Testimony of the Judicial Selection Commission before the Appropriations Committee

Thursday, February 28, 2019

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representatives DiMassa and Horn, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle and esteemed Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Monika Nugent and I am the Manager for the Judicial Selection Commission (JSC). I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Chairman Bob Bello and the rest of the Commissioners serving on the JSC. Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today.

The JSC consists of twelve volunteer, unpaid members who are each appointed to a 3-year term. The purpose and mission of the JSC is to evaluate, investigate, and recommend qualified candidates for consideration by the Governor for nomination as judges to the Superior Court, the Appellate Court, and the Supreme Court. Additionally, the Commission evaluates incumbent judges who seek reappointment to the same court or an elevation to a higher court. The manager is the only staff member for the Commission.

From January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2018, the JSC reviewed 28 new applicants for judicial appointment and 17 judges for reappointment and/or elevation. So far in 2019 we have already received a total of 29 applications, more than half of the total from 2018. The JSC has received 15 new applications, 6 of which have been reviewed, and 14 applications for reappointment/elevation, 7 of which have been reviewed. The JSC expects that the increase in new applications will continue to rise, as it has in past years as seen in our Annual Reports.

In review of the Governor’s budget for FY 2020-2021, the proposed appropriations to the JSC has remained flat. Since FY2015, the JSC has seen its available budget for other expenses cut in half. This has led the JSC to find new and different ways to cut cost and work more efficiently without going into a deficiency. To date, we have successfully done so. Currently, funds for other expenses includes the statutory (CGS 51-44a) reimbursement for necessary expenses to members in the performance of their duties and office/meeting supplies for the year. Any decrease in this budget, would prove to be an extraordinary burden for the JSC to fulfill its statutory obligation (CGS 51-44a).

With any decrease in the OE budget, the JSC will need to hold fewer meetings throughout the year. This would lead to longer wait times for judges and new applicants to be processed and reviewed and would jeopardize the statutory (CGS 51-44a) timeline of having all reappointment applications completed no later than 180 days prior to the next legislative session. Lastly, over the years, it has become more difficult to recruit volunteers to serve on the Commission. All of the volunteers currently serving have full time jobs and take time off of to attend meetings. Without funds for reimbursement for mileage and other necessary expenses incurred by Commission members, it may be even harder to recruit volunteers to serve. The current budget, with no further reductions, is imperative to keep the basic functions of this Commission.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present this information to you. If you have any questions now or in the future, I would be happy to answer them. The Commission can be reached at 860.256.2957 or at Monika.Nugent@ct.gov.