



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Children and Families in Chautauqua County to Receive Additional Family Court Judge

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Senate and Assembly Reach Agreement on Allocation of New Family Court Judges

ALBANY - To address a record number of cases, Chautauqua County will have an additional Family Court judge to alleviate a huge backlog.

After sponsoring legislation to elect an additional judge to relieve the overwhelming caseload in Chautauqua County Family Court, Senator Catharine Young (R,C,I-Olean) announced today that an agreement has been reached between the state Senate and Assembly to double the county's number of Family Court judges from one to two.

"This consensus between the Senate and Assembly Speaker was arduous to reach, but the Senate stood firm during negotiations. Assembly members from New York City were pushing to take judgeships slotted for upstate and have them go downstate instead. We were successful in keeping our fair share," said Senator Young.

"I commend Assemblyman Andy Goodell for his strong efforts to protect Chautauqua County's needs. His advocacy has been helpful in reaching this positive result," Senator Young said.

The limited number of Family Court judges available in Chautauqua County and across the state has impeded cases being heard and resolved in a timely manner.

Over 30 years spanning from 1983 to 2013, the number of Family Court filings in New York State increased from 366,644 to 690,928, while the number of judgeships increased from only 127 to 149.

The long-sought agreement will allow for 25 new judgeships in Family Courts across the state, with one in Chautauqua County to ease the burden. Resources for the new pool of judgeships was included in the 2014-15 state budget after Senator Young fought for the inclusion of \$5 million in additional funding, and with today's agreement the allocation of the new judges across the state is now determined.

The agreement is based on a bill sponsored by Senator Young to add a Chautauqua County Family Court judge to help hear matters involving children and families. The Family Court makes legal decisions regarding abused or neglected children, adoption, custody, domestic violence, foster care, juvenile delinquency, child and spousal support, and paternity. Today's Family Courts contain numerous services to assist families, such as childcare centers, mediation programs, and legal assistance programs.

In Chautauqua County, the Hon. Judge Judith Claire is the only regular Family Court judge available to hear thousands of cases. Families are often left waiting for months on end in a state of unknown about when their case will be heard and what direction it will take.

"A new judge in Chautauqua County is imperative to ensuring that all of those in need of Family Court services are able to receive attention in a timely manner. Too many families are put in a position where they cannot move forward with their lives and make decisions about their future and the future of their children. Although Chautauqua County's Family Court is the third busiest in the Eighth Judicial District, the county still has only one full-time family court judge to handle thousands of cases," said Senator Young.

Chautauqua County's new judge will be elected in this November's general election. Given the special circumstances of the creation of these new judgeships and the limited time available between now and the election, candidates will be accommodated by a lower than usual requirement for petition signatures. Ballot petitioning for candidates will begin on July 11, 2014, and petitions must be filed

with the county Board of Elections between July 21 and July 24. In Chautauqua County, petitions must be signed by either 350 registered voters enrolled in the party being petitioned, or by 1.75 percent of active enrolled voters of the party, whichever is less.

Typically, Chautauqua County's family court caseload is around 4,000 cases per year, but last year grew to approximately 9,000 cases. The dramatic increase resulted in a family court judge from Erie County having to help with the caseload in Chautauqua County two days every week. In addition, the abundance of work facing local City Court judges and Supreme Court justices has meant that they are not readily available to act as family court judges when needed.

"There is a tremendous need for an additional judge to relieve the backlog we have in the county, and this new judgeship will have a significant positive impact on county residents going through the court system. I look forward to this agreement being signed into law so a new judge can get to work serving families in Chautauqua County in 2015," said Senator Young.

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