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## Judicial pay commissioner says judges will get raise

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NEW YORK, Aug 8 (Reuters) - On Monday, members of the Special Commission on Judicial Compensation did more than voice support for giving New York state judges a raise. They put figures on the table.

In one of the last meetings before their recommendations are due, Commissioner Robert Fiske Jr. said that starting next year, state Supreme Court justices should be paid \$195,754 -- the same amount judges would be making had they received cost-of-living increases over the past 12 years.

Held at the headquarters for the Office of Court Administration in Lower Manhattan, it was the third public meeting for the commission, a seven-member panel established last year by former Gov. David Paterson. The panel has until Aug. 28 to make recommendations that would take effect April 1, 2012 and continue for four years, unless modified or repealed by statute.

"We're trying to correct a manifest injustice that has gone on for 12 years," Fiske said at Monday's hour-long meeting.

The state's ability to grant raises, and the overall tough economic climate, are among the factors that commissioners must consider, Fiske said.

But "in the end, I don't think a consideration of those factors should prevent us from doing what I think is the right thing for the judges," Fiske said.

Commissioner Mark Mulholland said he thinks judges should be paid \$220,000, a figure that takes into account the levels of compensation officials make in government, academia and nonprofit organizations.

"We should try to have our judges be the highest paid in the nation," Mulholland said.

Bill Thompson, the chairman of the commission, asked the other commissioners to submit their recommendations before the committee's next meeting on Aug. 26. "Everybody will get to see the different options," he said.

## 'LOWEST OF 50 STATES'

New York's Supreme Court justices make \$136,700, the lowest of the 50 states when taking into account the cost of living. Increasing the figure to \$220,000 would put New York's judges squarely in the middle, Mulholland said.

During a public hearing on July 20 in Albany, more than two dozen lawyers, judges and experts urged the commission to recommend a raise of at least 41 percent. State Budget Director Robert Megna said at that hearing that New York, which has cut spending across the board, can't afford to pay millions toward raises.

But following Monday's hearing, Thompson told Reuters, "The judges are going to get a raise."

Brooklyn Family Court Judge Daniel Turbow, who attended the meeting, said he was very pleased with what he heard.

"I have to think it's encouraging," Turbow said.

(Reporting by Jennifer Golson)

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Pay for Supreme Court, Court of Claims and some county court judges in the mid-\$190,000 range would only put those trial judges who are so important to the functioning of New York courts into the middle of the pack in terms of salary among their comparable peers in other states, Mr. Mulholland said.

"We should aspire to that level of greatness" of having the highest-paid state judges in the country, Mr. Mulholland said.

Mr. Mulholland was appointed to the commission by Senator Dean Skelos, the majority leader of the Senate, who is also a counsel at Ruskin Moscou Faltischek.

Other commission members were mum about their recommendations yesterday. The other four members of the group are James Tallon, the former state Assembly Democratic majority leader who is president of the United Hospital Fund; Kathryn Wyld, president of the Partnership for New York City; William Mulrow, an investment adviser with Blackstone, and Richard Cotton, general counsel of NBC-Universal.

Mr. Thompson acknowledged that there seemed to be a consensus among commission members that whatever increases are proposed for Supreme Court justices will also be recommended proportionately for other state judges.

The last meeting of the commission will be at 10:30 a.m. at 25 Beaver St. in Manhattan. The commission will go out of existence once it issues its recommendations.

@|Joel Stashenko can be reached at [jstashenko@alm.com](mailto:jstashenko@alm.com).

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