



NEWS RELEASE

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AOC Receives Award for Guide on Self-Represented Litigants

San Francisco—The Administrative Office of the Courts has received the Howell Heflin Award from the State Justice Institute (SJI) for its *Benchguide for Judicial Officers on Handling Cases Involving Self-Represented Litigants*.

The award is given “in recognition of an innovative Institute-supported project that has a high likelihood of significantly improving the quality of justice in State courts across the nation.” SJI’s board of directors selects the award recipient from projects completed in the past year.

First published in January 2007, the California benchguide has already been adapted as a national guide and is being used in at least eight other states, including New York, Arizona, Oregon, and Mississippi. It is designed to provide judicial officers with information on ethical issues involved in handling cases with self-represented litigants and explains practical skills such as handling evidence, communications, settlement strategies, courtroom management, and solutions for unintended bias.

The benchguide was produced with the support of an SJI grant. SJI board member Keith McNamara presented the award at the Judicial Council’s public meeting on Friday, August 15.

OTHER ACTIONS

At its business meeting on August 15, the Judicial Council also took the following actions:

Budget Proposals: The council approved fiscal year 2009–2010 budget requests of the Supreme Court, Courts of Appeal, trial courts, and Administrative Office of the Courts.

Court Collections: The council adopted the revised Collections Reporting Template, Collections Performance Measures and

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Benchmarks, and Collections Best Practices for use by cooperative superior court and county collection programs. Each of these recommendations will enable the Judicial Council to meet newly-enacted legislative mandates in the area of collections.

Impartial Courts: The Commission for Impartial Courts, which is charged with studying and recommending ways to ensure judicial impartiality and accountability in California's courts, presented its interim report to the Judicial Council. The commission outlined the areas it is examining and will make recommendations in its final report, which will be presented to the council in 2009.

Riverside Criminal Backlog Reduction: The council heard an update of actions taken by Chief Justice Ronald M. George to address the serious backlog of cases facing the Superior Court of Riverside County. Those actions included the assignment of a special team of judges with extensive criminal trial experience and a task force convened by Justice Richard D. Huffman that recommended ways to improve the management of criminal cases.

Court Interpreters: The council approved a recommendation to raise the renewal fee for certified and registered court interpreters and to modify the court interpreter test retake policy.

Reports considered at the Judicial Council's meeting are available on the California Courts Web site at <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/jc/documents/age081508.pdf>.

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.

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