

California Courts News Transcript

Title: Judicial Council Meeting: April 23, 2010

Date: May 6, 2010

April's Judicial Council meeting included a spirited debate over a proposal from the Los Angeles Superior Court. The L-A court asked the council to pursue legislation to redirect construction funds to court operations. Specifically, the LA court requested 47-million-dollars now, and then annually, to avoid laying off 500 more employees.

Stephen Nash, AOC Chief Financial Officer *"The court is appropriately concerned regarding the impact of reductions to trial court funding implemented in the state budget."*

Hon. Lee Smalley Edmon, L.A. Superior Court *"That's one thing that we can all agree on. These cuts that we're having to face right now are staggering and they aren't sustainable."*

AOC staff studied L-A's fiscal projections and the rationale for their request, and presented their own analysis.

Hon. Michael Vicencia, L.A. Superior Court *"I don't know why we're having this inter-family public debate about such things."*

Hon. Sharon Waters, Riverside Superior Court *"I think it's the responsibility of this body whenever there's a request from any court for supplemental funding to do an evaluation of the need. That's our responsibility to the other courts to ensure that the money truly is needed."*

Staff recommended that L.A.'s request be turned down.

Stephen Nash, AOC Chief Financial Officer *"This approach would too narrowly focus on one solution, an option that could significantly impair the ability of the branch to address critical facility needs in courts throughout the state for years to come."*

Instead, the recommendation calls for ALL funding possibilities to be explored.

Stephen Nash, AOC Chief Financial Officer *"This approach should consider all viable ongoing, limited-term, and one-time funding solutions, including transfers of funding from construction fund monies where such transfers would not impact the timing and scale of planned facility projects."*

Hon. Ronald M. George, Chief Justice of California *"Our perspective really is focused on putting everything on the table as long as we honor our long term commitments to infrastructure."*

AOC Administrative Director Bill Vickrey predicted there would be enough from SB 1407 fees and fines to fund the critical needs construction projects – and have some money for operations.

California Courts News Transcript

Bill Vickrey, AOC Administrative Director *“We think that there are revenues beyond the level required to deal with the 41 projects; and when I say ‘we think there is,’ we think there is with a substantial degree of confidence.”*

Hon. David Wesley, L.A. Superior Court *“I don’t know what the impact would be if some of the construction funds would be used. I’d want to know that before I’d vote on that recommendation.”*

Some council members think diverting money intended for construction to operations is a huge mistake; that it sends the wrong message to legislators.

Hon James Welch, San Bernardino Superior Court *“I think it hurts our chances for doing some meaningful legislative solutions to our budget.”*

Hon. George Abdallah, San Joaquin Superior Court *“I’m concerned as Judge Welch was with our looking to these funds as if they were a reserve fund for operations.”*

In the end, the council voted for a broad and flexible approach to achieving financial stability for all 58 courts. Los Angeles Judges Edmon and Wesley opposed.

The council also had vigorous debate over a new rule of court for criminal protective order cases. The measure passed on a close vote – 8 to 5.

And the council accepted the final report from the Elkins Family Law Task force. For details on the 117 recommendations – and other council action, check the court’s website – courtinfo.ca.gov.

I’m Leanne Kozak reporting from San Francisco.

[END]