

**Proposed Testimony to the Commission on Judicial Compensation**

**Chief Family Support Magistrate Michael Ferguson**

**Informational Forum**

**December 2, 2024 via Zoom**

Good afternoon. I would first like to thank you, the Judicial Compensation Commission, for the opportunity to present to you today. It is my honor to speak on behalf of the Family Support Magistrates. My name is Michael L Ferguson, and I am the Chief Family Support Magistrate, overseeing the administration of the statutorily appointed Family Support Magistrates as well as the Support Magistrate Referees.

To begin, I would like to present an overview of the important role that Family Support Magistrates play within the innerworkings of the Judicial Branch. The Magistrate program is born of the statutes and bestows upon the Division the distinct responsibility to adjudicate proceedings regarding parentage and support of spouses and children who are recipients of Title IV-D services. This includes individuals who receive state assistance and those who apply for support assistance through the Department of Social Services.

There are nine Magistrates who cover the entire state of Connecticut, presiding over different locations each day to ensure that all of Connecticut's citizens are provided access to a swift and just resolution of their parentage and support disputes. Notably, a significant number of the parties who come before the magistrates are self-represented. Thus, a great part of this adjudicator's role is to assist parties in navigating their matters by entering orders that are fair, equitable and in the best interest of the children and family.

Finally, the Magistrate program works alongside major state agencies, that being Support Enforcement Services, the Department of Social Services and the Attorney General's Office. This increases both the volume of persons that come before the Magistrate each day and the responsibility associated with managing dockets involving many conflicting interests and points of view.

In short, the Magistrates are devoted public servants from varied backgrounds who have a crucial role. They hear thousands of petitions and post judgment motions each year. Each Magistrate takes his or her responsibility on the bench seriously and handles each case with compassion and thoughtfulness, precisely because they know what a significant impact their decisions have on the lives of the families who come before them each day.

Family Support Magistrates serve a term of five years. They are appointed by the Governor after being interviewed by the Governor's Counsel, are presented to the Judiciary Committee for questioning at a public hearing and are thereafter confirmed by the House and Senate, in a process which is substantially similar to that of the Superior Court Judges. Dissimilar to Small Claims Magistrates, Probate Judges and Motor-Vehicle Magistrates, and pursuant to the Connecticut General Statutes, the Family Support Magistrates similar to judges, must devote full time to his or her duties and is not permitted to otherwise engage in the private practice of law.

I have reviewed Chief Justice Raheem Mullins' proposal as it relates to a salary adjustment for the Family Support Magistrates. It proposes modest and fair increases in the Family Support Magistrate's salary at an equivalent percentage to the Superior Court Judges. Notably, Justice Mullins' proposal calls for an adoption by the General Assembly of a statute that would provide for these increases and continuing onward to ensure that pay levels are set regularly and are based on fair and objective benchmarks. Overall, the proposal is thoughtful, carefully crafted and fair. I support Justice Mullin's submission and I hope that you adopt his recommendations.

Thank you again for your time and thoughtful consideration of my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.