

Senate Judiciary Committee
2015 Annual Report

Committee Staff

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Judiciary Budget for State Fiscal Year 2015-2016

The Legislature adopted a Unified Court System Budget increase to \$1.85 billion. This reflects an increase of \$36.3 million. The overall Judiciary budget increase was 2%.

III. PUBLIC HEARINGS

Criminal Justice Reform Hearings

On March 11 and May 7, 2015, the Committees on Judiciary, Codes and Corrections joined by the New York State Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Legislative Caucus held hearings to examine the need for reforms to the criminal justice system to ensure fairness, improve community/police relations, and protect the safety of law enforcement officers. The Committees and the Caucus heard testimony regarding specific reform measures needed to improve fairness and transparency in the criminal justice system.

Use of Body-Worn Cameras by Law Enforcement

The Committees on Judiciary, Codes and Governmental Operations conducted a Public Hearing on December 8, 2015, to examine the feasibility and effectiveness of body cameras worn by law enforcement officials. The Committees heard testimony concerning collateral issues related to body-worn cameras, including privacy concerns, presentation of evidence, and the effects of recording on community-police relations.

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IV. NEW YORK STATE'S JUDICIARY FUNDING

The 2015-2016 State budget adopted without change the Judiciary's budget request for appropriations in the amount of \$2.8 billion. The court's budget absorbs statutorily-mandated salary increments for represented non-judicial employees, statutorily-mandated increases for indigent legal defense, supplemental funds for IOLA, and a much needed increase in funding for civil legal services to address the crisis in legal services funding. With this year's Judiciary budget, the Office of Court Administration will maintain current staffing levels, filling just a limited number of positions critical to operations, and plans to keep courtrooms open to the public until 5 p.m. each day.

V. FUNDING FOR LEGAL SERVICES

In 2015, the Assembly built on its support for civil legal services in New York State by increasing its appropriation for civil legal services through the Judiciary budget by \$15 million for a total of \$85 million to help bridge the tremendous gap between civil legal service needs of low-income New Yorkers and the availability of services to meet these needs. As part of the SFY 2015-16 budget, the Assembly also restored its traditional funding for civil legal services in the amount of \$2.65 million and \$609,000 for domestic violence programs. Further, the SFY 2015-16 enacted budget appropriated \$86.9 million for the New York State Office of Indigent Legal Services, representing an increase of \$4 million from the prior year, to support quality improvements for upstate public defender offices, and to support the operations of the Office.