

Testimony of Maureen D. Dennis
Superior Court Judge and
President of the Connecticut Judges Association
March 3, 2008

Regarding Proposed Legislation
Bill No. 5036

Good afternoon Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee.

My name is Maureen Dennis. I am a judge of the Superior Court in Connecticut and I currently have the pleasure to serve as the president of the Connecticut Judges Association. Our association consists of approximately 238 members, including judges, senior judges and referees.

The matter that I would like to address is Bill No. 5036 -- AN ACT CONCERNING SALARIES OF JUDGES, FAMILY SUPPORT MAGISTRATES AND REFEREES. This bill would raise our salaries by two percent, effective January 1, 2009.

I would like to express the sincere gratitude of our entire membership, to the Governor for proposing this bill, and for supporting an increase in our compensation. We are truly appreciative of Governor Rell's proposal for this increase in our salaries. We support the increase, but are hopeful of achieving any future increase[s] by a slightly different method.

In February of 2007, the Commission on Compensation of Elected Officials and Judges issued a report to the General Assembly recommending that increases in the salaries of judicial officers, as well as those of the members of the Legislature, be linked to the increases received by Executive Branch managers. The final report of the Compensation Commission has not yet been issued, but our understanding is that their recommendation remains the same -- that judicial salary increases, and increases in the per diem rates paid to senior judges and judge trial referees, be linked to the increases received, if any, by managers in the Executive Branch.

Having any judicial salary increases tied into a set index would provide some level of predictability to judicial officers, as well as to those working to plan, craft and implement the state budget. Also it would mean that we would not need to come before the Legislature every few years seeking pay raises, which at times have been disproportionately high to make up for periods of years when no increases were provided.

Having to lobby another branch of government for salary increases is certainly awkward in terms of judicial independence. We feel that by eliminating the need to petition the legislature for pay raises, judges can be more involved collaboratively with

the legislature, on the myriad of other issues so very important to the judicial department and those whom we serve.

There are three equal branches of our government: Executive, Legislative, and Judicial. Basic principles of fairness and equity would seem to require that all three branches be treated the same, in the manner of calculating compensation adjustments.

If the method recommended by the Compensation Commission were adopted, salaries of judicial authorities would be increased by the same percentage received by managers in the Executive branch. And correspondingly, if the Executive Branch managers received no increase, then there would be no increase to judicial authorities.

We would urge you to review the 2007 report from the Commission on Compensation of Elected State Officials and Judges, which further expounds upon the arguments in support of this method of structuring any pay increases.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before your committee on behalf of the Connecticut Judges Association.