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Good afternoon. I am Dorchen Leidholdt, the Director of Sanctuary for Families' Center for Battered Women's Legal Services (the "Legal Center"). I'd like to extend my gratitude to the Commission on Judicial Compensation for holding these hearings. Sanctuary for Families, New York State's largest provider of dedicated services--residential, clinical, and legal--to victims of domestic violence and sex trafficking, wholeheartedly supports a substantial and long overdue increase in judicial salaries.

Sanctuary for Families is testifying here today because we are intensively involved in the court system and see on a daily basis the critically important need for the most qualified and highly motivated judges possible. Founded in 1989, the Sanctuary's Legal Center is the largest provider of legal services exclusively for victims of domestic violence and sex trafficking in the country. The Legal Center's 24 attorneys, operating out of offices in four New York City counties, last year provided legal representation and advocacy to well over 4,000 victims, many with multiple cases, and provided brief legal assistance, advice and referrals to more than a thousand additional clients. Sanctuary's attorneys train and supervise a vast network of pro bono lawyers, most from major New York City law firms. Each year, more than 400 pro bono attorneys represent domestic violence victims under the supervision of Sanctuary lawyers.

Our Immigration Intervention Project provides battered immigrant adults and children with legal services that enable them to obtain permanent resident status or citizenship; our Community Law Project addresses the family law needs of immigrant domestic violence victims, as well as other underserved populations such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender abuse victims; our Courtroom Advocates Project recruits, trains, and supervises law students, to advocate for domestic violence victims seeking orders of protection in New York City Family Courts; our Economic Justice Project helps economically disadvantaged domestic violence victims obtain contested and uncontested divorces, child and spousal support, child custody, and public benefits; and our Anti-Trafficking Initiative represents sex trafficking victims, many of whom have also been subjected to domestic violence.

You likely have heard the shocking statistics about the inadequate compensation of the New York State Judiciary due to the fact that our judges haven't received a pay raise in twelve years. In the 1970's New York's judges were the highest paid in the country. Today New York's judges now rank 46<sup>th</sup> nationally when adjusted for the cost of living, according to the National Center for State Courts. According to the New York Times, the lack of a pay raise has contributed to the accelerated rate of judicial turnover in recent years—about 1 in 10 Judges annually.

State courts are handling more cases than ever before, but State law bars the hiring of more judges. This means that we are asking our judges who are being paid less

and less as the cost of living rises to do more and more. This is not only grossly unfair but will inevitably lead to lowered morale, greater attrition, and a diminished quality of adjudication. The upshot is that New York State, which has been a leader nationally, not only in the development of model courts like the Integrated Domestic Violence Courts but in the development of the superb judges who preside over these courts, is in danger of dramatically diminishing the quality of its court system.

I am here today to put a human face on these statistics by talking to you about some of the excellent judges we are at risk of losing and the critical, urgent, and demanding nature of their work. An increase in judicial salaries is absolutely essential if New York State is to maintain the experienced judiciary it currently has, and will be even more critical in attracting highly qualified lawyers from the private sector to become judges in the future.

Sanctuary for Families' attorneys and the hundreds of volunteer attorneys that we recruit, train and mentor practice in the Family, Criminal, and Supreme Courts, including the Integrated Domestic Violence Courts, in all five boroughs of New York City on a daily basis. Over and over, in our own cases, and in cases we witness as we wait in court, we observe and experience the tireless, demanding, often heroic, and not infrequently lifesaving work of the judges who preside over cases that are often neither precedent setting nor sensationalistic, but that make an extraordinary difference in the lives and well being of the families who appear before them.

The unsung heroes whom we appear before issue civil orders of protection, which mean safety and peace of mind for our clients and their children, and frequently allow them to remain safely in their own homes. They preside over often heavily contested custody cases that ensure that our clients' children are raised in stable safe environments by loving and nurturing parents. They preside over visitation cases that result in carefully crafted orders that enable children to have visitation that does not jeopardize the abused parent's safety. They preside over matrimonial actions that enable our clients to terminate their legal bonds with their abusers while maintaining their family's financial security. They preside over criminal cases that enable our clients to achieve protection from abuse while holding accountable those who have committed crimes of domestic violence against them. In doing so, they often confront trauma, tragedy, threats, at times, personal danger.

Here are a two recent and representative examples:

A judge in the Integrated Domestic Violence Court in Manhattan presides over a trial in which a young immigrant woman from the Caribbean pursues a civil protective order against the father of her infant daughter after he brutally beat her, several times in the presence of their daughter, in their upper Manhattan apartment. The case goes to trial and is zealously litigated. The judge makes a series of sophisticated determinations with respect to the introduction of physical and photographic evidence and witness testimony. Her rulings, grounded in her extensive knowledge of evidentiary law and her decades of

trial experience as a prosecutor, are well reasoned, even-handed, and delivered in a way that is dispassionate, respectful, and authoritative. Despite the powerful emotions they bring into the courtroom, both litigants and their counsel recognize the wisdom and fairness of the judge's eventual decision in favor of the petitioner.

A judge in the Bronx presides over a case in which a father has filed a petition for visitation with his three-year-old son. Although both parents have agreed to unsupervised visitation, the Court carefully scrutinizes the respondent's previous petitions for orders of protection and spots an allegation that stops her in her tracks. The respondent had alleged that her child's father had thrown the contents of a full container of bleach on her, burning her face and hands and narrowly missing the child. The Court observes evidence of the injury on the respondent's face and hands. Refusing to accept the settlement, she issues a protective order on behalf of the respondent and child and orders that the visitation be supervised.

As you can see, not only are these cases complex factually and legally, requiring the highest quality of legal education, training, and experience, not only do they involve the safety and protection of the most vulnerable New Yorkers, they also demand extraordinary personal qualities: maturity, self-control, fairness, diplomacy, acute analytical abilities, wisdom, excellent judgment, compassion, and a strong sense of mission. Cases like these demand the best, the brightest, and the most evolved legal practitioners our court system can recruit and retain. It simply cannot ensure this high

quality of judges by paying salaries that are outstripped by those given law firm junior associates.

New York State has a long and distinguished history as a center of social justice. We have opened our doors to the world, and offered protection to the poor, the victimized, and the unrepresented. The Marriage Equality Act, the extension in 2008 of Family Court jurisdiction to persons in nontraditional families who need orders of protection, and the anti-trafficking legislation of 2007 are just three recent examples of this proud tradition.

These protections, however, would mean little without a strong judiciary. On a daily basis the most vulnerable New Yorkers, including victims of domestic violence and human trafficking turn to the courts. The cases that they bring present not only complex and difficult legal matters, but also, often complex and difficult human stories. To meet this challenge, it is imperative that we attract and retain the best of the bar to serve on the bench. It is also critical that our judiciary reflect the diversity of the people of this State.

If the declining real value of salaries discourages the best attorneys from serving on the bench, the most vulnerable among us are placed at greater risk, as is New York's heritage as a center of social justice.