



For Immediate Release  
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## **THE COMMITTEE FOR MODERN COURTS ORGANIZES COALITION TO SIMPLIFY STATE COURTS**

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Reforms Would Save Court System \$121 Million Annually,  
Plus \$443 Million in Litigants' Costs and Attorneys' Fees

New York, NY – Milton L. Williams, Jr., Chair of the Committee for Modern Courts today announced that it has partnered with leading New York State business associations and a broad array of advocates against domestic violence, legal service providers, bar associations, good government groups and others as part of its efforts to secure an amendment to the state constitution that would simplify New York's courts. Attached is the invitation to join this statewide coalition and a list of the 50 organizations which have responded to date.

Called the *Coalition for Court Simplification*, the group's goal is to reform one of the nation's most complicated and arcane court systems.

Over the last 200 years, New York complex and convoluted court system – designed to serve a population a fraction the size of the current population – has developed haphazardly and with insufficient planning or oversight. The result is the current morass of 11 different trial courts and four unbalanced appellate divisions.

Stephen P. Younger, Co-Chair of Modern Courts' Task Force on Court Simplification, said, "The broad support from members of the Coalition for Court Simplification demonstrates the concern so many New Yorkers have about our court system. The current structure of the courts not only costs the state more than it should, but also imposes additional and unnecessary costs on both court users and the taxpaying public. That's one of the reasons court simplification has such widespread support in the business community."

Simplification of New York's court system would consolidate the current system by creating a two-tiered structure, with a new Supreme Court and a new District Court, which will streamline judicial operations, save money, help families and benefit businesses which rely on courts to resolve their problems.

According to a fiscal analysis recently performed by Modern Courts, with the assistance of the Office of Court Administration, court simplification would result in budgetary court savings of at least \$65 million annually through the unified treatment of related cases and by improving the courts' administrative framework, less \$2.57 million annually related to the costs of the equalization of judicial salaries. An additional \$56 million annually in economic savings would be achieved through efficiencies from improved case management, procedural codes reform and automation.

In addition to savings to the court system, the Special Commission on the Future of the New York Courts in its 2007 report concluded that court simplification would save \$443 million annually in terms of productivity, lost wages, attorneys' fees and related costs – money that is currently wasted because litigants and their counsel have to make redundant court appearances, file unnecessary papers and briefs, and suffer through delays caused by courthouse backlogs and inefficiencies.

Fern Schair, Co-Chair of Modern Courts' Task Force on Court Simplification, said, "New York's needlessly confusing structure adds a further burden to the almost 2 million people who seek justice in our courts and cannot afford to hire a lawyer to help them. Chief Judge Lippman has gallantly fought to have some money added to offer legal services to some; but the vast majority must struggle on their own with laws, regulations, procedures, court rules, and the general chaos of too many lower courts. The very least that can be done for them is to streamline the system to make clear which court is the right forum, and to make sure that the judge they reach can handle all aspects of their situation without sending them on to yet another judge."

Milton L. Williams, Jr., Chair of the Committee for Modern Courts, said, "As a member of the Coalition for Court Simplification, we 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 more efficiently and effectively for all New Yorkers."

Founded in 1955, the Fund for Modern Courts is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, statewide organization dedicated to improving the courts in New York State through advocacy, public education and in-court programming. The Committee for Modern Courts is the lobbying and advocacy affiliate of the Fund for Modern Courts.

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## INVITATION TO JOIN THE STATEWIDE COALITION FOR COURT SIMPLIFICATION

New York has perhaps the most complex and convoluted court system in the country. Over the last two hundred years, lawmakers have allowed this system – designed to serve a population a fraction the size of the current population – to develop haphazardly and with insufficient planning or oversight. The result is the current morass of eleven different trial courts and four unbalanced appellate divisions. This archaic and inconsistent structure is needlessly confusing. A Constitutional Amendment to bring the Court into the 21<sup>st</sup> century offers an opportunity for every population that uses the courts and provides for a more just, efficient, and equitable system.

