



NEWS RELEASE

Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts

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Chief Justice Seeks Early Budget Relief from Congress

Seeking to avoid a situation that “would be devastating to the judiciary,” Chief Justice William Rehnquist has urged Congress and the President to exempt the federal court system from any legislation that would freeze funding for fiscal year 2005 at the 2004 level.

In a September 13, 2004 letter, the Chief Justice said a long-term continuing resolution (CR) would fund the judiciary in 2005 at fiscal year 2004 levels and would compromise the courts’ “ability to administer justice.” The judiciary needs a 5.6 percent increase in fiscal year 2005 just to stay even with the services it provided in 2004.

The letter highlights points contained in a resolution adopted by the Judicial Conference of the United States, the judiciary’s policy-making entity. The resolution, adopted unanimously, urged Congress and the President “to exempt the judicial branch from any fiscal year 2005 continuing resolution and to provide full-year funding at least at the current services level contained in the House-passed version of the judiciary’s 2005 appropriations bill (H.R. 4754).”

The resolution states that in fiscal year 1996, during a particularly contentious appropriations process, Congress provided for an exemption to the continuing resolution and granted full-year funding to the judiciary and other “law enforcement agencies.”

“The judiciary requires certainty, and sufficient and timely funding to avoid compromising its core mission, the administration of justice. The American people must be assured that the United States courts are available to perform their constitutional and statutory duties,” the resolution stated.

In his letter, the Chief Justice said, “The constrained fiscal year 2004 appropriation under which the courts are currently operating has resulted in hundreds of probation officers and court staff being fired or furloughed in spite of the growing workload they face.”

He added: “Under a CR, the courts will be forced to continue to operate at these low fiscal year 2004 funding levels in fiscal year 2005, resulting in even larger staff reductions, possibly affecting thousands of valued employees.”

The letter said the judiciary “plays a vital role in our nation’s law enforcement and homeland security,” and added, “To avoid compromising our ability to administer justice, I believe it is critical that the Congress take action in the remaining weeks of this session to provide sufficient and timely funding to the judiciary.”

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