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## Major Study on Juvenile Delinquency Proposes Reforms in Justice System

### *First Study of Its Kind in California Finds Overburdened Courts, Need for More Youth Services*

San Francisco—The Judicial Council of California today accepted a two-year study that urges major reforms in the state's juvenile delinquency courts to improve the administration of justice and the lives of youth, victims, and other community members affected by juvenile crime.

The first comprehensive research study of its kind in California, the *Juvenile Delinquency Court Assessment 2008* is based on surveys administered to juvenile delinquency court professionals statewide and focus groups conducted with delinquency court professionals and court users in six counties: Los Angeles, Placer, Riverside, San Francisco, San Joaquin, and Siskiyou.

Among the key findings are the following:

**Court workloads too high:** Workloads are too high for judicial officers and other professionals, particularly for probation officers and defense attorneys. Excessive workloads contribute to delays and rushed calendars which in turn reduce public satisfaction with the court process.

**More youth services needed:** More high-quality, affordable, and appropriate services are needed for youth, especially drug rehabilitation, mental health, and services for females. Without such programs, youth are not provided treatment for underlying issues and may receive inappropriate services or sanctions that are either too lenient or too severe given the facts and circumstances of a case.

**Incomprehensible court proceedings:** For youthful offenders, parents, victims, and witnesses, court proceedings are often difficult

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to follow and understand. Available court space and personnel at court facilities are needed in order to adequately address the questions of court users. Youth, parents, victims, and community members also expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of opportunities to participate meaningfully in delinquency court.

**Outdated technology:** Delinquency courts often have old, outdated technology systems, so courts often cannot share case information, sometimes even within the same county.

**High turnover:** Many judicial delinquency professionals enjoy their assignments and the ability to work with youth, but judicial officers and attorneys are often rotated to other duties, just at the time when their experience and effectiveness is high.

In response to the findings, the Judicial Council's Family and Juvenile Advisory Committee made a series of 58 recommendations for improving case-level performance, comprehensible hearings, youth services and sanctions, court management, and professionalism.

The study represents two years of research on California's delinquency courts. Surveys were conducted with all juvenile delinquency judicial officers (89% response rate); juvenile prosecutors (67% response rate); juvenile public defenders and contract attorneys (51% response rate); and court administrators (81% response rate). A 20% random sample of juvenile probation officers (51% response rate) was also included.

The study was conducted by the Center for Families, Children & the Courts of the Administrative Office of the Courts, the staff agency that carries out the policies of the Judicial Council. The study is available on the California Courts Web site at [www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/resources/publications/JuvenileDelinquency.htm](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/resources/publications/JuvenileDelinquency.htm).

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*The Judicial Council is the policymaking body of the California courts, the largest court system in the nation. Under the leadership of the Chief Justice and in accordance with the California Constitution, the council is responsible for ensuring the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice. The Administrative Office of the Courts carries out the official actions of the council and promotes leadership and excellence in court administration.*