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Testimony on
Judicial Compensation

Presented by
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Special Commission on Judicial Compensation Public Hearing
Wednesday, July 20, 2011

11:00 am
Hearing Room B – The Roosevelt Room
Legislative Office Building
Albany, New York

**Testimony of Denis Hughes, President of the New York State AFL-CIO
Special Commission on Judicial Compensation Public Hearing
Wednesday, July 20, 2011**

Chairman Thompson and distinguished members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to appear today. My name is Denis Hughes and I'm President of the 2 ½ million member New York State AFL-CIO, representing working men and women across the state in every sector, trade and profession. Well, maybe not every trade. I don't think we have any judges...Yet.

While it may not be everyday as a union leader that I'm advocating for the fair compensation of judges, I do advocate everyday for a strong structure to safeguard the rights of New York's workers both on the jobsite and in their communities. Make no mistake, an efficient and effective court system with the most qualified and experienced judges is an indispensable component of that structure. That is really why the commission is here today; to protect the integrity of the courts.

New York's workers rely on the court system to provide a forum to enforce labor protections, resolve disputes, and ensure that they are treated equitably under the law.

The twelve year freeze on judicial salaries and further erosion through inflation is well documented, so I will not belabor those points. From a policy standpoint and simply from a perspective of fairness, it's simply wrong and redress is overdue.

As a result, the New York State AFL-CIO supports a fair and appropriate raise for New York's judges. There are many ways to determine the appropriate salary adjustment. We do not take a position on exactly what that adjustment should be. What is clear is that the adjustment must be substantial. What is also clear is that the size of a fair adjustment is a reflection of the length of the judicial salary freeze and the ravages of increases in the cost of living over that time.

This is obviously a difficult fiscal time for the State. The impact on New York's workers in both the public and private sector in terms of job security and overall economic well being has been severe. Regrettably many public employees are now facing the prospect of no salary increases over the next few years. Worse, many more are facing layoffs, including computer

programmers, clerks, secretaries, stenographers, and others in the Office of Court Administration, many of whom are represented by our affiliates. As we stand with New York's judges in seeking a fair and rational compensation system, we also stand in defense of the workers that have paid the price for the struggling economy. I am ever mindful of these facts. Although we must be respectful of these tremendous hardships and fight for jobs in this state, it should not be an excuse to do nothing. The Commission must begin the process of correcting a longstanding wrong.

New York is a great state. Its courts and its judges are an important piece of what has made it great. Ensuring that we have the best and brightest judges is important to New York and to its working people. Resolving this issue is at the heart of protecting the court system and the people's faith in it.

Again, I thank you for your time and consideration and would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

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