



Superior Court of California

County of Sierra

BUDGET SNAPSHOT



JUDICIAL COUNCIL
OF CALIFORNIA
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

February 2015

Budget and Program Priorities for FY 2015-16

Service to the public has been and will continue to be negatively impacted as a result of the loss or reduction of key collaborative programs managed with neighboring partner courts in Plumas, Lassen and Nevada.

Self-Help / Mediation / Facilitator Services

- As of December 2012, the family law facilitator's office and non-grant funded self-help services we share with Nevada Court were reduced by 25%
- We are now less able to rely upon regular business hours served by the facilitator's staff due to severe reduction in office hours
- Self-Help satellite office contract has been cancelled

Traffic Processing Counters / Clerks / Telephone

The shared traffic services court with Plumas Superior Court was terminated in November 2014 upon closure of the Plumas-Sierra Regional Courthouse due WAFM based funding reductions suffered by Plumas Court.

Staff Impacts / Furloughs / Layoffs / Unfilled Vacancies

- Our staff has been reduced through retirement and voluntary separation
- We have a 33% vacancy rate, including 2 full-time clerks
- Although proposed funding for FY 2015-16 would be sufficient to fill one of two full-time clerk vacancies, the expense will not be sustainable should the Small Court WAFM Allocation Adjustment (the funding floor) be amended or discontinued

Court Security / Safety / Facilities

The Sierra County Courthouse is a county-shared facility that has recently undergone major restoration including roof, exterior, and window replacements due to an aging and failing roof. We will formally request installation of an ADA public/staff restroom for use on the 2nd floor where currently there are no restroom facilities.

Funding Shortfall

Sierra Court's WAFM formula shortfall has been augmented by an allocation adjustment which was developed for California's smallest courts. This adjustment, referred to as the funding floor, is based on the notion that despite the relative lack of economies of scale, the State's small courts need to provide the most basic court services and public access, and achieve statutorily mandated requirements.

Despite the availability of this funding floor, regional funding shortfalls have negatively impacted public access to traffic, appellate and family law services for Sierra court users. Sierra's internal workloads, previously shared with our collaborative partners in Plumas, Lassen and Nevada Superior Courts have increased with each year of cuts at those courts.

Due to the closure of the shared regional courthouse in Portola, Sierra's traffic violators must travel an additional 2-3 hours and negotiate hazardous conditions in winter to appear in Downieville in lieu of Portola. Additionally, we must reabsorb the traffic processing and hearing case load at the main courthouse in Downieville where staff is already overly burdened.

The shared office of the Sierra-Nevada courts for the AB 1058 family law facilitator can no longer absorb our combined public contract. Sierra's needs for services have been significantly reduced as a result of Nevada Court's funding limitations, which have also increased Sierra's workload.

Court Demographics

Population Served	3,089
Square Miles Covered	962
Total Number of Court Facilities	1

Court Leadership

Presiding Judge Court Executive Officer Executive Office Contact	Hon. John P. Kennelly Lee Kirby (530) 289-3698
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Budget Challenges for FY 2015-16

Since 1998, Sierra has maintained an internal network case management system, which has now reached end of its life; it must be replaced before a more-than-likely critical failure occurs causing the loss of 20 years of electronic case records. Despite the possibility that Sierra will receive sufficient operational funding next fiscal year, that funding is not sufficient to make up for the mandated loss of all but 1% of our fund balance, resulting in the termination of any planned replacement of this aging, proprietary and unsupported system.

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 case weights (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.