



**NEWS RELEASE** OC 61-11  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
August 30, 2011

## **Court Facilities Working Group Seeks Independent Expert** *Consultant to perform ongoing review and assessment of the courthouse construction program*

SAN FRANCISCO—The new Court Facilities Working Group appointed by Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye has directed the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) to engage an independent consultant who will assist the working group in its oversight of the judicial branch construction program. At its first meeting on August 26, 2011, the working group approved a draft scope of services for the consultant, and a subcommittee of the working group will participate in the selection process.

“We expect the selection process to take 90 days,” said Administrative Presiding Justice Brad R. Hill of the Court of Appeal, Fifth Appellate District, who chairs the oversight committee. “We have a lot of work to do and not much time to come up with our recommendations. The combination of more than \$500 million of court construction funds that were borrowed, swept to the General Fund, or reallocated to judicial branch budget operations this fiscal year and the breadth of the branch’s responsibility to build and maintain courthouses around the state make it imperative that we act quickly. The independent oversight consultant will perform ongoing review and assessment of the courthouse construction program, including governance, decisionmaking, and implementation.” Justice Hill added that the consultant will prepare a report required by recent legislation concerning the process, transparency, costs, and timeliness of the construction program’s procurement processes. That report is due to the Legislature by January 15, 2013.

In its initial meeting, the [25-member working group](#), which includes active and retired justices and judges, court executive officers, members of the State Bar, local government leaders, and industry leaders, reviewed the history of the court facilities program since its establishment under the Trial Court Facilities Act of 2002, including its legislative underpinnings, funding mechanisms, prioritization of projects, and the current status of the 41 projects authorized under Senate Bill 1407. Because of unprecedented cuts to the account that funds construction projects, the working group is looking at the entire roster of immediate and critical need projects currently under way. While its initial focus is the court construction program, the working group will also oversee statewide operations and maintenance responsibilities for more than 500 buildings that are part of the branch facilities program.

Before its next meeting on October 19 and 20, the working group will gather input from the 34 superior courts slated to receive new or renovated courthouses under SB 1407. The group expects to develop recommendations on the construction program to submit to the Judicial Council soon

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thereafter on which projects should proceed, which should be deferred or delayed, and whether any projects should be canceled altogether.

The judicial branch facilities program serves to provide local communities in California with safe, secure, accessible courthouses, responsive in serving the needs of the public. These vital infrastructure projects, funded by court users statewide, generate jobs, thereby contributing to local economies and state tax revenues. The resulting buildings will improve access to justice and serve as enduring symbols of the importance of the judicial process to democracy.

More information: [Chief Justice Names Court Facilities Working Group Members](#) (July 12, 2011)

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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.*