

California Courts News

Title: Facilities Transfers Completed

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An historic moment for the judicial branch in California. At the Judicial Council meeting, the Chief Justice accepted the symbolic key to the Glenn County Courthouse. That completes the transfer from the counties to the state of 532 court facilities.

Hon. Ronald George, Chief Justice of California *"This is just a phenomenal achievement; 532 facilities transferred, one of the largest real estate transactions in California history."*

The legislature passed the Trial Court Facilities bill in 2002, which provided for the transfers. The purpose was to ensure that everyone in the state had equal access to safe, secure and adequate court facilities; and to create a single, comprehensive infrastructure program.

The first transfer was in Riverside County in 2004, the Larson Justice Center in Indio. Then transfers slowed to a trickle. Negotiations were complex. Just a few agreements were reached, like this one in Mariposa, where the county will continue to own and maintain the historic building.

One of the stumbling blocks was the specter of earthquakes. 147 court buildings had potential structural problems if the earth started to move; including San Diego, Long Beach, San Francisco, Modesto, Porterville, Martinez, San Bernardino; and of course, Hollister in San Benito County, famous for the fault line that runs right through town. So the seismic condition of the courthouses was problematic.

Finally, it took legislation to work it out. By that time, more than a hundred people in the AOC's Office of Court Construction and Management were busy hammering out the many details of the agreements, along with AOC attorneys and finance experts, facilities staff in the courts, and many folks in 58 counties.

Elizabeth Howard Espinoza, California State Association of Counties *"It's certainly a shining example of inter-governmental collaboration at its best. On behalf of our counties we are very glad this is done."*

In the end, they struck 532 separate transfer agreements. Glenn County was the last one, just a few days before the deadline of December 31st, 2009. It's their historic courthouse, the center of community life since 1894. County officials say transferring title was like giving away a family heirloom - but the right thing to do.

Steve Soeth, Glenn County Board of Supervisors *"We're very confident that the needs of the citizens in our county will be met at the highest possible level."*

In addition to the Council's resolution, there was a joint resolution from the legislature recognizing this milestone.

And the Chief Justice once again emphasized the council's commitment to providing communities with safe and secure courthouses.

Hon. Ronald George, Chief Justice of California *"Certainly I consider our courthouses just as much a part of our state's infrastructure as its highways and bridges."*

With ownership comes responsibility. The AOC's Office of Court Construction and Management is now responsible for 19-million square feet of space.

Hon. Ronald George, Chief Justice of California *"And now that the state has title and the judicial branch has control we will devote ourselves to remedying the conditions or replacing facilities in the 41 most critically needed projects."*

And in a few months, there'll be 54 authorized capital projects under way – new construction and renovation – totaling \$6.5 billion.

Hon. Ronald George, Chief Justice of California *"We don't want marble palaces, we just need facilities that are safe."*

Plus the buildings will be secure, and efficient to operate and maintain. And they'll meet the long term needs of judges, staff, and the people of California.

I'm Leanne Kozak reporting for California Courts News.

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