



# NEWS RELEASE

Release Number: 45

Release Date: August 25, 2008

JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF  
CALIFORNIA  
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE  
OF THE COURTS  
Public Information Office  
455 Golden Gate Avenue  
San Francisco, CA 94102-3688  
www.courtinfo.ca.gov

415-865-7740

Lynn Holton  
Public Information Officer

## **Judicial Council Announces 2008 Winners of Distinguished Service Awards**

### ***Jurists, Court Administrator, and Legal Services Director Honored for Service to Justice System and Public***

San Francisco—The Judicial Council of California has announced the winners of its 2008 Distinguished Service Awards. The highest honors given by the council, the awards are presented to those who demonstrate extraordinary leadership and make significant contributions to the administration of justice in California.

Now in their 14th year, the awards will be presented during a statewide meeting of court leaders on October 14, 2008, in Monterey. Chief Justice of California Ronald M. George and Administrative Director of the Courts William C. Vickrey will present the awards. The recipients are as follows.

### **Jurist of the Year Award**

*This award honors two members of the judiciary for their extraordinary dedication to the highest principles of the administration of justice: Judge J. Richard Couzens (retired) and Judge David S. Wesley.*

**Judge J. Richard Couzens**, retired from the Superior Court of Placer County, was honored for his outstanding service as co-leader of a special team of assigned judges that helped reduce the criminal case backlog in Riverside County in 2007 and 2008.

A member of the Judicial Council from 1996 to 2000, Judge Couzens has been instrumental in improving the administration of justice in criminal caseflow management and delay reduction since the early 1990s. He has served on numerous council committees that studied those areas, including the project planning team of the Developing Effective Practices in Criminal Caseflow Management Project, 2004–2005; the Criminal Law Advisory Committee, 1992–1995, which he chaired from 1994 to

(over)

1995; and that committee's Working Group on Standards for Appointed Counsel in Death Penalty Cases, 2002. In addition, he served on the Advisory Committee on Criminal Delay Reduction, 1990–1992; the Advisory Committee on Uniform Delay Reduction Program Rules for Volunteer Courts, 1989–1990; and the Task Force on Review of the Weighted Caseload System, 1984–1985. He was a member of the California Council for Interstate Adult Offender Supervision from 2003 to 2005.

Judge Couzens is considered one of the state's foremost experts on criminal law and sentencing and has taught many judicial educational courses on those subjects and others. A judge for 27 years, he served as a justice court judge in Placer County from 1977 to 1980 and was appointed to the superior court in 1980. He has participated in the Chief Justice's Assigned Judges Program since his retirement in 2005.

Before joining the bench, Judge Couzens was a law clerk to California Chief Justices Roger J. Traynor and Donald R. Wright, 1969–1970. He was in general civil and criminal law practice from 1970 to 1978 and was a deputy district attorney of Placer County from 1972 to 1974.

**Supervising Judge David S. Wesley**, of the Superior Court of Los Angeles County, Criminal Division, was chosen for his extraordinary work as the judicial leader of the special team of assigned judges that assisted in reducing the criminal case backlog in Riverside County.

Judge Wesley is a statewide expert in criminal law and case management in high volume courts. In addition to hearing criminal cases at the Los Angeles trial court, he regularly traveled to Riverside, where he led the assigned judges team and heard criminal cases.

Judge Wesley is a member of the Judicial Council's Advisory Committee on Criminal Jury Instructions, which rewrote California's criminal jury instructions. The jury instructions were approved by the council in 2005 and are now in general use in California. He also is a member of the Task Force on Judicial Selection and Retention—one of four task forces of the Commission for Impartial Courts—and the council's Criminal Law Advisory Committee.

Appointed to the Superior Court of Los Angeles County in 1997, Judge Wesley was named assistant supervising judge of the Criminal Division in 2001, and was elevated to supervising judge in 2003. Before he joined the bench, he was a hearing judge of the State Bar Court, 1993–1995, and later served as superior court commissioner of the juvenile court from 1995 to 1997.

He was in private practice from 1991 to 1993 and was a partner in the Los Angeles law firm of Overland, Berke, Wesley, Gits, Randolph and Levanas, 1981–1991. He served in the Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office from 1972 to 1981.