The Fund for Modern Courts has established a Task Force on the Simplification of the New York State court system. Consolidating the current eleven separate trial courts will streamline judicial operations, save money, help litigants navigate the system and increase appellate level diversity. We support a passage of a Constitutional Amendment that would simplify the New York court system by creating a two-part structure, with a new Supreme Court -- consisting of the current Supreme Court, County Court, Family Court, Surrogate's Court and the Court of Claims, and a new District Court -- consisting of the current District Courts on Long Island, the New York City Civil and Criminal Courts, and the City Courts outside of New York City.

We ask that you add your organization's name to the Statewide Coalition for Court Simplification and work with a growing coalition of groups across the state to achieve this much needed goal.

### Court restructuring will

- Remove procedural and jurisdictional obstacles associated with a multi-layered trial court structure, to reduce the cost and time of litigation.
- Simplify the trial court structure by reducing the number of courts and thereby make it more accessible and easier to understand for the public and the Bar.
- Ease the difficulties experienced by children and families in family-related litigation (e.g., cases involving divorce, child custody and support, family offense), while promoting greater fairness and consistency of result.
- Consolidate the State's lower courts and expand their powers, enabling them to better serve local communities. (This amendment would not affect Town and Village Justice Courts.)
- Insure a more appropriate distribution of resources to the various courts, especially those that handle family matters.
- Broaden the pool of judges that can be appointed to the Appellate Courts.

## *Coalition for Court Simplification:*

*A growing list of New York State business associations, good government groups, advocates against domestic violence, legal service providers, bar associations and more. Join us email [justice@moderncourts.org](mailto:justice@moderncourts.org)*

African Services Committee

Atlantic Legal Foundation

Behavioral Health Services North, Inc.

Buffalo Niagara Partnership

Business Council of New York

Business Council of Westchester

CenterState Corporation for Economic Opportunity

Children's Law Center (CLC)

Citizens Union

Columbia Law School Sexuality & Gender Law Clinic

Common Cause/NY

Day One

Downstate Coalition for Crime Victims

Empire Justice Center

Fund for Modern Courts

Greater Binghamton Chamber of Commerce

Greater Watertown-North Country Chamber of Commerce

Hope's Door, Inc.

Human Services Council

inMotion

Lawyers Committee Against Domestic Violence

League of Women Voters/NYC

Legal Information For Families Today (LIFT)

Long Island Association, Inc.

Manhattan Chamber of Commerce

MFY Legal Services

National Federation of Independent Business in New York

New York City Bar Association

New York County Lawyers' Association

New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)

New York State Bar Association

New York State League of Women Voters

Orange County Chamber of Commerce

Pace Women's Justice Center

Partnership for the City of New York

Project Permanent Group, LLC

Queens Chamber of Commerce

Rural Law Center of New York

Safe Horizon Sanctuary

for Families Spanish

Action League

STEPS to End Family Violence

The Door - A Center of Alternatives, Inc.

The Legal Project

The St. Luke's-Roosevelt Crime Victims Treatment Center

The Westchester County Association

Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce

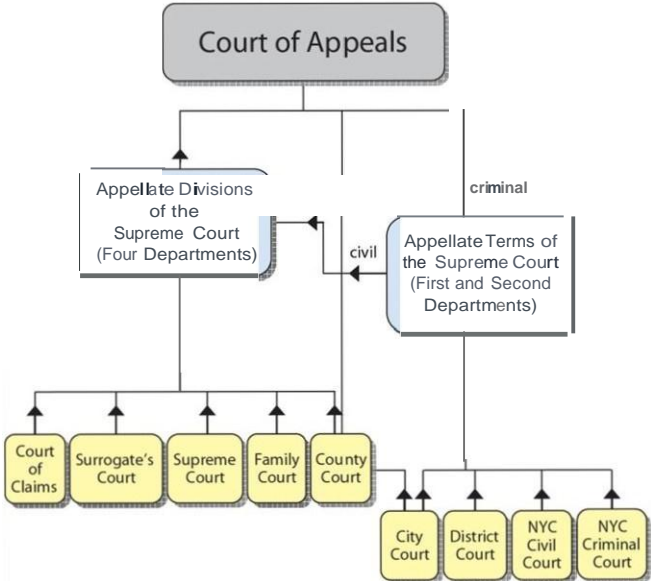
Urban Justice Center

Victim Resource Center of the Finger Lakes, Inc.

Voices of Women Organizing Project

Western New York Law Center, Inc.

### Current Structure



### Proposed Structure

