



NEW YORK STATE SENATE DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY

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Senate Majority to Pass Legislation to Strengthen Judicial Accountability and Transparency

(Albany, NY) Today, the Senate Democratic Majority will pass legislation to strengthen judicial accountability and bring greater transparency to New York’s judicial system. The legislation advancing today builds on the Majority Conference efforts to enhance ethical standards in State government and bolster public trust in our judicial system. This suite of legislation will increase transparency in our judiciary by requiring lobbying disclosure for a nomination to state office, strengthen ethical standards by requiring public posting of judges annual financial disclosure, allow for monitoring and review of bail data for any judicial bias, and enhance the authority of the Commission on Judicial Conduct (CJC) by making proceedings public when a judge is charged with misconduct and extending the CJC’s jurisdiction to judges who resign or retire. This legislation package also requires annual training about bail for judges exercising preliminary jurisdiction over any criminal offense and provides for audio-visual recordings in judicial proceedings.

“The Judiciary has a tremendous impact on the lives of all New Yorkers, and the power of its rulings lies in the public’s confidence in its moral clarity and adherence to the highest ethical standards,” said **Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins**. “With this legislative package, we are taking significant steps to strengthen judicial accountability, enhance the ethical standards of our judges, and bolster public confidence in our judicial system. I would like to thank the bill’s sponsors, as well as Senator Hoylman-Sigal, Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, for all their work in moving this package forward. I am very proud of this legislation and the effort our conference is making to strengthen people’s trust in the institution.”

Senate Deputy Leader Michael Gianaris, said, “It is important for the judiciary to be at least as transparent and accountable as the rest of state government. These reforms would achieve that and instill greater public confidence in our judicial branch.”

Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal, said, “The true administration of justice requires public faith in an impartial, unimpeachable, and competent judiciary. Sadly, New York’s court system and accountability proceedings are shrouded in secrecy, fostering perceptions of corruption, incompetence, and unaccountability. These bills will ensure our judiciary is properly trained and that bad apples are publicly identified and disciplined, restoring the public’s trust in our court system. I thank Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins for bringing this package to the floor and Senators Gianaris and Bailey for their partnership in developing this legislation.”

Bill Sponsor Senator Bailey, said, “Recognizing and combating all forms of bias is critical to upholding fairness and impartiality in our justice system. This legislation clarifies the State Commission on Judicial Conduct’s authority to utilize OCA-DCJS data to fulfill its constitutional responsibility. My bill would allow the Commission to conduct more effective oversight by utilizing data on pretrial release and detention decisions to identify and address potential bias. Together with my colleagues’ bills, this legislative package will make significant progress in reinforcing judicial accountability, strengthening ethical standards for judges, and building public trust in our judicial system. I want to thank Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Judiciary Chair Hoylman-Sigal, and my colleagues in the Senate for advancing these important reforms and promoting evidence-informed approaches to ensure our judiciary is held to the highest standards.”

The legislation being passed by the Senate Democratic Majority includes:

- **Enhancing the Authority of the Commission on Judicial Conduct:** This bill, [S4398](#), sponsored by Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal, strengthens the budgetary independence of the the State Commission on Judicial Conduct, makes CJC proceedings public once a judge is charged with misconduct, and extends the CJC’s jurisdiction to judges who retire while under formal charges.
- **Audio-Visual Recordings of Judicial Proceedings:** This bill, [S160](#), sponsored by Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal, provides for audio-visual recordings of judicial proceedings. This bill will give the public greater accessibility to audio-visual coverage of judicial proceedings while permitting reasonable restrictions considerate to the needs of witnesses.

- **Lobbying Disclosure for a Nomination to State Office:** This bill, [S4152](#), sponsored by Senator Michael Gianaris, closes a loophole in the lobbying laws that allows lobbyists to work in secret when promoting or opposing candidates for judgeships and other State offices. The bill requires lobbyists to disclose their activities related to Senate-confirmed appointments, just as they already disclose their activities related to promoting or opposing legislation.
- **Public Posting of Judges Financial Disclosures:** This bill, [S1571](#), sponsored by Senator Michael Gianaris, equalizes transparency rules between legislators and judges by requiring the public, online posting of annual financial disclosures of State-paid judges. Under current law, legislators, but not judges, must publish online their annual disclosure statements.
- **Annual Reporting on Judicial Training, Performance, and Security:** This bill, [S6665](#), sponsored by Senator Michael Gianaris, requires annual reports from the Office of Court Administration to the Legislature and the governor on court system operations. It requires OCA to report on legal training programs conducted for judges, on case backlogs, and on threats made against, and security measures provided for, court personnel. The report on case backlog data must be posted online for public review.
- **Monitoring and Review of Bail Data for Judicial Bias:** This bill, [S6417](#), sponsored by Senator Jamaal Bailey, allows the State Commission on Judicial Conduct to monitor, investigate, and comment on bias in the court system in matters of pretrial release and detention.
- **Annual Training for Judges:** This bill, [S4397](#), sponsored by Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal, authorizes the Chief Administrator of the Courts to require and provide annual training regarding bail, recognizance, and commitment procedures and standards for all judges exercising preliminary jurisdiction over any offense.

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