

Advocates of justice gathered on the steps of the State Capitol, to call attention to the crisis: the Judicial Branch is buckling after \$653 million in budget cuts over the last four years, an almost 30% reduction. California's Chief Justice said that reduction in court services is especially painful now.

Hon Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye, Chief Justice of California *"We need the courts to be open. When homes are lost and jobs are taken and services are eliminated, people rightly come to the courts and have an expectation that there will be justice for all."*

Without immediate budget relief, that won't happen and the situation will get much worse.

Jon Streeter, California State Bar President *"On behalf of the 230,000 members of the state bar of California, I have one simple message: no courts, no justice: no freedom."*

Inside, a joint informational hearing with the Senate Judiciary Committee and the Senate Subcommittee on Public Safety and the Judiciary. Speakers described the devastating effects of budget cuts: staff layoffs, closed courtrooms, long lines, endless waits for court hearings, self help services disappearing, to name a few.

Theodore Olson, ABA Task Force on Preservation of the Justice System *"We're hurting each of us, each one of our citizens, but particularly the weak, the vulnerable, the poor, who need our justice system the most."*

Ramon Arias, Executive Dir. Bay Area Legal Aid *"The list of shortages caused by the lack of funding is too long to tell."*

And the Judicial Branch may get hit with another \$125 million in trigger cuts this year, if voters don't approve new taxes in November or other revenues are found. Presiding judges have drastic plans in place; San Joaquin, for example. Judge David Warner said he'll have to close courts in Manteca and Lodi; Tracy's already history. They will no longer handle some probate and some family law cases. And they will completely shut down small claims court and all civil cases!

Hon. David Warner, Presiding Judge, San Joaquin Superior Court *"If I do not have the funds, I cannot do them. Where do they go to get that problem resolved? I am very concerned that those people will solve their problems; they simply won't be through the justice system."*

Sen. Mark Leno, Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee *"We are at a breaking point, and it could be a point of no return."*

David Boies, ABA Task Force on Preservation of the Justice System *"All of the rights that our constitution and our laws give are empty promises unless there is a justice system that is able to enforce those laws effectively."*

Sen. Loni Hancock, Chair, Senate Subcommittee on Public Safety and the Judiciary
“Honestly, our constitutional government is on the line here.”

Theodore Olson, ABA Task Force on Preservation of the Justice System *“We’re not talking about money for courts, or judges, or lawyers, we’re talking about money for a justice system that serves the people. We understand that there’s a financial crisis; but this has got to be first.”*

Senator Noreen Evans summed up the day’s testimony:

“The courts underpin everything. They are the foundation of our democracy. Our laws are not enforced and really don’t even apply if the court system is not open.”

I’m Leanne Kozak reporting from Sacramento for California Courts News.