

JUDICIAL COMPENSATION COMMISSION 2024
TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF THE CT JUDGES ASSOCIATION
DECEMBER 2, 2024

Good Afternoon, Commission Members. I'm Rupal Shah, the President of the Connecticut Judges Association. Thank you for inviting me to testify before the Commission today. Thank you also for serving on this Commission. I've worked with many of you previously, and I truly appreciate your time in considering this important issue. I wholeheartedly support the report and recommendations that Chief Justice Mullins has submitted to the Commission. All of the points he makes, and particularly the statistics regarding retention of judges over the last several years, should be particularly concerning to all of us.

The judiciary plays a unique and critical role in our democracy to uphold the rule of law. Judges are central to the judiciary. In my ten years as a judge, I have seen the bench change significantly in terms of judges leaving, retiring early and morale declining. This job is challenging, and I have not served in a court yet where I have not had to bring my cases home with me at night or on the weekend, far beyond the 9 to 5 description that is mistakenly presumed. With well over half of the judges on the bench having served less than seven years, it's essential to retain experienced judges in the system, for so many reasons, including that they are an invaluable resource to less experienced judges and provide a critical role on the bench, especially with more complex and difficult cases that we see as judges. There is simply no substitute for the knowledge and wisdom attained by sitting as a judge and sharing that knowledge and guidance with less experienced colleagues is what strengthens our system and ensures that we all make the best decisions we can to serve the people of Connecticut. In the over ten years I have been a judge, I have seen too many of our colleagues leaving the bench, not to enjoy their golden years in leisure, but to join a private firm and practice part time for a higher salary, either as an advocate or a mediator. More competitive judicial compensation is necessary to retain experienced judges. It is also essential to attracting a diverse and talented pool of candidates to the judiciary.

For all the foregoing reasons, the Connecticut Judges Association fully supports the recommendations of the Chief Justice as contained in his November 12 submission to this Commission. We encourage the Commission to adopt these recommendations. Setting judicial compensation for Fiscal Year 2026 in accordance with these recommendations, with future annual adjustments equal to CPI-U plus 2% will help ensure that Connecticut's citizens are served by a judiciary made up of a strong mix of new judges from the ranks of highly qualified and accomplished attorneys and more experienced judges. Thank you for your consideration.