## **Judicial Administration Award**

*This award honors individuals in judicial administration for significant contributions to and leadership in their profession.*

**Sharol Strickland**, executive officer of the Superior Court of Butte County, has demonstrated innovative and outstanding leadership by improving the administration of justice in Butte County and throughout the state, especially through her service on the Judicial Council of California and its committees. She is known for her principles and courage in speaking out on important issues that affect statewide court administration.

Ms. Strickland rose from the ranks of a clerk/typist in the Superior Court of Sonoma County to the top administrative position in the Superior Court of Butte County. Since 1995, she has served as executive officer, clerk of the court, and jury commissioner of the Butte County superior court. From 1980 to 1995 she served in various positions within the Contra Costa County Municipal Court and the Sonoma County Municipal Court, starting her court career in Sonoma as a legal processing clerk and moving up quickly to managerial positions.

As executive officer, Ms. Strickland has created an atmosphere of excellence at the Superior Court of Butte County. She has increased public access and public confidence in the court, expanded public services, enhanced technology, and created new opportunities for continuing education and professional development for all staff.

Over the past 13 years, the Butte superior court won 10 Kleps Awards for court innovations as a result of the progressive leadership of Ms. Strickland and the court's judges. The court received the last three awards for multicourt self-help centers (SHARP), the Court Clerk Certification Program, and the Butte/Glenn technology support collaboration.

A member of the Judicial Council since 2005, Ms. Strickland has been an active member of the Court Executives Advisory Committee for many years and served as chair in 2007. She has been involved in various subcommittees of that group, including those studying court interpreters, court infrastructure, rule review, strategic planning, court operations, and uniform filing fees.

Ms. Strickland also serves on the Judicial Council's Task Force on Self-Represented Litigants, the Trial Court Budget Working Group, and the Task Force on Judicial Selection and Retention, one of four task forces of the Commission for Impartial Courts. She is a member of the Judicial Council's Executive and Planning Committee.

Her statewide contributions include service on educational programs sponsored by the Judicial Council and the Center for Judicial Education and Research, both as a faculty member and a committee leader.

## **Bernard E. Witkin Amicus Curiae Award**

*This award honors individuals other than members of the judiciary for their outstanding contributions to the courts of California.*

**Kenneth W. Babcock**, Executive Director and General Counsel of the Public Law Center in Santa Ana, was honored for his extraordinary work to improve access to justice to low-income residents of Orange County and throughout the state.

Mr. Babcock has devoted most of his professional life to providing legal services to those who cannot afford them. As a member of the California Commission on Access to Justice, 2006–present, he chairs the commission’s Funding Committee and serves on the Executive Committee and the Pro Bono Task Force. Previously, he served on the commission’s Action Plan for Justice Working Group as well as the Aranda Access to Justice Award Selection Committee. He is the legal services representative on the commission, having been recommended by a vote of all 100 recipients of the State Bar’s Legal Services Trust Fund Program.

He has also been an active member of the Bench-Bar Coalition and received that group’s 2007 Legal Services Participant Award.

In 1999, Mr. Babcock was appointed to the Judicial Council’s Civil and Small Claims Advisory Committee, where he served until 2004. In the past, he also cochaired the Orange County Bar Association’s Pro Bono Committee and the State Bar’s Legal Services Section. From 1992 to 2000, Mr. Babcock regularly served as a small claims court temporary judge.

Mr. Babcock has received several other awards, including the Orange County and Long Beach Chapter of the Anti-Defamation League’s Marcus Kaufman Jurisprudence Award (2007); the U.C. Davis School of Law’s Distinguished Alumni of the Year Award (2003); and the California Alliance for Consumer Education’s Excellence in Consumer Education Award (1997). He is a frequent lecturer and author on pro bono and access to justice topics.

Before joining the Public Law Center in 2000, Mr. Babcock was the director of litigation and advocacy at Public Counsel in Los Angeles, 1998–2000, and the directing attorney of Public Counsel’s Consumer Law Project, 1989–1998.

*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.*