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**New York County Lawyers Association Issues Statement
on the Introduction of New York State Constitutional Amendment S8424/A9401**

Today, a constitutional amendment was introduced in the Legislature that would reform the New York court system and simplify its structure (S8424/ A9401). NYCLA has long supported the goal of court simplification, and we stand ready to assist the Legislature and the court system in making reform a reality.

New York has one of the largest court systems in the nation, and the structure of the system is so complex that it confuses litigants and even lawyers. New York has eleven separate trial courts, including Supreme Court, County Court, Court of Claims, Surrogate Court, Family Court, New York City Civil and Criminal Courts, other City Courts, District Court, and Town and Village Courts. These courts have specific subject matter jurisdiction, and the structure of the system varies by geography, meaning that lawyers from one part of the state often have little understanding of trial practice in another location.

This Byzantine system forces ordinary litigants to navigate a maze of different court procedures to get their needs met. For instance, a domestic violence victim who wants a divorce, custody of her children, and criminal sanctions against her abuser might have to pursue remedies simultaneously in Supreme Court, Family Court, and Criminal Court, causing undue stress and forcing her to miss valuable time at work. While a Fortune 500 company can hire sophisticated lawyers who understand the system, unsophisticated, at-risk individuals might get lost in the bureaucracy and have their claims go unheard.

Since 1970, numerous proposals have been made to simplify the court system, none of which has been adopted by the Legislature. NYCLA has spoken out in support of those efforts on many occasions. The constitutional amendment introduced today would build on those efforts, by establishing, among other things, that (1) a single, statewide Supreme Court be created by consolidating the existing Supreme Court with the Court of Claims, County Court, Family Court, and Surrogate Court, (2) a single, statewide Municipal Court be created by merging the New York City Civil and Criminal Courts as well as District Courts and City Courts, and (3) the Town and Village Courts retain their existing jurisdiction. Under the plan, existing methods of judicial selection will be retained.

The proposed amendment, while perhaps not as comprehensive as some of the reforms put forward in years past, would undeniably create a more efficient and streamlined judiciary. It would improve the functioning of the court system and make it easier for litigants to access justice. Further, by consolidating multiple courts into an expanded Supreme Court, the amendment would make a larger and more diverse group of judges eligible for appointment to the Appellate Division. This, too, represents an important step in the right direction. Therefore, we urge the Legislature to adopt this meaningful reform. The legislation can be viewed [here](#).

About the New York County Lawyers Association

The New York County Lawyers Association (www.nycla.org) was founded in 1908 as one of the first major bar associations in the country that admitted members without regard to race, ethnicity, religion, or gender. Since its inception, it has pioneered some of the most far-reaching and tangible reforms in American jurisprudence and has continuously played an active role in legal developments and public policy.

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