast on several public radio stations in the state. "That only seems fair."

Mr. Thompson also said that turnover in the judiciary has increased from about 5 percent to about 10 percent, according to information gathered by the commission and that New York citizens should be concerned whenever experienced judges are leaving the bench, or talented lawyers do not seek judicial posts because of the pay situation.

"The average citizen should be concerned," Mr. Thompson said. "You want to make sure you have the best and the brightest, the strongest judiciary possible."

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo appointed Mr. Thompson to head the seven member commission, which has until late August to recommend pay adjustments for judges through March 31, 2016. The proposal will have the force of law, unless the Legislature seeks to prohibit the increases.

Mr. Thompson noted the gloomy assessment yesterday of the state's finances by state Budget Director Robert Megna and of the state's ability to afford pay raises starting on April 1, 2012. But Mr. Thompson said Mr. Megna was doing his job by providing his analysis of the budget and that the state's ability to pay for salary hikes must be one factor the commission takes into consideration.

"I think the budget director laid out the fiscal condition in the state and how difficult things are now here," Mr. Thompson said. "We have to factor all of that in as we make decisions on the level of compensation and the state's fiscal situation is one of the things that we have to factor in, definitely."

Mr. Thompson said yesterday he believes Mr. Cuomo is "committed" to a judicial pay raise. "I think Governor Cuomo is committed to this," Mr. Thompson said.

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