

Connecticut Criminal Defense Lawyers Association
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November 12, 2020

George Jepsen, Clair
Connecticut Commission on Judicial Compensation

RE: Connecticut Commission on Judicial Compensation

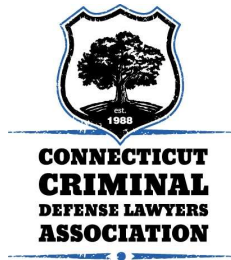
Dear Members of the Commission:

The Connecticut Criminal Defense Lawyers Association (CCDLA) appreciates the Commission seeking the input of criminal defense lawyers in determining evaluating the proper compensation for Connecticut's judicial officers. I personally have appeared in front of many of our state's judges and magistrates over by 22 years of practice. Our criminal judges are faced on a daily basis with making difficult decisions that affect defendant's lives and freedoms.

I am aware of the statutory factors that the Commission must consider when making compensation recommendations. One factor includes the interest in attracting highly qualified and experienced attorneys to serve in judicial capacities. I know many attorneys who have worked in the private sector for many years who have the qualifications to serve as a Superior Court Judge, but doing so would serve as a pay cut. My father was also a criminal defense attorney and practiced for 45 years. I recall having conversations with him in the mid-1990s about how he was asked to apply to be a judge, and he decided against it given financial considerations.

Criminal judges, especially those who had a previous life as criminal litigators (as prosecutors or defense lawyers), are invaluable resources to the bench in our state. Any seasoned criminal trial lawyer will tell you that the most effective criminal judges are those who know have tried many cases and have worked in the courtroom for many years. There are very qualified litigators who would qualify but may see applying to the Superior Court bench as a reduction in their salary.

As Chief Justice Robinson's report accurately notes, most attorneys seeking to become a judge do so because of a commitment to public service, and many private attorneys are willing to accept a lower salary because of this commitment. However, they should not be expected to accept a salary that, at a bare minimum, does not keep pace with inflation.



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Having reviewed the National Center for State Court's *Survey of Judicial Salaries*, I was surprised to see that the State of Connecticut ranks 44th out of 51 states (including Washington DC). The report also notes that CT Federal District Court judges currently earn \$216,400 and have lifetime appointments. They earn 25% more than Connecticut Superior Court judges.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, I would be remiss if I did not mention that our Superior Court judges are also taking on a great deal of risk by working in towards getting criminal court business moving again. Suffice it to say, the pandemic has caused a massive backlog of criminal business and it is these judges who are being asked to assist in provide access to the courts during this time.

I welcome any questions that the Committee has.

FRANK J. RICCIO II
President, CCDLA¹

¹ The Connecticut Criminal Defense Lawyers Association ("CCDLA") is a statewide organization of approximately 350 attorneys, private and public, who are dedicated to defending people accused of criminal offenses. Founded in 1988, CCDLA works to improve the criminal justice system by ensuring that the individual rights guaranteed by the Connecticut and United States Constitutions are applied fairly and equally.