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Legislation enhances ability to attract and retain quality judges

Chief Justice Applauds Legislature and Governor for Enacting New Salary Structure

HARRISBURG, July 8 — Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ralph J. Cappy today lauded the General Assembly and Gov. Edward Rendell for enacting legislation that promotes a new salary structure for top office holders within all three branches of state government.

“This compromise plan adopted by the state legislature sets federal Executive, Congressional and Judicial salaries as a reasonable framework for the long-term establishment of salaries of similar state officials in the Commonwealth,” the chief justice said. “Adequate salary levels are crucial to attracting and retaining highly qualified people to serve the citizens of the Commonwealth.”

“Raising public officials’ salaries is never popular and there is never the ‘right time’ to do so,” said Chief Justice Cappy. “Doing so now was an act of prudent courage by legislators, legislative leaders and Gov. Rendell and I must acknowledge their leadership on a difficult issue. Particularly when the work of state legislators so directly affects Pennsylvanians’ lives, the logic of compensating them on a percentage basis of Congressional salaries strikes me as a reasonable and consistent plan to avoid the political pressures necessitated by the former *ad hoc* approach.”

The chief justice noted that judicial pay, which had not been significantly adjusted in nearly a decade, is set by statute. The average of all cost-of-living adjustments for jurists since the last increase in judicial salaries in 1995 has been approximately 2.3 percent. “This legislation addresses the longstanding discrepancies in judicial salaries of elected judges and justices as compared to salaries of the counterparts in other sister states.”

Though the Commonwealth is the country’s fifth largest state, salaries of Pennsylvania jurists had significantly eroded on a comparative basis nationally with salaries of appellate court jurists in Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, Delaware, Connecticut and Florida, among others, all outpacing those of their counterparts in Pennsylvania. Given continual increases in judicial salaries around the country, Cappy said he anticipated salaries for Pennsylvania judges will settle at about fifth place.

Under the just-enacted legislation the new salary structure links standardized pay for jurists, lawmakers and top executive branch appointees with those of comparable officers at the federal level.

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