

COMMENTARY OF THE GOVERNOR ON THE JUDICIARY

In accordance with Article VII, Section 1 of the State Constitution, I am transmitting herewith the appropriations requested by the Judiciary for fiscal year 2009-10. As required by the Constitution, I am presenting the Judiciary budget as it has been submitted by the Chief Judge.

The Judiciary has requested appropriations totaling over \$2.5 billion. This reflects a change of \$2.3 million from the prior year, after adjusting for the elimination of non-recurring collective bargaining costs. This “no growth” budget is mindful of the State’s financial condition, and responsive in light of my call for all Executive Branch agencies to restrain spending.

The Judiciary will face twin challenges in the coming year – an austere budget, coupled with growing caseloads. The economic downturn is already increasing cases related to mortgage foreclosures, consumer debt, evictions and family matters. To meet this anticipated growth in the courts’ workload, the Chief Judge must carefully manage existing resources.

Despite these pressures, I am pleased to note that the Judiciary’s proposed budget reflects a continuing commitment to the improvement of the Justice Courts, an integral part of the delivery of justice in our communities across the State. In addition, the Judiciary is increasing its reliance on technology, e.g. electronic filing, video appearances, remote learning, and acceptance of online credit card payments for fees and fines, thereby both reducing costs and demonstrating a commitment to environmental responsibility.

To its credit, the Judiciary has submitted a request that does not appeal for an increase in resources, but rather seeks to better utilize existing funding to meet its core constitutional mission. Notably, the proposed budget once again seeks to address judicial salary compensation, but does so within available appropriations, including a reappropriation of 2008-09 funding enacted for this purpose.

The Chief Judge is to be commended for her thoughtfulness in preparing this proposal, and I wish her well in her future endeavors.