

# Bell proposes creation of 6 judgeships, seeks pay raises for judiciary

## Chief judge is concerned about confidence in bench

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SUN STAFF

In his first State of the Judiciary address, Maryland Chief Judge Robert M. Bell called yesterday for creation of six new judgeships, asked for legislative approval of \$9,000 pay raises for judges and pledged to reinstate public confidence in the bench.

At a joint session of the General Assembly, Bell urged Gov. Parris N. Glendening and legislators to approve new Circuit Court judgeships in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Montgomery and Prince George's counties and new District Court slots in Baltimore and Anne Arundel counties.

The combined caseload for the Circuit Court and District Court systems last year totaled more than 2.2 million, "an increase of more than 120 percent in the 20 years since I became a judge," Bell

said. "By contrast the complement of trial judges had grown to only 234, an increase of less than 50 percent."

Bell also urged approval of the Judicial Compensation Commission's recommendations for \$9,000 pay raises for judges this year, an increase which would range from 7.23 percent for Bell to 10.09 percent for District Court judges.

And he raised concerns about "public dissatisfaction with the courts and the way they administer justice" and promised a concerted effort to change it.

"My intention and vision is for the Maryland judiciary to increase its focus on public outreach, to inform the public better as to how best they can negotiate what is to some a mysterious and sometimes tricky path to justice," he said.

"Through both written and electronic judiciary outreach programs, we intend to make our courts, and especially their procedures, more understandable and user-friendly."

Key legislators said after the speech it is unlikely the General



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**No. 1:** Maryland Chief Judge Robert M. Bell delivers his first State of the Judiciary address to a joint session of the General Assembly in Annapolis. He said the court caseload has risen 120 percent in 20 years.

Assembly will be willing to grant the \$9,000 pay raises. "We'll probably do something, but not the \$9,000 they want," said Del. Howard P. Rawlings, a Baltimore Democrat and chairman of the House Appropriations Committee.

Others noted the legislature

gave judges a 3 percent pay raise last year while other state employees got no raise and will not get a pay increase again this year under the governor's budget.

Meanwhile, Glendening said he would consider funding the new judgeships if, after Bell presents

his case to the Assembly, legislators decide they are necessary.

"If the legislature approves it, we'll fund it," the governor said.

Bell, 53, was sworn in as chief judge of the Court of Appeals in October. He succeeded Robert C. Murphy, who retired.