



State of New York

Executive Chamber

No. 4

E X E C U T I V E O R D E R

ESTABLISHING JUDICIAL SCREENING COMMITTEES TO ENSURE THAT JUDICIAL OFFICER APPOINTMENTS ARE OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY

WHEREAS, under the Constitution and Laws of the State of New York the Governor is entrusted with the responsibility of appointing judicial officers to the offices of Judge and Presiding Judge of the Court of Claims; designating Justices of the Supreme Court to the offices of Justice, Temporary Justice, and Presiding Justice of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court; and appointing judicial officers to fill vacancies in the offices of Justice of the Supreme Court, Judge of the County Court, Judge of the Surrogate's Court, and Judge of the Family Court outside the City of New York; and

WHEREAS, a fair, impartial, independent, highly qualified, and diverse judiciary is essential to ensuring justice for all who come before New York's courts and to fostering public confidence in the integrity of the judicial process; and

WHEREAS, a fair, impartial, independent, highly qualified, and diverse judiciary is cultivated by:

1. encouraging highly qualified candidates from all parts of the State, with diverse backgrounds and experiences, to apply for judicial offices;
2. reviewing candidates for judicial office without regard to political beliefs or party affiliation; and
3. selecting judicial officers who reflect the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the residents of this State, based on their integrity, independence, intellect, judgment, temperament, and experience; and

WHEREAS, the highest quality of judicial appointments can best be assured with the assistance of credible, impartial and non-partisan judicial screening committees;

NOW THEREFORE, I, Eliot Spitzer, Governor of the State of New York, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and Laws of the State of New York, do hereby order as follows:

A. Purpose and Duties

1. Judicial Screening Committees are hereby established to evaluate the qualifications of candidates for appointment or designation to judicial office throughout the State, and to recommend to the Governor those persons who are highly qualified to hold judicial office.

2. Each Judicial Screening Committee shall:

a. Actively recruit candidates for appointment or designation to the judicial offices within the committee's jurisdiction. In recruiting candidates, the Judicial Screening Committees shall strive to find candidates that reflect the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the citizens of this State;

b. Review and evaluate the qualifications of all candidates for appointment or designation. In reviewing and evaluating the qualifications of candidates, each committee member shall give primary consideration to each candidate's integrity, independence, intellect, judgment, temperament and experience, and shall not give any consideration to the age, creed, color, national origin, sexual orientation, military status, sex, disability, predisposing genetic characteristics, marital status or political party affiliation of the candidate;

c. Recommend for appointment or designation only those candidates who, as determined by a majority vote of all members of the committee, are highly qualified for the judicial office for which they are being considered. No committee shall pass on the qualifications of any candidate until after a thorough inquiry has been made by the committee and its staff;

d. Prepare written reports on the qualifications of each candidate it determines to be highly qualified and recommends to the Governor. Committee reports shall be made available to the public upon the announcement by the Governor of an appointment. All other records and deliberations of, and all communications to, any Judicial Screening Committee with respect to a candidate shall be held in confidence and shall not be disclosed to anyone other than the Governor, Counsel to the Governor, or their designees. Notwithstanding the foregoing, information submitted to any Judicial Screening Committee relating to an appointee may be disclosed to the Senate when necessary for confirmation of the appointee, and information submitted to a Judicial Screening Committee may be disclosed to any other person or organization if disclosure is required in connection with disciplinary proceedings or is otherwise required by law.

B. State Judicial Screening Committee

1. A State Judicial Screening Committee is hereby established.

2. The State Judicial Screening Committee shall consist of thirteen members: two individuals selected by the Governor; the Chairperson of each of the Departmental Judicial Screening Committees established by Section C of this Executive Order; one of the other members of each of the Departmental Judicial Screening Committees, who shall be selected by the Governor; two persons selected by the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals; and one person selected by the Attorney General. The chairperson of the State Judicial Screening Committee shall be appointed by the Governor from among the members of the Committee.

3. The term of office of any member of the State Judicial Screening Committee who is a member of a Departmental Screening Committee shall expire at the same time as the member's term of office on the Departmental Screening Committee expires.

4. The State Judicial Screening Committee shall have jurisdiction to consider the qualifications of candidates for appointment to the offices of Judge and Presiding Judge of the Court of Claims, and to recommend to the Governor all persons whom it finds highly qualified for those judicial offices.

5. When exercising the power to designate the Presiding Judge of the Court of Claims pursuant to section 2(6) of the Court of Claims Act; or the power to appoint a Judge of the Court of Claims pursuant to section 9 of Article VI of the Constitution and section 2(2) and 2(4) of the Court of Claims Act; or the power to fill a vacancy in the office of Judge of the Court of Claims pursuant to section 21(b) of Article VI of the Constitution, the Governor shall appoint or designate only persons who have been recommended by the State Judicial Screening Committee as highly qualified for the judicial office to which the appointment or designation is to be made.

6. The State Judicial Screening Committee shall promulgate appropriate rules and regulations to govern its proceedings and those of the Departmental and County Judicial Screening Committees established by this Order. The rules and regulations shall include standards and procedures for ensuring, to the extent possible, uniformity of criteria for evaluating the qualifications of candidates for appointment or designation to judicial office throughout the State.

