

Albany branded a 'judicial hellhole'

By [David Lombardo](#)

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Albany and New York City were declared judicial hellholes in a report from the American Tort Reform Association. The cities earned the distinction after being on the group's watch list in 2010. The American Tort Reform Association is a nationwide coalition founded in 1986 to bring more fairness, predictability and efficiency to the country's \$246 billion civil justice system. Also on the list this year were Philadelphia, California, West Virginia and South Florida. The New York cities made the list based on a variety of "ridiculous lawsuits" the association is monitoring, including one filed against a wedding photographer for missing photographs of the last dance and bouquet toss. The former bridegroom is seeking \$48,000 to re-create the entire wedding and ATRA feels it is a waste of taxpayer money for the state Supreme Court in Manhattan to even begin to entertain this suit. "To really spur on New York's economic recovery, we need to reverse this trend," said Tom Stebbins, executive director of the Lawsuit Reform Alliance of New York, in a press release. "Other states that have implemented common sense lawsuit reform have done a much better job of weathering the recent economic downturn." The report from ATRA blames the large number of lawyers in the state Legislature for its failure to embrace lawsuit reform. The report's selection of hellholes is based on a survey of ATRA members. The full ATRA report is available at www.judicialhellholes.org.

'Green steps' applauded

The environmental watchdog Environmental Advocates had a better assessment of Albany last week, warmly greeting the outcome of a meeting held by Gov. Andrew Cuomo's Spending and Government Efficiency Commission meeting. "[On Thursday] the SAGE Commission outlined some positive green steps for New York State. By creating a web-based system for the state's water pollution permit program, New Yorkers will gain access to valuable information about exactly what is released into our lakes, rivers and streams," said Environmental Advocates Executive Director Rob Moore in a press release on Friday. "The commission's recommendations regarding energy efficiency could save the state up to \$100 million per year, while cutting the use of dirty fossil fuels and the air pollution that causes climate change and illnesses like asthma." The group did warn that realigning state agency functions and permits should not be done if it impacts critical functions that protect health and environmental conditions. The approved recommendations from Thursday included the merging of transportation responsibilities, the establishment of an Office of Lean Management and an increase in the amount of capital available for affordable housing by using reinsurance to free up capital. The SAGE Commission is supposed to release a full report in 2012 on areas of wasteful spending.

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