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Judicial Council Announces 2011 Winners of Distinguished Service Awards

San Francisco—The Judicial Council of California has announced the winners of its 2011 Distinguished Service Awards. The highest honors given by the council, the awards are presented to those who demonstrate extraordinary leadership and make significant contributions to the administration of justice in California. The program is now in its 18th year, and the awards will be presented later this year. The recipients follow.

Ronald M. George Award for Judicial Excellence

This award honors members of the judiciary for their extraordinary dedication to the highest principles of the administration of justice. The award was previously called the Jurist of the Year Award.

Administrative Presiding Justice Brad R. Hill, of the Court of Appeal, Fifth Appellate District (Fresno), was honored for his contributions to the statewide administration of justice and for his work to ensure a fair system of justice that is accessible to all Californians.

A distinguished jurist for 20 years, Justice Hill was appointed to the Fresno Municipal Court in 1991 and 7 years later was elevated to the superior court, where he quickly became known as a judicial leader. In 2006, he was elevated to the Court of Appeal and in 2010, was named presiding justice. At the superior court, he was assistant presiding judge for three years and in 2003 was elected presiding judge. He helped guide the court during a fiscal crisis and dramatically reduced the backlog of civil cases by creating the court's first civil division.

Justice Hill has served on and chaired a variety of Judicial Council committees and has been on the forefront of dramatic improvements in

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the judiciary. He has served two full terms on the Judicial Council (2000–2003 and 2007–2010). He currently chairs the Court Facilities Working Group, which oversees the judicial branch court facilities program, as well as the Commission for Impartial Courts Implementation Committee, which is reviewing numerous proposals to improve judicial selection and recruitment. He also heads the Task Force for Criminal Justice Collaboration on Mental Health Issues, which issued a major report on ways to improve cases involving mentally ill offenders that accepted by the council earlier this year.

For more than 10 years, Justice Hill has worked to increase the number of judgeships in California. As a member of the Court Profiles Committee and as its chair in 2009, he led the development of a statewide judicial needs assessment and was instrumental in gaining legislative recognition of the need for more judges in state courts.

Active in judicial education, Justice Hill was part of the committee that helped pioneer the use of cost-saving satellite TV broadcasts of educational programs throughout the state. He also serves on the Working Group on Court Security (2004–present) and the Bench-Bar Coalition (2002–present). Previous committee service included the Judicial Council’s Policy Committee (2002–2003, vice-chair in 2008–2010) and member of the Ralph N. Kleps Award Committee (2006–2007), Court-County Working Group (2005–2006), and Trial Court Executive Management Working Group (2003–2004).

Justice Hill received the President’s Award in 2006 from the California Judges Association for outstanding service to the California judiciary. That same year, the Fresno County Bar Association presented him with the Bernard E. Witkin Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2006, he received the Bench-Bar-Coalition Award from the State Bar in recognition of his “outstanding contributions to the Judicial Branch in California.”

Justice Ronald B. Robie, of the Court of Appeal, Third Appellate District (Sacramento), was honored for his contributions to the statewide administration of justice, including his leadership in judicial education and Kleps Award Committee.

Justice Robie has served on the Court of Appeal since January 2002. He had been a judge of both the Superior and Municipal Courts of Sacramento County since 1983 and was presiding judge of the superior court in 1994–1995. He was named Judge of the Year by the Sacramento County Bar Association in 2002.

He currently is a member of the board of directors of the National Center for State Courts. He is the 2010–2011 chair of the California Commission on Access to Justice and the California Supreme Court Committee on Judicial Ethics Advisory Opinions.

He served as a member of the Commission for Impartial Courts and is chair of its Task Force on Judicial Selection and Retention, which made numerous recommendations to the

Judicial Council to improve judicial selection and retention. He is a former member of the California Judicial Council and the Federal-State Judicial Council.

Since 2002, Justice Robie has chaired the Kleps Award Committee, which selects award recipients for innovative projects that improve court administration of courts.

In addition, he chairs the Governing Committee of the California Center for Judicial Education and Research (CJER) and has taught at many judicial institutes and programs, including a course on the California Environmental Quality Act.

Justice Robie has taught water law and environmental law at the University of the Pacific, McGeorge School of Law since 1970. Before assuming the bench, Justice Robie was a leader in California water matters. He served from 1975 to 1983 as director of the California Department of Water Resources and from 1969 to 1975 as a member and vice-chair of the California State Water Resources Control Board. This followed service as a legislative intern and committee consultant to the California Legislature, Assembly Committee on Water (1960–1969), where he wrote many significant water laws.

In 1975 he served as chair of the Water Committee of the American Bar Association Section of Environment, Energy, and Resources. Since 1974, Justice Robie has been the California reporter for the Rocky Mountain Mineral Law Institute's *Water Law Newsletter* and is a co-author of *California Civil Practice: Environmental Litigation*, first published in 1993 by Thomson-West Publishing Co.

