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Judicial Branch Leaders Move to Address State Budget Cuts

Judicial Council Public Meeting Set for July 15

San Francisco—California’s judicial branch leaders moved quickly today to address the \$350 million in budget cuts that were approved by the state Legislature on Tuesday. In addition to those reductions, the Legislature swept \$310 million from the State Court Facilities Construction Fund, which will delay some courthouse projects for up to year.

The Judicial Council’s Trial Court Budget Working Group is examining the impact of the new budget and will meet on July 13 to finalize a formal recommendation for allocations to the trial courts and forward them to the Administrative Director and the Judicial Council. In addition, the six Administrative Presiding Justices of the Courts of Appeal and their court administrators will be reviewing options for implementing reductions in the appellate courts.

The Administrative Office of the Courts is also surveying trial and appellate courts to determine how the severe budget reductions will impact the judicial branch. The Judicial Council will meet on July 15 to review recommendations and to make a final decision on the allocations. It is routine for the Judicial Council to hold a meeting to allocate the judicial branch budget after the State Budget is finalized.

“This is an extremely challenging time for California’s courts and I am committed to finding ways to minimize the effect of this devastating budget cut on both the courts and the citizens who use them every day,” said Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye.

“Because of the cumulative effect of cuts to the courts in the last three years, we are facing individual court closures, fewer services to court users, and the possibility of more furloughs and layoffs for employees,” she continued. It will affect everyone and anyone connected to the courts

in civil cases, criminal cases, family law, probate, and small claims.”

The Trial Court Budget Working Group includes 15 trial court presiding judges and 15 trial court executive officers who review the fiscal needs of all 58 trial courts in developing recommendations. Subcommittees of the working group have already begun meeting to review and recommend how special funds should be used for programs next year.

Last week, 122 leaders of the California trial and appellate courts sent a letter to the Governor and members of the state Legislature that warned of the devastating impact of further reductions to the judicial branch budget at the time the \$150 million cut was announced. (See www.courts.ca.gov/documents/NR23-11.pdf .)

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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 ensures leadership and excellence in court administration.