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**MODERN COURTS SUPPORTS CHIEF JUDGE’S PROPOSAL**

**TO SIMPLIFY THE STATE COURT STRUCTURE**

**ANNOUNCES ORGANIZATION OF A SIMPLIFY THE COURTS COALITION**

New York, NY – Modern Courts welcomes and enthusiastically supports the Chief Judge Janet DiFiore’s proposal to change the current court system so that it better serves the needs of all those who use the courts to resolve their problems, whether civil, criminal, commercial or family matters.

Amelia T.R. Starr, Chair of the Fund and Committee for Modern Courts, said “Simplifying the courts will provide a system that works for all litigants - families, children, domestic violence survivors, advocates for the poor, small businesses, and anyone else who uses the courts.”

William Silverman, Vice Chair of Modern Courts and chair of its working group for court simplification, said, “The Chief Judge is proposing a much needed reform to make the court system more fair and efficient. What we have now is a relic of the 19th century that is so complex that it has become an impediment to justice, something true for all New Yorkers but especially for vulnerable populations. There is no substantive defense for the present system. New York has eleven different trial courts; California has one.”

The proposal of the Chief Judge requires a constitutional amendment, creating a court structure with a two tier system of courts – one with general jurisdiction to include matters that currently are considered by 5 separate courts (Supreme Court, Family Court, Surrogates Court, the Court of Claims and County Court) and a court of more limited jurisdiction to resolve matters that are currently considered by 5 separate courts (City Court, District Court, NYC Civil Court, NY Criminal Court and Housing Court). In addition it will eliminate the constitutional cap on the number of Supreme Court justices and enhance the status of Housing Court and its judges.

Ms. Starr continued, “The Chief Judge’s proposal builds upon her highly successful Excellence Initiative and is the next logical step in the process of strengthening and modernizing our courts to meet the challenges of the 21st century. New Yorkers deserve a court system that provides equality and dignity for everyone who enters the courtroom. We need a system that is designed to have the authority and resources to provide all litigants with better justice.”

In order to support the Chief Judge’s proposal, Modern Courts is organizing a coalition, called the *Simplify the Courts! Coalition and Campaign*, which currently includes [105 member organizations](https://moderncourts.org/) from across the entire state to demonstrate to legislative leaders and legislative members how this reform will benefit their constituents.

During the next legislative session which begins in January 2020, Modern Courts and coalition members will support and advocate on behalf of a legislative resolution which will amend Article VI (Judiciary) of the constitution to create simplified court system. During the legislative session which begins in January 2021 the same process will be repeated with the goal that the people for the state of New York will be able to approve a statewide voter referendum at the general election of November 2021.

Amelia T.R. Starr said, “Modern Courts and the coalition plan to engage the public in a discussion of the pressing need and tangible benefits of court simplification and are committed to working with the Legislature to amend our constitution to modernize the structure of the courts so that it will work better for all New Yorkers.”

Partial funding for the development of this coalition and campaign was provided by The New York Community Trust.

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*Founded in 1955, Modern Courts is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, statewide organization dedicated to improving the courts in New York State through public education and advocacy.*

Additional information about Modern Courts is available at [www.moderncourts.org](http://www.moderncourts.org).

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**Simplify the Courts! Coalition[[1]](#footnote-1)**

*A growing coalition of organizations who support a court system that is accessible, navigable & trusted by all New Yorkers.*

Anti-Violence Project New York City (AVP)

Brooklyn Bar Association Volunteer Lawyer Project

Buffalo/Niagara League of Women Voters

Capital District Women's Bar Association Legal Project

CASA-NYC

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Albany

Center for Community Alternatives, Inc., New York City, Syracuse and Rochester

Center for Court Innovation

Center for Elder Law and Justice, Erie County

Center for Safety and Change, Rockland County

Children's Aid

Children's Defense Fund, NY

Citizens Union

Citizens' Committee for Children

Common Cause New York

Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies

Crime Victims Treatment Center

Day One

Empire Justice Center

Empowerment Collaborative of Long Island (ECLI)

Erie County Bar Association (ECBA) Volunteer Lawyers Project

Family Services Society of Yonkers

FamilyKind

Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies

Fines and Fees Justice Center

Footsteps

Forestdale

Good Shepherd Services

Grace Smith House, Inc.

Graham Windham

HeartShare St. Vincent's Services

Her Justice

Hope's Door

Human Services Council

Immigrant Justice Corp

JCCA (formerly known as Jewish Child Care Association)

LawHelpNY

Lawyers Committee Against Domestic Violence

Lawyers for Children, Inc.

League of Women Voters NYC

League of Women Voters of New York State

League of Women Voters of the Syracuse Metropolitan Area

LGBT Bar Association of New York

LIFT (Legal Information for Families Today)

Long Island Association

Long Island Housing Services, Inc.

Mobilization for Justice, Inc.

Modern Courts

My Sister's Place

NAACP New York Conference

Neighborhood SHOPP

New Alternatives for Children

New Castle League of Women Voters

New York City Bar Association

New York Immigration Coalition

New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

New York Legal Assistance Group/NYLAG

New York Legal Services Coalition

New York State Bar Association

New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence

North Country League of Women Voters

Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation/NMIC

Oswego County Opportunities, Inc., (OCA) Crisis & Development Services

Pace Women's Justice Center

Partnership for New York City

Prison Families Anonymous

ProBonoNet

Queens County Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project

Rising Ground (formerly Leake and Watts)

Rivertowns League of Women Voters

Rochester Metropolitan Area League of Women Voters

Rockland County League of Women Voters

Safe Homes of Orange County

Safe Horizon

Safe Passage Project

Sanctuary for Families

Saratoga County League of Women Voters

SCO Family of Services

Shalom Task Force

Sheltering Arms

STOP Domestic Violence/Behavioral Health Services North, Inc.

The Children's Law Center

The Door

The Jewish Board of Family & Children's Services

The Legal Aid Society of NYC

The Legal Aid Society of Rochester

The Safe Center Long Island

UJA Federation - NY

Unity House of Troy, Inc.

Urban Justice Center

Urban Resource Institute

Vera House, Inc.

Victims Information Bureau of Suffolk (VIBS)

Violence Intervention Program, Inc.

Voices of Women

VOLS (Volunteers of Legal Services)

Volunteer Lawyers Project of Onondaga County, Inc.

Volunteer Legal Services Project of Monroe County

Weinberg Center for Elder Justice at the Hebrew Home at Riverdale

Westchester County Office for Women

Westchester Jewish Community Services

Westchester Women's Agenda

Western New York Law Center

William Randolph Hearst Public Advocacy Center at Touro Law Center, Suffolk County

Youth Represent

1. As of September 23, 2019

 For information or to join: justice@moderncourts.org [↑](#footnote-ref-1)