

## California Courts News

### Title Judicial Council Meets on Aug. 19

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Money matters were again high on the Judicial Council's agenda. Budget requests were approved for critical services and programs for the entire branch for fiscal year 2010/11. The Council also decided to give the San Joaquin court a small, one-time break for this year. San Joaquin's budget allocation will be reduced a slightly smaller percentage than the other courts, because they are so severely under resourced.

Bill Vickrey, Administrative Director of the Courts *"They have rescinded their cost of living adjustment for their staff in the upcoming year, they're implementing furloughs, closing the courts, and even then may have to be laying off some staff in the process."*

8 other courts have been placed on a "watch" list in case their financial situation worsens: Fresno, Glenn, Placer, Sacramento, San Bernardino, Tehama, Tulare, and Yuba.

The Chief Justice says other states are handling their financial troubles with a hodgepodge of fixes; not as effective as a one-day-a-month statewide closure.

Hon. Ronald M. George, Chief Justice of Calif. *"Reinforced to me the wisdom of the action that this Judicial Council took. Given that our mission statement is to improve and increase access to justice it is a painful step for all of us to take."*

And he appealed once again to judicial officers to volunteer for a salary waiver.

Hon. Ronald M. George, Chief Justice of Calif. *"I think it's only right that we set an example. We are asking much more of our employees; we are requiring much more of our employees."*

The council also heard how the recession is putting great pressure on free and low cost legal programs.

Bonnie Rose Hough, Center for Families, Children & the Courts *"We see that in legal services, we see that in self help. There is just a huge increase of need for people for legal services. People who have traditionally been able to afford an attorney just can't in many situations now, due to job loss or other kinds of difficulties."*

Help comes from the State Bar Legal Services Trust Fund. When lawyers get retainers, they put the money in a statewide interest bearing account. That interest, some money from general funds, and some filing fees added up to more than \$14 million. The Council approved distributing that to more than a hundred organizations that provide free legal services for low income people.

Courthouse construction was also on the agenda. Council members approved an updated version of the site selection and acquisition policy.

Burt Hirschfeld, Office of Court Construction/Management

*"These include fundamentals such as cost efficiency, quality and functionality, accessibility, local preferences and AOC/Court collaboration. In last December's issues meeting and in feedback received during the public comment period, we listened carefully to what the courts had to say. The policy update attempts to address these issues through the use of clear and distinct language."*

The new and improved version will serve as a compass to maintain direction on goals and principles when there are difficult choices to make.

Lee Willoughby, Dir. Office of Court Construction/Management *“These revisions to the policy will just make it more efficient and effective as we go through the site acquisition process.”*

And that process is just beginning for 15 courthouse projects all over the state, with dozens more to come.

I'm Leanne Kozak reporting from San Francisco for California Courts News.

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