



Office of the Court Executive
Superior Court of the State of California
County of Kings

Jeffrey E. Lewis
Court Executive/Clerk
and
Jury Commissioner

September 28, 2015

Mr. Martin Hoshino
Administrative Director
Judicial Council of California
455 Golden Gate Avenue
San Francisco, California 94102-3688

Subject: **Notification of Closures Pursuant to Government Code §68106**

Dear Mr. Hoshino:

The Superior Court of California, County of Kings, currently conducts courtroom proceedings and operates a Clerk's Office at each of our Court locations in Avenal, Corcoran and Hanford. This letter is to notify you that this Court intends to cease, permanently, all operations at the Avenal and Corcoran facilities, with those services and staff relocating to the Hanford Courthouse, effective at the close of business on December 18, 2015.

Commencing October 1, 2015, this Court will solicit public comment in writing regarding this plan of action per the enclosed notice. A copy of this notice will be posted throughout our multiple facilities and on the court website at <http://www.kings.courts.ca.gov> for the required 60 days minimum prior to the effective date of these changes (December 18, 2015, at close of business).

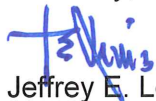
Historically, the Kings Superior Court has steadfastly endeavored to serve our citizenry to the best of its abilities, despite its very limited resources as a habitually under-funded and under-resourced court. Over the previous six fiscal years - which saw this court's baseline funding reduced by 30% and facing a 2012-13 structural deficit of approximately \$1.3 million - Kings Superior Court decreased its expenses by more than \$2,495,000 by means of a 21% reduction in line staff, the elimination of 23% of all management positions, a six-year average of 14 furlough days per year taken by all residual personnel [the equivalent of an annual 5.3% pay reduction], increasing employee cost-share of medical and retirement benefits, executing a court closure in Lemoore, and through a combination of expansion, terminations, and rollbacks in vendor contracts.

An improving state economy by 2013, suggested the opportunity for a meaningful increase in trial court funding by 2014-15. However, the state's three-fiscal years' failure to provide even nominal financial relief from years of unprecedented budget reductions, and the recent elimination of the court's right to carry-over yearly fund balances, now compels Kings Superior Court to implement these courthouse closures (with resultant transfer of staffs to Hanford) to offset critical personnel shortages in an effort to maintain the most basic judicial services.

Moreover, this consolidation to maximize our staffing resources in a single location – and to alleviate some of the impacts of long-standing vacancies at our largest courthouse - is also in line with the Court's long-term plan of merging Avenal and Corcoran services into the new 10-courtroom Hanford Courthouse, scheduled to be operational in February 2016.

We are available to answer any questions or concerns you may have regarding these adverse, yet necessary actions - and it is fully acknowledged these closure decisions will erode some of our residents' accustomed local access to the Kings Superior Court. However, for the majority of our public, the relocation of much-needed personnel resources to Hanford will enable this Court to discharge (to some degree) its' core mission of providing timely, accessible service to the citizenry of all Kings County, an objective damaged by far too many years of calamitous budget cuts and commensurate losses of proficient court management and staff.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey E. Lewis
Court Executive Officer

Enclosure

Cc: Hon. Thomas DeSantos, Presiding Judge
Hon. Steven D. Barnes, Assistant Presiding Judge
Ms. Jody Patel, Judicial Council of California – Chief of Staff
Mr. Curt Soderlund, Judicial Council of California – Chief Administrative Officer

Avenal Division
501 E. Kings Street
Avenal, CA 93204
(559)582-1010, ext. 4094

Corcoran Division
1000 Chittenden Ave.
Corcoran, CA 93212
(559)582-1010, ext. 3003

Hanford Division
1426 South Drive
Hanford, CA 93230
(559)582-1010, ext.5002



Superior Court of the State of California
County of Kings

Thomas DeSantos
Presiding Judge
of the
Superior Court

Jeffrey E. Lewis
Court Executive/Clerk
and
Jury Commissioner

*****PUBLIC NOTICE of COURT CLOSURES*****

October 1, 2015

Pursuant to California Government Code Section 68106*, the Superior Court of California, County of Kings hereby provides sixty (60) days' notice of its proposed intent to cease all operations at its Court locations in Avenal (at 501 E. King Street) and Corcoran (at 1000 Chittenden Avenue), with those services and staff relocating to the Hanford Courthouse, effective at the close of the Court's business day on December 18, 2015.

