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Judicial Council Approves Emergency Funding for SF Superior Court

San Francisco – By a unanimous vote, the Judicial Council of California today approved allocation of \$2.5 million in one-time emergency funding to the Superior Court of San Francisco County to assist the court in reducing courtroom closures and staff layoffs.

The emergency funding, with other resources made available to the court, would enable the court to keep open a sufficient number of courtrooms and provide other services to adjudicate both civil and criminal cases and provide the public with equal and timely access to justice.

The agenda and transcript for today’s Judicial Council meeting are available at <http://www.courts.ca.gov/3044.htm> .

“The spirited discussion at today’s meeting reflects the Judicial Council’s unwavering commitment – not to just one group of citizens – but to the entire state of California,” stated Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye, chair of the Judicial Council. “Despite false information about the Judicial Council’s intentions and ad hominem attacks on the AOC and the council, we remain vigilant in our obligation to improve the administration of justice for all Californians.”

The council took the action in response to the Superior Court’s emergency funding request, which results in part from the unprecedented \$350 million reduction in the statewide judicial branch budget in fiscal year 2011-2012. The council’s action included a number of conditions to assure accountability and appropriate use of the emergency funding.

The \$2.5 million will come from a special reserve fund that is part of the Trial Court Improvement Fund. The Improvement Fund was created by Government Code section 77209 and requires a portion of the fund to be set aside and not allocated until after March 15 of each year unless allocated to a court or courts for “urgent needs.” The total amount of the fund is \$9.89 million for fiscal year 2011-2012.

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In addition to the \$2.5 million in “urgent needs” funding, the Judicial Council has already authorized \$645,960 for the Superior Court to continue operations of its two complex civil litigation departments. This funding is from the statewide Judicial Administration Efficiency and Modernization Fund for six courts, including San Francisco, that participate in the council’s complex civil litigation program.

Conditions of Emergency Funding

As part of its action today, the Judicial Council approved certain conditions that will apply to the allocation of emergency funding. Council members noted that they are in the process of developing new statewide criteria for courts to use when applying for such funds. The conditions approved for the San Francisco include the following:

- The court will use necessary resources to keep open 11 courtrooms that had been identified for closure and reduce the number of staff layoffs.
- The “urgent needs” funding must be used for the sole purpose of keeping open a sufficient number of courtrooms and providing other necessary services during the 2011-2012 fiscal year to meet the Superior Court’s obligation to adjudicate all matters, both civil and criminal, that come before the court.
- The Superior Court may reduce its Fund Balance below the amount that the court would otherwise be required to maintain under the council-adopted Fund Balance Policy.
- The Superior Court must submit two written reports to the Judicial Council – one in six months and another on August 1, 2012 – on how it used the “urgent needs” funding.
- The Superior Court will repay without interest \$2.5 million within five years.

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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.