

The Franklin H. Williams Judicial Commission
Letter In Support of the Judiciary's 2014-15 Budget Request

The Franklin H. Williams Judicial Commission (Commission) strongly urges the legislature to adopt the Office of Court Administration's Judiciary 2014-15 Budget Request, (the Judiciary Budget), in its entirety.

The Commission seeks to promote racial and ethnic fairness in the courts and serves to sensitize all levels of court personnel to issues of racial diversity, cultural sensitivity and perceived racial bias and disparate impact. The Commission is composed of judges, lawyers and court administrators all appointed by the Chief Judge of the State of New York.

The initial study in 1991 that led to the Franklin H. Williams Judicial Commission becoming a permanent entity in the courts reported that people of color had a perception of a lack of fairness in the courts. We are pleased to report that over the past two decades, there has been progress. However, the current under funding of the courts is undermining the judiciary's ability to meet its constitutional mandate and disproportionately impairing the quality of justice delivered to our citizens.

These problems are most acute in the criminal, family, housing and lower civil courts. These are the courts serving the poor. While the above-mentioned problems do not discriminate on an individual basis, there is no question that there is clearly a disparate impact on the poor and people of color. We believe it is imperative that the legislature understand the multi-dimensional impact of reduced funding.

In courts throughout the state, the early closing of courts as well as a reduction of court personnel – all the result of State budget cuts in court funding in recent years – has resulted in significant delays, and we fear, at times, justice denied. Judges sit frustrated waiting for officers to be re-assigned in order to conduct judicial proceedings, lawyers and litigants are overwhelmed with cases requiring additional adjournments, jurors are required to serve additional days as cases stretch out longer and, in the rain and snow, citizens stand in long lines that snake around the courthouse waiting to clear security in understaffed courthouses.

With sensitivity to the state's economic concerns, the Office of Court Administration has proposed a budget with a de minimis increase, far from what is truly

needed to restore the courts to a fully functional state. Passing the budget as submitted is a first necessary step to address the needs of the judiciary.

Therefore, on behalf of the Franklin H. Williams Judicial Commission, we urge you to support the Judiciary Budget, in its entirety.