Statement of the Chief Justice Chase T. Rogers
Regarding budgetary reductions to the Judicial Branch
July 15, 2011

Our state Constitution in Article I, Section 10 states: "All courts shall be open, and every person, for an injury done to him in his person, property or reputation, shall have remedy by due course of law, and right and justice administered without sale, denial or delay."

The Connecticut Judicial Branch has always met this responsibility, but as we face unprecedented budget cuts, I fear that our courts will be unable to fulfill the mandate that the Constitution requires and that every resident deserves. Because we have no option but to close and consolidate courts and to lay off 452 employees, these cuts will dramatically change the way the Judicial Branch does business.

We don't have the option of turning away any cases, so we must do our best to adjudicate the over 550,000 cases that come to our courts every year, with significantly reduced funding. Clearly, it is necessary to prioritize, and I can assure you that criminal cases will be our top priority. But this means that our limited resources must be stretched to also assist parties in family and civil matters, including many who are self-represented. Unfortunately, with the emphasis on criminal matters, this task will grow more difficult as there will be fewer clerks, interpreters, court monitors, family relations counselors, mediators, law libraries and other resources available.

As Chief Justice, I am responsible for the administration of the Judicial Branch. My message has been consistent that we must do more with less and look for innovative ways to best serve the public with reduced resources. With these cuts, however, I am not certain that we can adequately meet the requirements of Article I, Section 10. Access will be limited and we also anticipate that the resolution of civil, family, housing and small claims cases will be delayed. The end result is that our ability to administer justice as required by the Constitution may very well be compromised.