

Resolution 16 In Support of Increased Funding for the State Justice Institute

WHEREAS, the Conference of Chief Justices consists of the chief justices of the 50 states, the District of Columbia and commonwealths and territories that make up the United States; and

WHEREAS, the State Justice Institute (SJI) was created by Congress in 1986 at the urging of the Conference with an authorized funding level of \$25 million annually to ensure Federal support and assistance for State court initiatives that promote national policies and interests in improving the fair and effective administration of justice; and

WHEREAS, strong, effective State judicial systems are the backbone of the American system of justice, resolving over 95% of all litigation in this country; and

WHEREAS, since its creation SJI has assisted State courts in implementing national policies on a host of issues including violence against women, child support enforcement, child welfare, full faith and credit enforcement of protection orders of other states, habeas corpus reform, national security, drug enforcement, criminal justice, immigration and welfare reform; and

WHEREAS, SJI assistance is, in the majority of cases, matched by the expenditure of equal or larger sums by state, local and private sources; and

WHEREAS, the Attorney General, in a recent congressionally-mandated report evaluating SJI, found it to be effective and declared that there is a Federal government interest in having fair and innovative State courts, which SJI is promoting; and

WHEREAS, the Conference, as well as other individuals and State court organizations, has been engaged in an effort to educate members of Congress and their staff on SJI's effectiveness and expressed its continued support for this agency; and

WHEREAS, the President has not nominated anyone to the SJI board since October 1998; and

WHEREAS, SJI has operated at a funding level of \$3 million in fiscal year 2002 and will continue at the same level in 2003, which has resulted in a dramatic cutback in programs; and

WHEREAS, the Conference believes that, in order for SJI to fulfill its charter to promote the Federal interest in improving the fair and effective administration of justice in the State courts, SJI should be funded at a level close to its original authorization amount;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Conference urges Congress, in the strongest possible terms, to fully fund SJI's FY 2004 budget request;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Conference urges the President to nominate the new members to the SJI board as early as possible in 2003.

Adopted as proposed by the State-Federal Relations Committee of the Conference of Chief Justices at its 26th Midyear Meeting on January 30, 2003.