



# NEWS RELEASE

Release Number: 88

Release Date: December 4, 2006

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

## **New Report Shows Public Confidence In California Courts Remains High**

### *Public's Top Value: Fairness in Court Procedures*

#### *Key Findings on Self-Help Centers, High Volume Courts, Barriers to Justice, and State's Diverse Population*

San Francisco—A new report commissioned by the Judicial Council of California shows that public users of the California courts hold generally high levels of confidence in state courts and have a high regard for judges.

Utilizing focus groups, as well as one-on-one and group interviews with California business and community leaders, a qualitative study set out to understand what the public wants and needs from the courts. The report on the study shows that being treated fairly with dignity and respect is of utmost importance to the public.

Procedural fairness—having a sense that court decisions are made through processes that are fair—is the strongest predictor by far of whether members of the public approve of or have confidence in state courts.

The report results were revealed on Friday at the Judicial Council's public meeting in San Francisco. The phase II study follows a statewide survey completed in 2005 and concludes a two-part judicial branch assessment to determine current levels of trust and confidence in the state courts, and to obtain information concerning expectations and performance of the state courts. (*Trust and Confidence in the California Courts, Phase II: Public Court Users and Judicial Branch Members Talk About the California Courts:* [http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/4\\_37pubtrust.htm](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/4_37pubtrust.htm))

(over)

## Highlights of Key Findings

Key findings include the following:

- **Court information:** Court users and judicial branch members overwhelmingly favor having more self-help centers inside the courthouse. Although relatively few court users have used court Web sites, those that have are very positive about the content and helpfulness of these sites.
- **Experience in a court case:** Californians who use some of the highest volume courts – such as family or traffic court – often report feeling stress and confusion. These court users are more likely to give the courts a less favorable rating. On the other hand, most court users with jury experience give the courts high ratings and they appreciate recent changes in the jury system.
- **Barriers to taking a case to court:** Finding a good, affordable attorney is the main barrier preventing Californians from taking a case to court. As a result, there has been a rise in the number of self-represented litigants in court, which has led to court delays and drains on court resources, according to judicial branch members.
- **Needs of a diverse population:** California’s diverse population creates many challenges for the courts in meeting the needs of court users. Court users and branch members agree that the courts need more interpreters. Continuing to strive for more diversity on the bench would strengthen confidence in the courts among minorities, according to the focus group participants.

The council’s landmark 2005 survey found that 67 percent of the public had a positive attitude about the courts, compared to less than 50 percent in 1992. (*Trust and Confidence in the California Courts: A Survey of the Public and Attorneys:*

[http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/4\\_37pubtrust.htm](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/4_37pubtrust.htm))

The phase II study used focus groups and interviews to seek direct information from court users that would yield specific, effective strategies for addressing customer concerns identified in the 2005 survey.

In addition, the phase II study sought input from judicial officers and court administrators to yield an insiders' perspective on the California courts. These judicial branch members said that improved communication with the public and with others on the bench will allow the courts to better serve the public.

Preliminary findings from the phase II report helped shape the Judicial Council's long-range strategic plan for the judicial branch, adopted last Friday. The results also will assist the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), the council's staff agency, and the trial courts establish future plans and improve training, public education, and community outreach.

#

*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.*