

# COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

SCHOOL OF LAW

February 14, 2007

Honorable Patrick J. Leahy, Chairman  
Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
United States Senate  
433 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington DC 20510-4502

Dear Chairman Leahy,

We write in support of Chief Justice John Roberts' call for an increase in the compensation of federal judges. As the Chief Justice showed in his recent report, although the average U.S. worker's wages have risen 17.8% in real terms since 1969, federal judicial pay has actually *declined* 23.9% after inflation over the same period. Indeed, federal trial judges now earn less than some law school graduates earn *in their first year* of private practice. In calling for an immediate and substantial increase in judicial pay, the National Commission on the Public Service (the Volcker Commission) concluded a few years ago that "judicial salaries are the most egregious example of the failure of federal compensation policies" and noted that judicial salaries lag behind the salaries of other nonprofit leaders with whom judges might be compared.

This is a grave problem because our judiciary is an essential guardian of our freedom, and we need the most capable people to serve, without regard to their personal financial capabilities. We also want judges to consider the bench to be an insulated position from which they are free to make unpopular but necessary decisions to uphold the Constitution. If judges expect that they will have to leave the bench eventually for financial reasons, the independence of the judiciary is compromised.

To show the importance of an independent judiciary, Chief Justice Roberts quotes Alexander Hamilton: "The independence of the judges once destroyed, the constitution is gone, it is a dead letter: it is a vapor which the breath of faction in a moment may dissipate." We cannot allow that to happen.

We hope you will promptly vote a substantial increase in the compensation of federal judges.

Respectfully,

David M. Schizer  
Dean and the Lucy G. Moses  
Professor of Law

And 129 additional signatories attached

CC: Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr.

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## Additional Signatories of the Law School Deans' Letter on Judicial Pay

*NOTE: Law School affiliations are provided for identification purposes only.*

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