



Superior Court of California County of Merced BUDGET SNAPSHOT



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
OF THE COURTS
OFFICE OF GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

January 2014

Budget and Program Priorities for FY 2014-15

The Court continues to address funding reductions and unfunded costs by decreasing court services in almost every area including reductions in filling vacant positions. Assisting the public/ self-represented individuals is a priority for the court. Increased and improved automation for accessing court services is also a priority. We continue to experience delays in processing court documents due to staff reductions.

Self-Help / Mediation / Facilitator Services

Combined Self Help Center and Family Law Facilitator Hours into one office, and reduced service hours from 40 hours per week to 30 hours per week further reductions are being considered for the future. The public is served on a limited first come-first serve basis. Individual appointments no longer exist.

Court Reporters / Interpreter Services

- No reduction in court reporters. The court is using electronic recording equipment in authorized case types as of last year in order to save costs.
- Users now have to provide their own court reporter for family law.
- Merced County has a very high non-English speaking population, so reducing interpreters is not being considered.

Counters / Clerks / Telephones

- As of October 2011, all clerks' offices close at 3:00 pm, allowing available staff time to process documents.
- Court users wait for one hour for traffic information on a normal basis. Some court phone lines don't open until 10:00 AM.
- May have to reduce hours at a branch location if there are further budget cuts.

Closed Courtrooms

We discontinued hearing court in two rural cities, where traffic and small claims cases (predominantly) were heard in a city council chambers; all citizens who utilized this service now must drive 20 miles to a main branch court that has inadequate court facilities.

Staff Impacts / Furloughs / Layoffs / Unfilled Vacancies

- At the beginning of FY 2013-14 we eliminated two paid intern positions.
- In FY 2012-13, we laid off employees and four paid interns; four more intern positions were vacated by attrition
- Froze employee step increases in FY 2010-11 and FY 2011-2012.
- Froze most vacant positions; we are only filling essential positions. In FY2012-13, the court instituted a voluntary separation incentive program; current vacancy rate is 21.5%
- Furloughs were instituted in FY 2009-10 and FY 2010-11 (12 days) and expanded in FY 2011-12 (9-13 days).

Court Security / Safety / Facilities

Traffic building inadequate: not ADA compliant, no public wait area, reduction in court security services, and no employee restroom. Los Banos Branch Court has no space for in-custody defendants, and no security cameras in holding area.

Availability of Judicial Officers

We use visiting judges for most of the year due to judicial vacancy. Currently awaiting 2 new judgeships, pending approved funding.

Budget Considerations

Budgeted Revenues* FY 2013-2014	\$14,502,713
<u>Total Revenues* FY 2008-2009</u>	<u>\$15,565,104</u>
Five-Year Revenue Reduction	-\$1,062,391
<small>*Excludes Sheriff-Provided Security</small>	
Current Year Unfunded Employee Health Benefits and Retirement Costs	-\$684,656
Share of \$60 million augmentation	\$470,828

Court Demographics

Population Served	258,736
Square Miles Covered	1,972
Total Number of Court Facilities	6
Filled Staff Positions FY 2013-2014	118
<u>Filled Staff Positions FY 2008-2009</u>	<u>144</u>
Lost Positions in 5 years	-26 (18% reduction)

Court Leadership

Presiding Judge	Hon. Brian L. McCabe
Court Executive Officer	Linda Romero Soles
Executive Office Contact	(209) 725-4127

Budget Challenges for FY 2014-15

- *Service is delayed to the extent that court users must wait much longer for assistance at Clerk's Offices and on the telephone. The necessary but increased in use of drop boxes for filing by public has impacted backlogs.*
- *Due to reduced office hours, 15-20 individuals are turned away from the Self-Help Center per week.*
- *Backlogs have further increased due to staff reductions.*