William C. Vickrey Leadership in Judicial Administration Award

This award honors individuals in judicial administration for significant contributions to and leadership in their profession.

Michael D. Planet, Court Executive Officer of the Superior Court of Ventura County, was selected for his outstanding service to the Judicial Council and for improving the administration of justice statewide and in Ventura County.

Before he took office as Court Executive Officer in Ventura in May 2001, Mr. Planet was court administrator for the King County Superior Court in Seattle, Washington. Previously, he had been deputy court administrator and judicial administrator for the Superior Court of Arizona for Maricopa County.

Mr. Planet's activities at the statewide and local level have supported the goals of the Judicial Council by providing access to justice to members of the community. His participation as a member of the Court Case Management System (CCMS) Steering

Committee demonstrates his long-term commitment to modernizing court management and administration through the development of a unified case management system that will improve judicial administration and create efficiencies for courts, justice partners, and members of the public.

The Ventura court has successfully implemented the civil, small claims, probate, and mental health version of CCMS and is one of the three early adopter courts for implementation of the final product.

Mr. Planet also served on the Collaborative Court-County Working Group on Enhanced Collections and was instrumental in providing technical assistance to other courts seeking to improve their court collections. The Superior Court of Ventura County is conducting collections for the Superior Court of Imperial County, which was responsible for collecting approximately \$100,000 per month as of February 2009.

Local programs developed under Mr. Planet's leadership include an elder abuse court and elder law projects, which have helped other courts establish similar programs. "Workshops on the Web" presents video programs from the court's *Family Law Self-Help Workshops* series through the court's website, available to anyone with access to the Internet. This program received a 2009 Granicus Digital Governance Award, which recognizes government agencies for excellence, innovation, creativity, and leadership in using digital technology to improve transparency, public participation, and efficiency.

Mr. Planet also established the Deaf and Hearing-Impaired Community Outreach Program, which added community liaison duties to its American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter positions. Another program, the Quickstart Assessment Center, enables judges to refer defendants for immediate mental health or substance abuse assessments and services, allowing judges to make better-informed decisions. Both programs received honorable mentions from the Kleps Award Committee.

Through partnership with Interface and the United Way of Ventura County, Mr. Planet helped establish a 2-1-1 program. This program includes phones that are installed at key court locations that can be used to find services, including employment resources, information on child care, where to get a meal, where to get shelter, help with care for aging parents, and help for a substance abuse problem. Finally, he established the LEAD program, which provides continuous professional and personal development for court staff, is designed to develop future court leaders.

Mr. Planet was an advisory member of the Judicial Council from 2007 to 2010 and served on four internal committees during that time, including the Commission for Impartial Courts Task Force on Judicial Campaign Finance (2007–2009), Trial Court Budget Working Group (2007–present), Collaborative Justice Courts Advisory Committee (2005–present), Kleps

Award Committee (vice-chair, 2002–present), and Court Executives Advisory Committee (2002–present.)

Bernard E. Witkin Amicus Curiae Award

This award honors individuals other than members of the judiciary for their outstanding contributions to the courts of California.

Joseph W. Cotchett, partner at the law firm of Cotchett, Pitre & McCarthy, was selected for his decades of dedicated service to California’s judicial branch and his commitment to improving the administration of justice.

One example of Mr. Cotchett’s commitment to equal justice was demonstrated by a case he filed pro bono against the United States on behalf of 8,600 Amerasian children in the Philippines who were left in villages after the closing of the Subic Bay Naval Base. The case resulted in a settlement that gave U.S. aid to children fathered by U.S. servicemen and led to a television documentary on the subject.

Recently, Mr. Cotchett successfully represented parties in a lawsuit to ensure continued ownership by the State of California of appellate judicial facilities, including the Ronald M. George State Office Complex in San Francisco, the headquarters for the California Supreme Court and Court of Appeal, First Appellate District; and the Ronald Reagan State Building in Los Angeles, which houses the Supreme Court’s branch office and the Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District.

Mr. Cotchett’s service to California has earned him numerous awards and citations, including his April 2011 induction into the Trial Lawyers Hall of Fame for his lifetime of representing the underdog in the courtroom, the 1996 Anti-Defamation League’s Distinguished Jurisprudence Award, and the 2000 Presidential Award of Merit from Consumer Attorneys of California.

He has served on the California Judicial Council (1997–1978), Commission on Judicial Performance (1985–1989), Commission on the Future of the Courts (1991–1994), Commission for Impartial Courts (2007–2009), and Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care (2006–2011). Throughout his career, Mr. Cotchett has advocated for statewide policies and proposals advanced by the Judicial Council and facilitated discussion and consensus-building among the sister branches of government.

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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.