

New chief justice urges local lawyers and judges to work with Legislature

dwalsh@sacbee.com

Published Friday, Feb. 11, 2011

The California Supreme Court's new chief justice, Tani Cantil-Sakauye, is calling for Sacramento-area judges and attorneys to "step up" and apply for positions on statewide committees that advise the Judicial Council, the policymaking body of the state court system.

"There is such talent and passion" in the region's legal community, "and we need to take advantage of that," Cantil-Sakauye said Thursday in an interview with The Bee.

She should know. She is a native of Sacramento who served on trial and appellate courts here before being tapped last year by then-Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger as his pick to replace retiring Chief Justice Ronald M. George.

She mentioned specifically the Liaison Committee as one that would benefit greatly from having someone from her hometown as a member. It is the committee that interfaces with the Legislature, which controls the judicial branch's appropriations, and lawyers and judges in the Sacramento area tend to be more familiar with the ins and outs of the Capitol, she noted. They also have easier access to lawmakers, she added.

"We (the judiciary) have to avoid politics, and it is sometimes difficult to get across that we are an independent branch of government," Cantil-Sakauye said, recalling that, up until 14 years ago, courts were partially funded by the counties. "We need some form of established communication with our legislative and executive partners."

Even within the judicial branch, there is a lot of misunderstanding, especially among newer judges, as to how administration of the courts works, she said.

She first sounded the local call to arms during a talk to the Sacramento County Bar Association in early December, after she had been named by the governor but a month before she took her seat on the high court.

And she was expected to renew it Thursday evening in remarks to more than 900 proud supporters at a dinner and celebration of her appointment at the Radisson Hotel.

The testimonial, "which to my knowledge will be the largest law-related event in the history of our city, will be a demonstration of what it means to have 'one of our own' as the chief justice,"

said Arthur Scotland, retired presiding justice of the 3rd District Court of Appeal and master of ceremonies at Thursday's event.

The 2011-12 state budget includes a \$200 million cut in funding for the courts, and that's on top of a carried-over \$140 million deficit.

Cantil-Sakauye said the shortfall will be met, at least in part, with some reductions in service, hoped-for fee increases and reallocation of resources.

"My highest priority is to avoid the courthouse closings and the layoffs of the past two years," she said.

She also does not want to resort to allowing judicial vacancies to linger as a cost-saving device.

"We want those seats filled as fast as the governor can do it," she said. "I want Justice Moreno's replacement chosen as quickly as Gov. (Jerry) Brown is able to do it."

Associate Justice Carlos R. Moreno has announced he is stepping down from the Supreme Court.

Based on a recent discussion she had with Brown, Cantil-Sakauye said, "I know they're moving on it." She said the governor told her he wants to keep her in the loop on the selection process, and invited her to give him the names of anyone she believes would be qualified.

[© Copyright The Sacramento Bee. All rights reserved.](#)