

SANTA CRUZ

Population: 271,595 • Authorized Judges: 12 • Staff: 121 FTE
Civil Filings: 3,259 • Criminal Filings: 42,446 • Family/Juvenile Filings: 3,028 • Other Filings: 450

OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

Help more self-represented litigants in family and housing cases at the Self Help/Facilitator's office.

- **Budget reductions have required the elimination of a full-time attorney position, as well as workshops, in our Self-Help Center. Wait times continue to increase for services, as demand continues to rise.**

Ensure court clerks are available when and how people need them.

- **In 2010 a courtroom was closed. That courtroom remains closed. The remaining courtrooms have been impacted by increased caseloads. The public must wait longer for cases to be heard, litigants miss more work and jury trials have become longer as trials cannot begin until court calendars have been completed. The consolidation of traffic, small claims, and unlawful detainer case types into one location because of budget cuts and staff reductions has severely limited access to justice for many court users. Users must now make commutes of up to 2 hours to conduct court business**
- **Clerk's Office hours which were reduced in 2010 have yet to be restored and litigant's experience longer wait times for the processing of documents such as family court custody documents, record clearance petitions and family court mediation appointments.**

Lack of stable funds for Collaborative Courts.

- **Without adequate funding, each year it becomes more difficult to maintain and support the full range of collaborative courts that have become essential in our community (Behavioral Health Court, Veterans Court, Parole Re-Entry Court, Dependency Drug Court, Serial Inebriate Program, and the Downtown Accountability Court).**

Lack of Modern Court Systems.

- **Although a number of steps have been taken to modernize court operations, moving to a fully modernized court is not been achievable due to a lack of funding.**

PRIORITIES FOR REINVESTMENT

Assuming an additional investment in operations funds, we intend to...

- **Self-Represented Litigant Access** – Fill the vacant staff attorney position in the collaborative *Santa Cruz and San Benito Self-Help Center*. This will decrease wait times for customers; Resume Workshops for Self-Represented Litigants for the following subjects: Unlawful Detainers; Small Claims and Criminal Records Clearance.
- **Courtroom Access** – Re-open the courtroom that has been closed since July 2010. This one additional courtroom will improve processing times for criminal cases and permit the support and expansion of collaborative court programs (i.e., Behavioral Health Court; Veterans Court; Parole Re-Entry Court and the Family Preservation Court.) and again offer Traffic Court services in the Watsonville Courthouse.
- **Staffing Enhancements** – Restore some of the vacant clerical staff positions to improve document processing times including for Criminal Records Clearance Cases; Family Law and Civil Judgments and Orders. Increase compensation to improve employee retention and competitiveness within the local job market.
- **Modernization** – Digitize *all* paper court files to improve the efficiency of court operations and improve the public's access to court records. Leverage technology to better assist the public when contacting the court by telephone (Interactive Voice Response); implement live, online "chat" technology for court users and a court date reminder system using text messaging technology.