



# Superior Court of California County of Santa Clara BUDGET SNAPSHOT

February 2016



JUDICIAL COUNCIL  
OF CALIFORNIA  
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Risé Jones Pichon, Presiding Judge

David H. Yamasaki, Court Executive Officer

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## Court Service Highlights in the Current Year

- Implementation of new case management system for Civil, Family, Juvenile and Probate operations
- Maintained court reporter services in non-mandated areas
- Avoided further reductions in public service hours and operating court rooms

## Court Service Highlights in Detail

- Implementation of traffic ticket/infraction amnesty program
- Implementation of Phase 1 of our case management system
- Planned implementation of e-filing in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of FY 2015-16
- Completion of Family Justice Center Courthouse in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of FY 2015-16

## Court Service Reductions in Detail

### Impact of WAFM funding reductions

- **Self-Help/Mediation/Facilitator Services**
  - Reduced Self-Help days from 4 (four) to 3 (three)
  - Reduced Small Claims Advisory services to e-mail only
- **Court Reporters/Interpreters**
  - Increased court reporter vacancies and reduced services due to fiscal reductions
  - Increased workload and delays in court hearings due to lack of certified and registered interpreters
- **Counters/Clerks/Telephones**
  - Reduced public service hours by closing at 3:00 p.m. (from 4:30 p.m.)
  - Reduced number of operating service windows due to budget reductions
  - Increased backlogs in conjunction with reduced staffing levels
  - Reduced telephone services as a result of redirecting staff to support customers appearing in person
- **Courtroom Closures**
  - Since 2009, a total of 9 courtrooms have been closed courtwide. There are no immediate plans to re-open any of these departments due to fiscal reductions
- **Impact of closed Courtrooms**
  - Reduced workforce by 300 employees since 2008, making staffing levels 37% lower than 2008
- **Judicial Officers**
  - We will be carrying 5 (five) commissioner vacancies at the conclusion of this fiscal year

## Budget Challenges and Priorities

### Challenges

Despite the introduction of additional funding for the trial courts, the continued reduction in local funding to Santa Clara court resulting from the Workload Allocation and Funding Methodology (WAFM) has required us to continue reducing our workforce and services to the public.

Today, our staffing level stands at 566 employees, down significantly from 860 in 2008. This reduction prompted (already implemented) courtroom closures, and continues to contribute to significant delays in scheduling court hearings and processing petitions filed at our windows. With costs continuing to escalate and funding continuing to remain flat, we may be required to reduce our staffing even more, worsening our backlogs and delays.

Efforts to balance our budget by reducing staff have also prompted us to maintain vacancies in court commissioner positions which previously served in traffic and small claims courtrooms in the cities of Palo Alto and Morgan Hill. With these staff reductions and courtroom closures, litigants in our County are required to take longer amounts of time from their work at considerable expense (including lost wages, gas, parking, etc.) to resolve their cases. Our staff-to-judicial officer ratio continues to be one of the lowest in the state.

### Priorities

Notwithstanding these declining resources, we will be implementing the second phase of our case management system next fiscal year and relocating from 6 separate court facilities into our new Family Justice Center Courthouse. Both of these activities will present operational and budget challenges, and will be our top priorities for funding next budget year.

## Court Demographics

Population Served	1,868,558
Square Miles Covered	1,304
Total Number of Court Facilities	14

## 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' traditional share of the statewide funding. The WAFM calculation tells us what the trial courts need to function based on current filings, whereas the traditional share was based on the amount each court received from its county not taking into consideration the courts' filings or staff needs.)

Unfortunately, the total WAFM funding needed for all 58 courts exceeds the funding currently appropriated in the state budget. (This is the WAFM funding gap.) California's trial courts are underfunded by at least a collective \$444 million. The underfunding is made worse for those courts that experience a reduction of funding based on their WAFM share. 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, applying it fully only to new money appropriated in the budget.

The rules of application adopted by the Judicial Council are:

- Each year beginning in FY 2013-14, and through/including to 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 12-13 base is distributed according to WAFM;
- All new state funding is 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.