

The budget crisis in California's Third Branch once again loomed large during the Judicial Council's public business meeting. The expanded public comment period featured a half dozen special interest advocates lobbying for additional resources.

Chief Deputy Director of the AOC Ron Overholt offered a hopeful prediction that the legislature and the Governor will recognize the meltdown in the branch, and take remedial action.

Ron Overholt, AOC Chief Deputy Director *"I do believe, given the kind of attention that's been raised and discussion that's taken place in the legislature, will bear fruit next year. If there's a way to survive this year, hopefully we will take that opportunity and work on next year."*

In the meantime, the San Francisco Bar asked the council to authorize courts to establish new, additional fees in complex civil cases – to help plug the budget hole. The council was cautioned that they lack authority to do that.

Mary Roberts, AOC Office of the General Council *"Can such a fee be established? Absolutely yes. What body has the authority to establish that fee? The body is the legislature."*

Council members voted to decline the fee request. But they did agree to consider new statewide fees or fee increases to recommend to the legislature.

An attempt to restore hundreds of millions of dollars in lost funding was identified as a top priority.

And the Council approved budget proposals for next year for the Supreme Court, Courts of Appeal, trial courts, and the Judicial Council/Administrative Office of the Courts.

Hon. Richard Huffman, Financial Accountability/ Efficiency Committee *"Important to understand that there are no staffing increases identified in these BCP's for the administrative office, nor do any of them expand the responsibilities or duties of the administrative office."*

The timeline is tight - budget proposals are due in the Department of Finance September 12th.

Kim Turner, Judicial Council Member *"What we're looking for today is just to give authority to start moving forward on the urgent business of trying to get restoration of funding for the courts and to place some broad parameters on how that would work."*

The Trial Court Facility Modifications budget has also been crippled – down from \$50 million to only \$30 million for '11-'12.

Hon. David Power, Facility Modifications Working Group *"As routine maintenance is deferred, the need for facility modifications increases, putting even more pressure on the facility modification budget."*

The priority list was approved, which essentially allows for funding of only the most urgent, emergency fixes.

Hon. William Highberger, Facility Modifications Working Group *“It’s a totally reactive environment. It’s not as it ought to be, but that’s the reality.”*

Positive news on the Court Case Management System. Justice Bruiniers reported that the core product – with 6 million lines of code - has been accepted. And it is under budget.

Hon. Terence Bruiniers, Chair, CCMS Executive Committee *“We are there. We have successfully completed the development activities for CCMS. Our CCMS development costs will come in at \$315.5 million; that’s actually about \$3.6 million less than we last reported to the legislature.”*

An action plan generated by an independent review of CCMS will be presented to the council at the October meeting.

The complete record of Council action is on the court’s website.

I’m Leanne Kozak reporting in San Francisco for California Courts News.