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Pay-Frozen NY Judges Flee Bench for More Money

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Without a pay raise for a dozen years, increasing numbers of New York judges are leaving the bench for jobs at law firms paying 10 times as much as their judicial salaries. The exodus, amounting to nearly 1 in 10 judges, has risen sharply during the past five years, The New York Times reports.



In 1999, just 48 of the 1,300 state judges left the bench, but the number stepping down last year ballooned to 110 judges.

One example is James McGuire, a judge on the intermediate state appeals court in Manhattan. As a judge, he earned \$144,000. He left to be a partner at Dechert LLP, where the average partner makes \$1.4 million, the Times

reported.

McGuire, who once served as Gov. George Pataki's chief counsel, said the lack of a raise became increasingly troublesome for him. "I tormented myself for the longest period of time about whether I should go, because I love the work," he told the Times. "And then I realized, 'I've got no choice. The only responsible thing for my family is to go.'"

Nationally, judicial salaries have fallen behind those of lawyers in private practice, law professors, school administrators, elected officials, and even some courthouse employees. In New York City, law clerks can earn more than the judges they work for, the Times reported. U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts also has noted the pay gap at the national level.

New York's chief judge, Jonathan Lippman, said those leaving the bench constitute just half of the problem. "Why would a talented lawyer want to join an institution that hasn't had even a cost of living increase in 12 years?" the Times quotes Lippman as saying.

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