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NY Family and Civil Courts to Add 28 Judges Under Bill Signed Into Law

The reinforcements are expected to ease a crisis of thousands of backlogged cases.

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Judges



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Addressing a crisis concerning thousands of backlogged cases, New York is adding 28 new positions for appointed and elected family and civil court judges.

The New York State Bar Association lobbied for the bill, issuing a memo of support to Gov. Kathy Hochul, and the association published a report where it made this recommendation.

“Family Court judges are responsible for protecting children at the most difficult time of their lives,” NYSBA President Domenick Napoletano said on Thursday.

“When children are removed from their homes,” he added, “families have the right to a day in court as soon as possible and justice demands that. But with an inadequate number of judges, these hearings often take weeks or months, trapping children in foster care for half a year or more and at times causing permanent damage to these vulnerable kids. We commend Gov. Kathy Hochul and the state Legislature for taking swift action to expand access to justice for these families.”

Hochul on Wednesday signed the bill into law. It took effect immediately.

The measure adds 16 civil court judgeships in New York City, distributed across the five boroughs, while two each will be assigned to Nassau and Suffolk counties.

One each will be added to Cayuga, Chenango, Cortland, Erie, Jefferson, Rensselaer, Rockland and Westchester counties.

Each of the courts has experienced case backlogs, according to Hochul.

“Civil and family courts adjudicate some of the most sensitive issues New Yorkers face, and for too long, backlogs and delays have inhibited their ability to function effectively,” Hochul said. “This legislation gives our courts the tools to tackle the case backlog and carry out the fair and efficient justice system New Yorkers deserve.”

Brooklyn Defenders said the new judgeships were much needed given pressures on the family court system.

“Families separated by the foster system should not be forced to be apart even longer because of unnecessary delays in family court,” said Lisa Schreiberdorf, Executive Director of Brooklyn Defenders “This critical measure signed by the Governor, as well as needed increases in funding for family court attorneys, will help ensure these matters are handled in a more timely manner.”

The bill was sponsored by state Sen. Brad Hoylman-Sigal, D-Manhattan, chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and first-year Assemblyman Landon C. Dais, D-Bronx, who is also an attorney.

Lawmakers had resolved the additional judges, who will come at a cost of \$11.6 million in partial-year funding, were necessary to address the crisis.

The new judicial posts bring the number of Family Court judges throughout New York to 67, according to the bill.

They are in addition to 13 new family court judges permitted under legislation passed by the Legislature in 2023, also sponsored by Hoylman-Sigal, along with Assemblyman Alex Bores, D-Manhattan.

During a Nov. 1 joint hearing of the Senate Judiciary and Children and Families committees, lawmakers were told that supervising judges have been transferring inexperienced elected Civil Court judges to New York City Family Court, to compensate for the lack of Family Court judges.

A report derived from the hearing concluded that family courts are overburdened and underresourced, plagued by untenable caseloads, overworked staff and a legacy of dysfunction.

Court of Appeals Chief Judge Rowan Wilson applauded Hochul’s signing of the bill.

“Addressing the needs of families in distress is one of the highest priorities of the New York State Unified Court System, and we applaud Gov. Hochul and the Legislature for their leadership on this issue,” said Wilson, New York’s top judge. “Creating these new judgeships across the State, together with the augmentation of resources required to serve our families, will greatly enhance our ongoing efforts to improve the lives of children and families and to ensure that individuals appearing in Family Court receive the fair, thoughtful and expeditious delivery of justice that they deserve.”

Dais, the first-term lawmaker, said he sponsored the bill “because I recognize the critical gap we must bridge in our family and civil court system to improve the quality of justice they deliver to those in our communities.”

“By adding more judges to the Family Court’s system in New York City and state, this legislation will be a landmark improvement for many families,” he said.

Hoylman-Sigal said: “I am hopeful that this increase in judgeships will allow more children and families to have their cases heard, and seek justice, in a timely manner.”

NYSBA retained Greenberg Traurig and lobbied Democratic legislative leaders, while Brooklyn Defenders lobbied the governor’s office, using lobbying public relations firm Yoswein New York.

Lobbying and government relations firm Dickinson Avella lobbied on behalf of the Rent Stabilization Association of New York City, sending letters to all members of the Legislature.

The bill sailed through the Senate and Assembly earlier this year by a combined 182-23 margin.

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