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## Seasons greetings and a wish list from GRAWA

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*Daily Record Columnist*

At this time of year, retailers are focusing on the big sales push for the holidays, and it is easy to get caught up in the wish lists, the gift lists and the "to do" lists.

These, along with looming year-end deadlines, make this time of year especially hectic. Somehow, Jan. 1 has a way of arriving before we've had much time to evaluate the past year and set goals for the new one.

As we set our personal goals, I invite you to consider larger goals for our community. GRAWA's activities this year include a wish list of sorts for the improvement of justice in New York State.

### **Wish 1: Equal access to justice**

The Office of the Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Justice Initiatives has started a series of conversations about justice issues in rural New York State.

Viewed by some as a direct response to a series of troubling reports, two conferences were held recently to bring together a variety of stakeholders in the delivery of justice. I attended one on behalf of GRAWA. The disparity in services available in rural areas, including lack of transportation to services or court, lack of resources and the impact of poverty, are enormous challenges facing large portions of our state. The conferences have encouraged discussion, innovation, and collaboration. Resources and information are available online at [courts.state.ny.us/ip/justiceinitiatives/rural\\_justice.shtml](http://courts.state.ny.us/ip/justiceinitiatives/rural_justice.shtml).

### **Wish 2: Increase respect for our court system**

A nationwide leader in many areas, New York ranks dead last in the length of time since our judiciary received a pay increase.

While the issue is now in the hands of the court system, it is one that concerns all of us. The allegation that the lack of an increase has impinged on the independence of the judiciary is troubling because the independence of the judiciary is a bedrock of our system of government and ensures the

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branches of government are separate, not subordinate to each other.

This issue, however, presents an even a larger concern: How does our society value and respect the justice system? Where are our priorities as a state? If we expect the judiciary and the justice system to be respected and honored, and we expect the public to have confidence in our laws and administration of justice, then shouldn't that value be reflected in compensation? In response to this issue, the Women's Bar Association of the State of New York approved a resolution in favor of Chief Justice Judith S. Kaye's position.

### **Wish 3: Protection of attorney-client privilege**

New York State Bar Association President Kathryn Grant Madigan has called on the state's lawyers to push for passage of the Attorney-Client Privilege Protection Act in

the U.S. Senate.

The proposed Act responds to increased threats to the privilege based on policies of the U.S. Department of Justice that encourage organizations to waive the attorney-client privilege and related attorney work-product protection and to fire employees who assert constitutional or other privileges.

### **Wish 4: Happy holidays**

At the recent GRAWA Holiday Party, members not only celebrated 2007 but also donated office supplies and snacks for children who are served by the Bivona Children's Advocacy Center, a 2007 Nathaniel Award Honoree and not-for-profit agency dedicated to coordinating and providing services to child victims of sexual or physical abuse and their families. All year long, Bivona's full wish list is available at [www.bi-vonacac.org](http://www.bi-vonacac.org).

On behalf of the entire GRAWA membership, happy holidays. Thank you for your support of our programs, our wish list and our mission.

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