

# THE NEW YORK STATE UNIFIED COURT SYSTEM

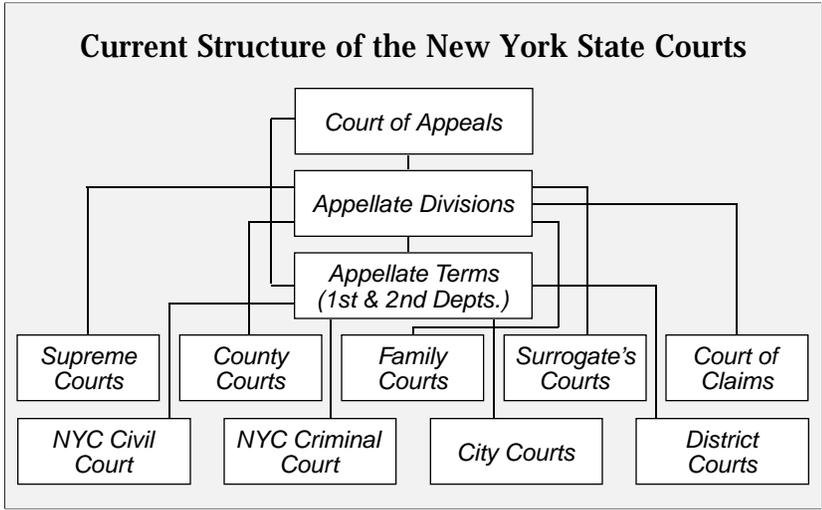
The New York State Unified Court System is one of the world's largest and busiest justice systems. Last year alone, New York's courts received over 3.4 million new matters (not including parking and traffic cases)—a new record for annual filings, representing a 23 percent increase in just four years' time. The subject matter of this caseload is as broad as human experience itself: from suits over sophisticated financial transactions to disputes over simple leases; from homicides to charitable trusts; from litigation involving the breakup of families to cases creating new caring homes for children. The New York State courts' mission is to provide fair and effective resolution of every matter, however large or small.

With the year 2000 on the horizon, many are focusing on the future, anticipating the changes the new millennium will bring. The New York State courts are no exception. Changing times require changing courts—courts that keep pace with modern technology, that are innovative, and that continually measure their performance from the perspective of the public they serve. This report describes many specific initiatives that reflect the New York courts' commitment to ensuring that the delivery of justice in the 21st century continues to be fair and effective.

One change yet to be accomplished—and one that would immeasurably aid the effort to build a more responsive system—is court restructuring. As illustrated by the accompanying chart, the current scheme created by Article VI of the State Constitution is absurdly complex: nine different major trial courts, some found only in New York City, some only upstate, some with overlapping jurisdiction, some with jurisdiction over only a portion of larger legal disputes. The net result is a court system that is difficult to understand, hard to navigate and a burden to administer.

Last year, the judicial branch began an intensive campaign for a constitutional amendment to modernize this archaic, cumbersome structure. Under the courts' proposal, the welter of tribunals would be replaced by a simplified two-tier trial system: a Supreme Court with unlimited jurisdiction, and a District Court with limited jurisdiction over civil and criminal matters. The fiscal benefits of the proposal are, in themselves, compelling. In five years' time, the reconfigured system is projected to produce

### Current Structure of the New York State Courts



net savings to the State of over \$92 million. And these estimates do not include the savings in legal fees and aggravation that litigants would enjoy in a vastly simplified structure.

A diverse coalition of over 50 community and professional groups—from the Business Council of New York to the Women’s Prison Association to the League of Wom.083 -16 TD 0.136 Tw (Last year, the judicial branch began an intensive campaign)Tj

### Proposed Structure

