

The Budgetary Impact of Court Merger

Court merger would make possible a net cost savings potential of over \$131 million in the first five years following the effective date of the restructured court system. The savings would be in two areas:

- Case consolidation – \$128.1 million

Restructuring will significantly reduce the costs to the Judiciary of processing its growing caseload by allowing related matters to be heard before a single judge in the reconstituted Supreme Court. Under the Court System's proposal, 125,580 cases each year would be treated together with other existing related cases. The proposed system would not only be far more convenient and comprehensible to the parties, but would eliminate costly case processing redundancies. Among the many case processing tasks, and related costs, that would be eliminated are:

- ▶ review, acceptance and filing of petitions
- ▶ review of files for existing or previous related cases
- ▶ creation of case files and records

- Administrative Savings – \$12.8 million

A simplified court structure will permit increased efficiency of court operations through coordinated delivery of administrative services and a streamlined trial court management structure. Court management under the current trial court structure requires that there be separate court managers for each of the separate trial courts resulting in administrative fragmentation. Once the Supreme, County and Family Courts are merged, it will be possible to streamline leadership in the reconstituted Supreme Court in each county and, as a result, to reduce through attrition the number of court management lines within the trial courts.

The combined savings to the State of almost \$141 million would be offset by a modest cost of \$1.9 million per year (\$9.5 million over five years) for equalization of judicial salaries.

Thus, a consolidated court structure will provide a net savings to the State of over **\$131 million** in the first five years following trial court consolidation with over **\$73 million** of that savings being realized in the first three years following implementation of the proposal.