

STATEMENT OF  
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**COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT**

TO THE

**JOINT LEGISLATIVE BUDGET COMMITTEE HEARING**  
ON THE  
**2026-27 EXECUTIVE BUDGET**



Albany, New York  
February 12, 2026

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## Table of Contents

Overview	1
Background: The Commission's Unique Constitutional Status	1
The Commission's Record of Accomplishment	3
Conclusion	4

## **Overview**

I am pleased to report that Governor Hochul’s Executive Budget proposes a fiscal year 2026-27 appropriation of \$9,330,000 for the Commission on Judicial Conduct, as the Commission requested. This is a maintenance budget, consistent with the Governor’s request that state agencies not propose increases from the current fiscal year to the next.

The Commission’s mandate is to investigate and, where appropriate, discipline judges for ethical misconduct. In 2025:

- Over 3,250 new complaints were received and processed;
- Over 650 preliminary inquiries or full-scale investigations were conducted; and
- 25 judges publicly disciplined (one more than last year), including 15 who were removed or permanently resigned.

## **Background: The Commission’s Unique Constitutional Status**

The Commission on Judicial Conduct is created in the Constitution to enforce judicial ethics on judges and justices of the New York State Unified Court System. Since 1978, we have handled nearly 75,000 complaints and publicly disciplined 994 judges.<sup>1</sup>

The Commission’s design is purposefully and uniquely crafted to foster its independence. Its 11 members are appointed by leaders of the judicial, legislative

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<sup>1</sup> More statistics are presented on page 4.

and executive branches, but no one appoints a majority, and the Commission itself elects a Chair and designates a full-time Administrator/Counsel as chief executive officer.<sup>2</sup> Commission members serve without compensation for renewable four-year terms.

To avoid an obvious conflict, our funding is not controlled by the Judiciary or the Office of Court Administration. It comes from the Legislature, which considers both the Governor's recommendation in the Executive Budget and the Commission's response. But the Commission is not an Executive agency reporting to the Governor. Indeed, the Commission is created in the Judiciary Article of the Constitution, its statutory operating authority is in the Judiciary Law, and its function is strictly limited to Judicial Branch ethics enforcement.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, we strive for a collaborative relationship with the Executive Branch – as do other constitutionally independent entities such as the Office of the Attorney General, the Office of the State Comptroller and the Judicial Branch – but our constitutional independence is essential to public confidence in our work.

Prior to the Governor's submission of this year's budget, I had, as always, cordial communications with Budget Director Blake Washington and gubernatorial

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<sup>2</sup> The Commission is comprised of four judges, five lawyers, and two non-lawyers. The Governor appoints four members, the Chief Judge appoints three, and one each is appointed by the Assembly Speaker, the Assembly Minority Leader, the Senate President Pro Tempore, and the Senate Minority Leader.

<sup>3</sup> Article VI, Section 22, of the Constitution; Article 2-A, Sections 40-48, of the Judiciary Law.

Counsel Brian Mahanna, and we are all on the same page as to the Executive's proposed appropriation for the Commission. In the past, with different administrations where such harmony was not always the case, the Legislature has been especially sensitive to the constitutional issues at stake and, significantly, supplemented the Executive's budget recommendation for the Commission multiple times, by more than \$3 million since 2007.

### **The Commission's Record of Accomplishment**

The Commission may well be the most consistently effective ethics-enforcement entity in government, as reflected in this record of accomplishment since its creation almost 50 years ago:

- Nearly 75,000 complaints processed, including 3,250 in 2025.
- Over 10,000 preliminary reviews and inquiries since 2001.<sup>4</sup>
- Approximately 10,000 full-scale investigations.
- 994 public dispositions:
  - 185 removals
  - 159 permanent resignations
  - 359 censures
  - 291 admonitions
- Approximately 1,860 confidential cautionary letters were issued to judges.
- 188 investigations are currently pending.

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<sup>4</sup> The Commission did not statistically track this category prior to 2001.

## **Conclusion**

I appreciate the warm reception and thoughtful consideration the Legislature always gives me. I hope it supports the Commission's request and the Governor's recommendation for a budget of \$9.33 million. As always, I look forward to working with you, now and in the future.

<b>SELECTED BUDGET FIGURES: 1978 TO PRESENT</b>								
Fiscal Year	Budget	New Complaints	Prelimin Inquiries	New Investig'ns	Pending Year End	Attys / Investig'rs	Public Disciplines	Total Staff
1978-79	\$1.6m	641	NA	170	324	21 / 18	25	63
2023-24	\$8.1m	2,982	570	208	204	22/8	17	49
2024-25	\$8.9m	3,353	537	159	212	22/9	24	52
2025-26	\$9.3m <sup>1</sup>	~	~	~	~	24/9	~	56 <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Proposed

<sup>2</sup> Projected