



Michael J. Darcy, CAE., EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR Michael F. Cerra, ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
222 West State Street, Trenton, NJ 08608 PHONE: (609) 695-3481 FAX: (609) 695-0151 WEBSITE: www.njslom.org

Media Advisory

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League Statement on Supreme Court Committee on Municipal Court Operations

The New Jersey Supreme Court today issued a report, entitled *Report of the Supreme Court Committee on Municipal Court Operations, Fines, and Fees*, prepared by the Supreme Court's Committee on Municipal Court Operations. The Committee, which was created by Chief Justice Rabner in March 2017, included a representative from the League.

The League commends the efforts of the Committee, under the leadership of Judge Julio Mendez and Judge Lisa P. Thornton. However, after careful review of the Report, the League determined it could not endorse the Report or its recommendations as drafted. Unfortunately, the report draws many of its conclusions based on anecdotal accounts, including those from other states and the recommendations do not address the impact of state imposed mandates and requirements.

We hope all who consider municipal court operations appreciate the dedicated public service of our municipal court professionals. Municipal judges, prosecutors, public defenders and court administrators take their offices seriously and exercise their duties ethically and responsibly. All undergo training before taking office. All work under the jurisdiction and are audited by of the Administrative Office of the Courts. And, in the case of the court administrators, they are certified and compliant with continuing education requirements. Further we hope all recognize the value local elected officials place on the efficient and effective administration of justice at the local level and the support – financial and otherwise - provided to the State Judiciary.

Municipal Court operations are often complicated by legislative mandates – including the collection of myriad fees and surcharges that are sent to the State to fund State-level programs and responsibilities. For instance, the report cites (on page 12) that just over half of the \$400 million collected in 2017 was “turned over” to municipalities. In fact, this statistic demonstrates that nearly half these funds are a direct result of State surcharges to fund state priorities. While the report itself notes the negative impact of these State mandated charges on indigent defendants, not one of the Committee's 50 recommendations aim to address this burden.

Notwithstanding the League's position with respect to the Report, the League believes the work of the Committee, as expressed in the Report, provides a framework for discussions between the Supreme Court and the League on the future of the municipal court system in New Jersey. The League is willing to engage in a dialogue that addresses the concerns of the Supreme Court, as well as those of the League's membership. The League has communicated this willingness to discuss the issues to the Supreme Court in the hope of moving the conversation forward. The League will also be submitting comments setting forth our concerns and recommendations

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Contact: Michael F. Cerra, Assistant Executive Director, mcerra@njslom.org, cell 609-532-2494 or 609-695-3481 x120.

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