

COMMENTARY OF THE GOVERNOR ON THE JUDICIARY

In accordance with Article VII, Section One of the State Constitution, I am transmitting herewith the appropriations requested by the Judiciary for fiscal year 2007-08. As required by the Constitution, I am presenting the Judiciary budget as it has been submitted by the Office of Court Administration.

The Judiciary has requested appropriations totaling nearly \$2.4 billion – an increase of \$47 million, or 2.0 percent over the current year. This increase includes amounts necessary to provide salary increases to judges, retroactive to April 1, 2005.

Judicial salaries have remained unchanged since 1999, and achieving agreement on new compensation levels for judges is a high priority of the Chief Judge. In recognition of the importance of this issue, and in support of the Chief Judge, the Executive Budget advances Article VII legislation to provide for a judicial salary increase to the level recommended by the Chief Judge. I urge the Legislature to take action on this proposal, which has languished too long.

In addition, I commend the Chief Judge for her Action Plan for Town and Village Courts, which will provide training, technology, and security for these courts. A total of \$10 million is requested, as a first installment in what will be a multi-year plan to strengthen this part of our justice system. Ensuring that justice is fairly done within these small, community courts is a laudable goal which I strongly endorse.

Finally, I am very pleased to support the Chief Judge's recommendation to increase support for civil legal services for low income New Yorkers. A modest increase of eight dollars in the criminal history fee allows this initiative to be accommodated within the Legal Services Assistance Fund, without impairing current support for criminal defense and prosecution services. Funding for civil legal services has been neglected by the State, and I join with the Chief Judge in recommending that the State assume a greater role in ensuring the adequacy of these services statewide.