



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
JUDICIAL BRANCH

CHAMBERS OF  
BARBARA M. QUINN  
CHIEF COURT ADMINISTRATOR

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**Testimony of Judge Barbara M. Quinn  
Appropriations Committee Public Hearing  
February 9, 2010**

**House Bill 5018, An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures and  
Revenues for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2011**

Good afternoon, Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, Senator Debicella, Representative Miner and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Barbara M. Quinn, and I am the Chief Court Administrator. I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk about the Judicial Branch's financial difficulties and the Governor's mid-term budget adjustments.

In recent months, the Judicial Branch has been invited to appear before this Committee, at the November deficiency hearing, and before the Judiciary Committee at its January 19<sup>th</sup> hearing, to talk about our well-documented budget difficulties. I do not intend to use our limited time today to go over that ground in detail again. However, before I discuss the impact of the Governor's FY2011 budget proposals on the Judicial Branch, I do need to emphasize that the serious fiscal issues facing the Judicial Branch in the current fiscal year and beyond are emblematic of a much more profound problem that requires your attention.

**Fundamental Structural Reform**

There are fundamental and over-arching structural budget issues that must be addressed if we are to ensure that the Judicial Branch continues to function as intended by the Legislature. These issues include changing the manner in which the Legislature receives the Branch's budget proposals, and placing appropriate limits on the ability of the Executive Branch to unilaterally make allotment reductions and rescissions to the Branch after a budget is adopted. Plainly spoken, the present budget system for the Judicial Branch is broken and needs to be replaced by one in which the Branch is treated as a co-equal branch of state government.

and unexpected budget shortfall in FY 2010. These reductions are forcing us to make unpleasant and unpopular program cuts and delays as we try to live within the dollars that remain. New mandates given to the Branch by the Legislature are now in direct conflict with disproportionate budget reductions imposed on us.

We explained this in detail when we testified at the deficiency hearing just last November. Nevertheless, no concrete action has been taken to date by either the Executive or Legislative Branches that would obviate the need for these cuts, which include closing courthouses and law libraries in addition to programmatic cuts and delays. By taking these undesirable actions, we have managed to reduce the expected deficiency in our *Other Expenses* line item from more than \$12.9 million to approximately \$1.2 million.

I am aware that there is significant legislative interest in reversing the budget reductions that have forced these unfortunate steps, and we are very thankful for that. However, I must point out that because we are closer to the end of the fiscal year than the beginning, the time remaining to reverse course and implement programs that have been deferred such as those associated with "Raise the Age," and postpone a final decision concerning closing law libraries in Bridgeport, Hartford and Litchfield, grows short. If any action is to be taken to rectify the problem in the current fiscal year, it must be taken as soon as possible so that the programs and contracts that have been delayed or eliminated can be implemented by April 1. Doing so will require that \$5.45 million be restored to the Branch's OE account in FY2010. However, we must bear in mind the amount of funding which must be restored in OE for FY2011 is closer to \$9.5 million, which represents the \$7.8 million associated with "reducing OE to FY2007 levels" and a minimum of \$1.95 million for law libraries.

## **FY2011**

The Governor's mid-term budget adjustments must be examined in the context of what has happened this fiscal year. Although at first glance the budget proposal may not appear to substantially cut the Judicial Branch budget, further analysis indicates that is far from the case. If adopted as proposed, the budget would severely erode the gains we have made in recent months in replacing some of the hundreds of key staff we have lost over the past 2 years to a hiring freeze and ERIP, prevent us from hiring essential court security staff, allow the highly successful and badly needed foreclosure mediation program to expire by the end of the summer, and most critically, leave us exposed to the possibility of tens of millions of dollars of allotment reductions and rescissions after the budget goes into effect.

The constraints and uncertainties in the Governor's budget proposal mean that we will have to proceed with the announced courthouse and law library closings, not implement "Raise the Age" programming in FY2011, and once again not fund certain contracts such as those for legal assistance to the poor that are passed through the CT Bar Foundation. Regrettably, we will have no choice but to continue our contingency

## **The Branch's future**

I will end my remarks by repeating the questions I posed at the end of my recent testimony before the Judiciary committee. The ultimate question for you as a Legislature is this: What kind of court system do you want to have in Connecticut? Is it a Branch that provides services to citizens in reasonable proximity to where they live? Is it a Branch that has an adequate number of judges and support staff to serve the public and ensure that people have timely access to justice? Is it a Branch that is in the forefront of new and innovative programming that actually reduces crime and costs to the State and its communities? Is it a Branch that can continue to work effectively and cooperatively with its Legislative and Executive partners? Or, is it a Branch that struggles to meet its traditional statutory and constitutional responsibilities because of incessant budgetary conflict and uncertainty?

I know that at the end of the day we are all committed to working together to maintain the best court system we can, even in the face of tight resources. Thank you for this opportunity, and I am pleased to answer any questions that you may have.