



THE DOMINICAN BAR ASSOCIATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Dominican Bar Association (“DBA”) opposes the Office of Court Administration’s (“OCA”) proposed court consolidation or merger. Under this proposal, OCA presents a three-tier court system, which eliminates a number of limited jurisdiction courts. This proposal is a threat to our democracy that disenfranchises many constituencies and decreases diversification of the bench.

As an Affinity Bar Association, we are particularly concerned with the merger’s devastating effect on historically underrepresented communities and minority groups. The proposal decimates the people’s right to elect a bench that serves it justice and understands its needs. Under OCA’s proposal, citizens surrender their power to select a large number of Supreme Court Justices to elected officials.

Also of particular concern is OCA’s authority to place any Justice anywhere in the State without regard to competencies, constituencies, or local knowledge of the individual Justice. This disenfranchises constituencies by abolishing their power to elect the judges in their communities who will decide criminal matters, family matters, probate matters, or general civil matters and vests this fundamental right in the hands of elected officials. This is a threat to our democracy that goes against our American ways.

The proposal would also authorize the legislature to increase or decrease the number of judicial districts or alter the composition of judicial districts and re-apportion Supreme Court justices every 10 years. Additionally, the proposal eliminates a Constitutional provision which currently adds one additional Justice per 50,000 residents, directly impacting the seats gained by the census’ results. This eliminates the electorate’s ability to get more Justices based on population growth, which directly affects historically underrepresented groups and growing minority communities.

Over the past years, the people’s right to an independent and locally elected bench has equipped it with highly qualified and diversified members. The number of locally elected judges surpasses the number of judges appointed by public officials. In New York City alone, within the last two years the people have elected to the bench at least five of our own affinity bar members with backgrounds in private practice and public interest alike. The election process allows the locally elected bench to have a deep understanding of the communities it serves and provides equal access and justice for all. We are proud of the progress we have made to have a more representative and diversified bench and worry that the proposal’s effect would exponentially decrease the number of minority judges to something that the elected officials’ appointments cannot equate.

Therefore, we urge the OCA to reconsider this proposed merger that disenfranchises many constituencies and decreases diversification of the bench.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marbel Leonel Muñoz". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

MARBEL LEONEL MUÑOZ, ESQ.
President, The Dominican Bar Association