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Judicial Council Votes on Court Audits, Budgets at Public Meeting Today

San Francisco – To increase accountability and transparency in the state judicial branch, the Judicial Council today adopted new procedures, including public disclosure of final audit reports of state trial courts, that will enhance public access to court audits and governance of the judicial branch audit program.

Chaired by Chief Justice Ronald M. George, the council is the administrative policymaking agency of the California courts.

Under the new procedures, audit reports will be reviewed by the council's new Advisory Committee on Financial Accountability and Efficiency before being considered by the Judicial Council. After final audit reports are accepted by the council, they will be posted on the California Courts website. Audit results and activities also will be regularly reported to the council at public business meetings.

Publishing final audit reports on the public website will ensure that final audit reports are accessible to the public. This practice is consistent with other state audit organizations. In the past, final audit reports have been made available to the public upon written request.

The AOC established the Internal Auditing Services unit in 2001 to conduct independent audits of the state trial courts and other entities of the judicial branch. The unit currently performs comprehensive audits of the superior courts that generally encompass financial, performance, and operational work on a four-year cycle.

In other actions today, the Judicial Council:

Judicial Branch Budget: Approved several budget concept proposals for fiscal year 2011–2012 for the Supreme Court, Courts of Appeal, trial courts, and the Judicial Council/Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). Despite the absence of a State Budget for this year, budget concept proposals for the next year must be submitted to the state

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Department of Finance by September 13.

For the appellate courts, budget concept proposals were approved for court-appointed counsel for indigents, online legal resources, and court research services. For the trial courts, budget concept proposals were approved for court security, court-appointed dependency counsel, assigned judges, the Court Interpreters Program, and language access for court users who have limited English proficiency. For the Judicial Council/AOC, budget concepts were approved to provide continuing services to the courts and the public in the areas of statewide case management and court facilities. Approval of budget concept proposals does not involve the allocation of funds.

Civics Education: Approved two recommendations from the final report of the Commission for Impartial Courts that would improve judicial outreach, public information, and civics education. Those recommendations provide for (1) the appointment of a branchwide public outreach leadership group, and (2) focused and coordinated judicial branch advocacy for improving civics education in K–12 curriculum. The recommendations are designed to ensure that every child in the state receives a quality civics education and that the public is better informed of the role and operations of the state court system.

Trial Court Facilities: Approved the adoption of an updated Trial Court Capital-Outlay Plan and directed the AOC to present it to the Department of Finance as part of the five-year court facilities infrastructure plan, in addition to requests for the continuation of trial court capital projects.

Subordinate Judicial Officers: Approved a modification to the allocation schedule for the conversion of subordinate judicial officer (SJO) positions to judgeships. The modification would allow the Superior Court of El Dorado County to convert a vacant SJO position to a judgeship in fiscal year 2010–2011. The modification will also allow for the completion of all 16 SJO conversions for the current fiscal year, pending enactment of the State Budget.

Court Interpreters: Approved the *2010 Language Use and Interpreter Need in California Superior Courts* report for submission to the Legislature and Governor. The report, which details interpreter use and need in state trial courts during 2004–2008, is used to make determinations about which languages should be designated for court interpreter certification. There are currently 13 certified languages in California. Based on this study, the Court Interpreters Advisory Panel is not recommending the designation of additional languages at this time.

In addition, Justice Carlos R. Moreno, of the California Supreme Court, presented an informational report on the first 18 months of implementation efforts by the Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care, which issued sweeping recommendations for

reform of the juvenile court and child welfare systems that were accepted by the Judicial Council in August 2008.

Retired Presiding Justice Laurence Donald Kay, of the Court of Appeal, First Appellate District, presented an informational report on the implementation efforts of the Domestic Violence Practice and Procedure Task Force.

The Judicial Council's agenda and reports are posted on the California Courts website at www.courtinfo.ca.gov/jc/documents/age20100827.pdf.

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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 ensures leadership and excellence in court administration.