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Chief Justice Urges Bench/Bar Leaders To Work Together to Restore Judicial Branch Budget

Four-Point Plan Outlined for Future of Courts

Long Beach—In her First Annual Address to the State Bar of California, Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye urged the bench and bar to work together to restore some portion of the judicial branch budget so that state courts can protect the rights of Californians. The Chief Justice made her remarks on Saturday at the State Bar’s Annual Meeting in Long Beach.

“This year, the judicial branch budget is only 2.4 percent of the state budget and we also unwillingly contributed \$1.1 billion back to the General Fund,” the Chief Justice declared. “That’s 2.4 percent of the state budget to protect the constitutional rights of 38 million Californians, to provide a place for the resolution of civil disputes, to protect public rights, and to protect the rule of law.”

“I recognize that there has been a national, global, state economic downturn and I recognize as a third branch of government, we need to do our part,” the Chief Justice continued. “We have done our part, admirably and heroically with shrinking resources, trying to provide the same level service. We’ve done a number of things. But the remedy doesn’t exist to fix the branch with 2.4 percent of the state budget.”

In searching for remedies, the Chief Justice has convened a series of meetings with the State Bar, bar association leaders, and the California Judges Association to enlist their support, ideas, and voice in seeking restoration of some portion of the judicial branch budget.

New Era of Judicial Branch Governance

Focusing on changes in the judicial branch, Chief Justice Cantil-Sakauye stated, “... (I)n my first nine months in office, I’ve travelled up and down

the state, met many of you, talked with you, and I've heard your concerns. What I have done in the last nine months is try to put some of those concerns to rest as best I could."

Examples of the Chief Justice's "new era in judicial branch governance" are the following:

- Appointment of judges to oversee two of the judicial branch's largest infrastructure projects—the California Case Management System and the Court Construction program.
- Naming a special committee of court and government leaders to evaluate and prioritize the services of the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) and to make recommendations to the Judicial Council.
- Appointment of new court leaders to key committees of the Judicial Council and broadening membership to encourage the application of jurists to all committees.
- With Judicial Council input, made all meetings of the Judicial Council public and has invited public comments at each business meeting.

Four-Point Plan for the Future

The Chief Justice also stated she has developed a four-point plan to guide the future of the courts during these economically challenging times.

Her first priority is keeping courts open across the state. "It will be a coalition effort, and as we do that—and none of us can succeed alone—it will be the legacy of how the branch was built by collaborative leadership, muscle, and sheer will."

The second priority is strengthening the branch from within. "I thank Chief Justice George for the institution he created, but now it's time for us to advocate for ourselves," Chief Justice Cantil-Sakauye declared. "It's time to take the great talent we have here, the persuasion, the connections and strengthen the branch so that we can move forward and do the best we can for the public, our clients, and ourselves."

The Chief Justice's third priority is to coax the courts into the 21st century—not only by building safe and accessible courthouses by having a user-friendly case management system.

The fourth priority is to engage the public about the important work that both the bench and bar do to protect the rights of the public. The Chief Justice noted that she is planning a civics education initiative later this year, and has already engaged two jurists from the state and federal courts to lend efforts in this regard.

“And amidst all of those plans, I commit to a partnership in working together, in being inclusive, and [to] working with civility and integrity,” the Chief Justice concluded. Addressing the assembled lawyers and judges, she concluded: “I look forward to partnering with you....we have a strong branch and a great bar. That’s why the California judicial branch is the model for the United States.”

A video of the Chief Justice’s remarks is available online at <http://www.youtube.com/californiacourts>.

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