C. Departmental Judicial Screening Committees

1. A Departmental Judicial Screening Committee is hereby established in each judicial department of the State.

2. Each Departmental Judicial Screening Committee shall consist of thirteen members: five members shall be selected by the Governor; two members shall be selected by the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals; two members shall be selected by the Attorney General; one member shall be selected by the Presiding Justice of the Appellate Division for that department; one member shall be selected jointly by the Speaker of the Assembly and the Minority Leader of the Senate; one member shall be selected jointly by the Majority Leader of the Senate and the Minority Leader of the Assembly; and one member shall be selected by the President of the New York State Bar Association. The Chairperson of each Departmental Screening Committee shall be appointed by the Governor from among the members of the Committee. Each member of the Committee shall be a resident of, have an office in, or work in the judicial department in which he or she is to serve.

3. Each Departmental Judicial Screening Committee shall have jurisdiction to consider the qualifications of candidates for designation to the offices of Justice, Additional Justice, Temporary Justice and Presiding Justice of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court for such department, and candidates for appointment to the office of Supreme Court Justice within such department, and to recommend to the Governor all persons whom it finds highly qualified for those judicial offices.

4. When exercising the power to designate the Presiding Justice of each Appellate Division pursuant to section 4(c) of Article VI of the Constitution; or the power to designate other Justices of any Appellate Division pursuant to sections 4(c) and 4(d) of Article VI of the Constitution; or the power to designate Additional Justices of any Appellate Division pursuant to section 4(e) of Article VI of the Constitution; or the power to fill a vacancy in the office of Justice of the Supreme Court pursuant to section 21(a) of Article VI of the Constitution, the Governor shall appoint or designate only persons who have been recommended by a Departmental Judicial Screening Committee as highly qualified for the judicial office to which the appointment is to be made.

5. A candidate recommended as highly qualified for the office of Justice or Additional Justice of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court by a Departmental Screening Committee shall be eligible for appointment or designation by the Governor to such office in any judicial department. Notwithstanding the foregoing, a person serving as a Justice of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court may be designated by the Governor to serve as an Additional Justice, and a person serving as an Additional Justice of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court may be designated by the Governor to serve as a Justice, of the same or a different judicial department without the recommendation of a Departmental Screening Committee.

D. County Judicial Screening Committees

1. A County Judicial Screening Committee is hereby established in each county of the State, consisting of the members of the Departmental Judicial Screening Committee for the department in which the county is located plus one additional person who shall be resident of, have an office in, or work in the county in which he or she is to serve, to be selected by the chief executive officer of the county. The Chairman of the Departmental Judicial Screening Committee shall also serve as Chairman of the County Judicial Screening Committee. As used herein, the term "chief executive officer" for the county shall mean the appointed or elected county executive, as the case may be, or if there be no such office, the chairman of the governing body of the county; provided, however, that for counties within the City of New York, the term "chief executive officer" for the county shall mean the Mayor of the City of New York.

2. Each County Judicial Screening Committee shall have jurisdiction to consider the qualifications of candidates for appointment to the offices of Judge of the County Court, Judge of the Surrogate's Court, and Judge of the Family Court outside of the City of New York, for such county, and to recommend to the Governor all persons whom it finds highly qualified for those judicial offices. When exercising the power of appointment to fill a vacancy in the office of Judge of the County Court, Judge of the Surrogate's Court, or of Judge of the Family Court outside of the City of New York, pursuant to section 21(a) of Article VI of the Constitution, the Governor shall appoint only persons who have been recommended by the appropriate County Judicial Screening Committee as highly qualified for the judicial office to which the appointment is to be made.

E. General Provisions

1. The terms of office of the members of the Judicial Screening Committees established by this Executive Order shall be for a term of three years, except that with respect to the Departmental Screening Committees: one member first selected by the Governor shall serve for a term of one year; two members first selected by the Governor shall serve for a term of two years; one member first selected by the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals shall serve for a term of two years; and one member first selected by the Attorney General shall serve for a term of two years. The terms of office of the members of the Judicial Screening Committees established by this Executive Order are subject to the provisions of section 5 of the Public Officers Law.

2. Vacancies shall be filled in the same manner as initial appointments, and a person appointed to fill a vacancy shall serve for the remainder of the unexpired term. No member shall be removed during his or her term by the Governor except for cause.

3. No member of a Judicial Screening Committee shall hold any judicial or elected public office for which he shall receive compensation during his period of service, nor shall he hold any office in any political party. No member of a Judicial Screening Committee shall be eligible for appointment to any judicial office within the jurisdiction of the Judicial Screening Committee on which the member serves during the member's period of service or within one year thereafter.

4. Members of Judicial Screening Committees shall receive no compensation for their service, but shall be entitled to reimbursement for any necessary expenses incurred by them in connection with the performance of their duties. Each judicial screening committee shall have a paid staff available to it sufficient to enable the committee to carry out properly its responsibilities including adequate investigations into all matters relevant to the qualifications of candidates for appointment to judicial office.

5. Except as may be necessary or appropriate prior to the time the Judicial Screening Committees established by this Executive Order are fully operational, the power to fill a vacancy in a judicial office will be exercised by the Governor in accordance with the provisions of this Executive Order.



G I V E N under my hand and the
Privy Seal of the State
in the City of Albany
this first day of
January in the year two
thousand seven.

BY THE GOVERNOR

/s/ Eliot Spitzer

/s/ Richard S. Baum

Secretary to the Governor