As a part of the judicial branch of government, the Kings Superior Court receives its annual budget allocation through the Judicial Council of California, an entity of the State. After the Governor and Legislature imposed over one billion dollars in state cuts to the judicial branch from Fiscal Years 2008-09 through 2012-13, every trial court state-wide had to absorb its share of reductions, by instituting various cost saving measures, including attrition, hiring freezes, eliminating vacated positions, furloughs, layoffs, early retirement programs, reengineering court processes for efficiencies, reduction of expenditures for services and supplies, and many other reasonable efforts to control labor, supply, and contractual service costs.

Historically, the Kings Superior Court has steadfastly endeavored to serve our citizenry to the best of its abilities, despite its very limited resources as an habitually under-funded and under-resourced court. Over the previous six fiscal years - which saw this court's baseline funding reduced by 30% and facing a 2012-13 structural deficit of approximately \$1.3 million - Kings Superior Court decreased its expenses by more than \$2,495,000 by means of a 21% reduction in line staff, the elimination of 23% of all management positions, an average of 14 furlough days per year taken by all residual personnel [the equivalent of an annual 5.3% pay reduction], increasing employee cost-share of medical and retirement benefits, executing a court closure in Lemoore, and through a combination of expansion, terminations, and rollbacks in vendor contracts.

With the economy improving in the state by 2013, trial courts anticipated a significant restoration of trial court funding by 2014-15. However, the state's three-fiscal years failure to provide even nominal financial relief from years of unprecedented budget reductions, and the recent elimination of the court's right to carry-over yearly fund balances, now compels the state's trial courts to take further remedial actions to maintain the most basic judicial services.

For Kings County residents, notwithstanding this Court's history of prudent fiscal planning, revenue generating strategies, and effective cost-cutting measures [including the multiple times Kings Superior

Court has announced reduced service levels due to on-going fiscal constraints], this Court now finds it necessary to institute the above closures in light of unresolved critical staffing shortages.

The court regrets having to make these very difficult decisions with regard to court operations, which, it is recognized, will lessen the degree of access to justice for some of our county's citizens. Kings Superior Court does so only after exhausting all other alternatives to cope with multiple years of statewide trial court funding reductions with only marginal reinvestment efforts in the Courts recently demonstrated by California's Governor, Senate and Assembly.

Kings Superior Court believes, however, that these measures are unavoidable and represent a sound management practice, utilizing remaining staff resources as efficiently as possible and which can be best accomplished by consolidating operations into our Hanford facilities to better serve the majority of our County residents. This consolidation of services will also serve to enhance security and safety for the public and staff, as Hanford provides security elements not available at the Avenal or Corcoran Courthouses. Further, this consolidation is also in line with the Court's long-term plan of merging Avenal and Corcoran services into the new 10-courtroom Hanford Courthouse, which should be operational in February 2016.

To summarize, after six years of untenable state-imposed budget reductions and attendant unacceptable personnel losses, this intended decision to consolidate all trial court operations in Hanford:

- Was agreed upon, reluctantly, by this Superior Court's judges and Court Administrator in mid-September 2015,
- Was reached *only after* multiple assessments of the overall impacts on Avenal and Corcoran residents and law enforcement agencies were conducted (and potential alternatives to closures and staff relocation were considered), and
- Was determined to be the most suitable course of action to meet and improve our court's core mission of providing accessible, timely service to the citizenry of all of Kings County.

Any interested person or entity is encouraged to provide input regarding this noticed plan of action. Comments should be provided in writing, no later than 5:00 p.m. on November 30, 2015, and be addressed to:

Jeffrey E. Lewis, Court Executive Officer
Kings County Superior Court
1426 South Drive
Hanford, California, 93230

You may also send your comments via email to jlewis@kings.courts.ca.gov. As required by Government Code 68106(b)(2)(A), the Court will review and consider all public comments received.

*Government Code section 68106 requires trial courts to provide notice to the public at least 60 days before closing any courtroom or closing or reducing the hours of clerks' offices by conspicuous posting within its facilities and on its public website.