

Superior Court of California County of Merced BUDGET SNAPSHOT



JUDICIAL COUNCIL
OF CALIFORNIA
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

February 2015

Budget and Program Priorities for FY 2015-16

The Court continues to address funding reductions and unfunded costs by decreasing court services in almost every area including not filling vacant positions. Assisting the public/self-represented individuals is a priority for the Court. Modern and enhanced automation for accessing Court services is also a priority. The Court continues to experience delays in processing court documents due to lack of resources.

Self-Help / Mediation / Facilitator Services

We combined Self-Help and the Family Law Facilitator into one office, reducing service hours from 40 hours per week to 30. The public is served on a first come-first served basis with a daily limit imposed court users

Court Reporters / Interpreter Services

- No reduction in court reporters. The court is using electronic recording equipment in authorized case types as of 2013 in order to save money
- Litigants must provide their own reporters in family law matters
- We have a high non-English speaking population, so reducing interpreters is not being considered at this time

Access

- Clerks' offices close and telephones are not answered after 3:00 pm to provide staff time to process documents. Increased volume of documents in drop boxes due to restricted service hours
- Longer wait times on the phone and at the counters due to reduced hours
- May reduce hours at a branch location if there are further revenue cuts
- Discontinued traffic and small claims in two rural locations; court users must now drive an additional 20 miles each way to a facility that is inadequate to handle the volume of people

Operational Efficiencies

- Implemented new case management system to enhance access to justice. E-filing component to be available by June 2015. It is anticipated that internal savings will be realized and backlogs will be reduced as a result of implementation
- Technological jury service improvements have been made

Staff Impacts / Furloughs / Layoffs / Unfilled Vacancies

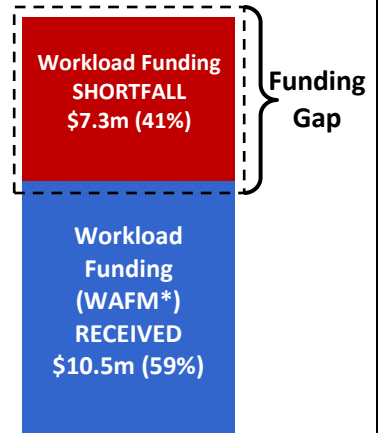
- Froze employee step increases in FYs 2010-11 and 12; 12 furlough days were instituted in FYs 2009-10 and 11, and 13 days in FY 2011-12
- Froze most vacant positions; only essential positions are being filled. Instituted a voluntary separation incentive program in FY 2012-13; current vacancy rate is 21.6%

Court Security / Safety / Facilities

- Traffic building is not ADA compliant, has no waiting area, reduced security, and no public restroom.
- Los Banos facility has no space for in-custody defendants
- Main court lobby inadequate for queuing and security screening

Funding Shortfall

***WAFM is the Workload-based Allocation & Funding Methodology. It describes how much funding courts need based on their workload. In the current year, the workload-based allocation needed in Merced was calculated at \$17.8 million but the court received \$10.5 million. See reverse for a detailed explanation of how WAFM is calculated.**



Court Demographics

Population Served	264,922
Square Miles Covered	1,972
Total Number of Court Facilities	6

Court Leadership

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

Judicial Officers

Currently awaiting two new judgeships, pending approved funding.

Budget Challenges for FY 2015-16

Service will continue to be delayed due to staff reductions which have resulted in longer response times for phone and counter assistance. Backlogs have further increased due to staff reductions. The necessary but increased use of drop boxes has added to backlogs. Also, the 1% cap on fund balances limits our capacity to maintain infrastructure, let alone develop enhancements to better serve the public in the future.

The Workload-based Allocation & Funding Methodology (WAFM)

The Workload-based Allocation & Funding Methodology (WAFM) calculates the total funding needed for California's 58 trial courts based on case filings, workload and other factors.

To do this, WAFM relies on results from what we call the Resource Assessment Study (RAS) model to estimate total staffing needed using a weighted caseload model. Developed in partnership with national experts, the RAS model is based on a time study of over 5,000 case processing staff in 24 California trial courts. The study established a set of caseweights (amount of time in minutes to process a case from initial filing through any post-disposition activity) understanding that certain types of filings take more time and resources to handle than others. The weighted filings are used to estimate total staff needed in each court.

The WAFM model converts the staff need data into dollars, taking into account average salaries, benefits, operating expenses and equipment, and the local cost of labor using the Bureau of Labor Statistics as a benchmark. A "funding floor" is applied to the smallest trial courts because there is a basic operating threshold that must be met in order to provide service to the public. In other words, California's small courts do not have economies of scale, and yet there are basic expenditures that even the smallest courts must make. The result is, for each court, an estimate of the core operations funding required to adequately process its workload. This is known as the court's WAFM share.

Starting in FY 2013-14, a portion of each court's allocation is being recalculated according to its WAFM share. (A court's WAFM share is different from the courts' historical share of the statewide funding. The WAFM calculation tells us what the trial courts need to function based on current filings, whereas the historical share was based on the amount each court received from its county.)

Unfortunately, the total WAFM funding needed for all 58 courts exceeds the funding currently appropriated in the state budget by as much as \$800 million. (This is the WAFM funding gap.) To manage the budget reductions resulting from the implementation of WAFM in the absence of full trial court funding, the Judicial Council approved applying WAFM incrementally to each court's historical share of statewide funding, applying it 100% only to "new" money appropriated in the budget. New money is any undesignated general court operations funding increase above the FY 2012-13 State funding level.

The rules of application adopted by the Judicial Council are as follows:

- Each year beginning in FY 2013-14, and through/including FY 2017-18, incrementally more of the historical (base) funding (using FY 2012-13 as the base) will be subject to WAFM, until 50% of the FY 2012-13 base is distributed according to WAFM;
- All undesignated court operations state funding increases after FY 2012-13 are distributed according to the WAFM shares; and
- For each dollar of new state funding, one dollar of the historical base will be reallocated using WAFM.