



# Superior Court of California County of Siskiyou BUDGET SNAPSHOT



Hon. William J. Davis, Presiding Judge

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## Court Service Highlights in the Current Year

- **Upgraded case management system**
- **New court website**
- **Implemented new optional payment methods for civil and family Law court users**

## Court Service Highlights in Detail

### Upgraded case management system

The court went live on its upgraded case management system (CMS) on February 16, 2016. The CMS is a web-based platform and allows for greater efficiencies for the public, justice partners and court personnel.

### New court website

Our new court website is user friendly and well organized. It provides a tremendous amount of information in an accessible manner. It allows a user to get information on their case, make a payment, and retrieve information about jury service or seeking self-help services.

### Implemented new optional payment methods for civil and family law court users

The court is now set up to accept credit and debit cards in our civil and family law departments, in addition to accepting cash or checks. This will create efficiency for our court users.

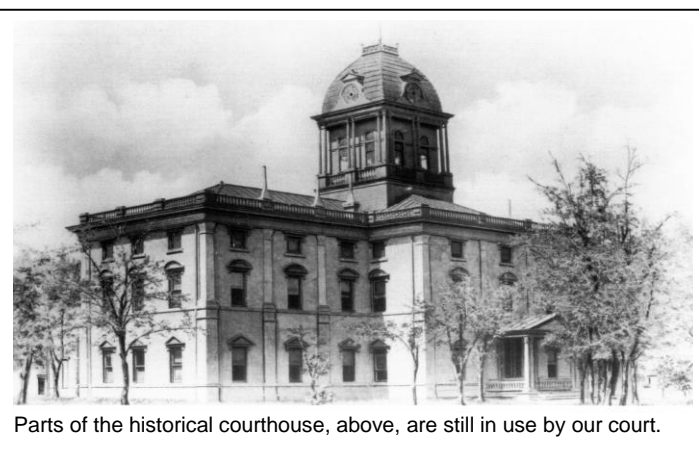
### Court services that create better service processes

Our family law facilitator (FLF) travels circuit with representatives from Social Security, Child Support and Domestic Violence services, and sometimes Legal Aid, regularly stopping at sites around the county, thereby enabling people to access many services in one visit. This is a collaboration funded from the agencies' own budgeted resources. 2015 marked the highest customer count ever in the FLF office; he attributes the high number of customers to getting out into the communities and providing services to people where they live.

## Budget Challenges and Priorities

Due to the adverse effects of WAFM on small courts, we have suffered significant reductions from our historical funding allocation, leaving us with reduced staff and limited resources. This, coupled with the 1% fund balance reserve restriction, hampers our ability to cover payroll or any unexpected expenses. We have been able to limp along by freezing or eliminating positions, largely through attrition, but this cannot be sustained indefinitely as we are currently at bare bones staff levels. In addition to coping with increasing budget cuts, we are facing possible cuts to our dependency counsel program and AB 1058 commissioner and facilitator services. Without the reinstatement of adequate and stable funding, we will be forced to institute unacceptable limitations on access to justice in our county.

## Historical Section of the Siskiyou County Courthouse (Completed in 1857)



Parts of the historical courthouse, above, are still in use by our court.

## Court Demographics

Population Served	43,554
Square Miles Covered	6,347
Total Number of Court Facilities	2

## **Why do courts need more money if filings are down?**

***Most of California's courts have not been funded at 100% of their need for at least the past five years. Some courts, specifically those that are considered historically under-resourced, have always been chronically underfunded.***

### **How courts are funded**

Trial court revenues can be divided into three categories: state financing sources, grants, and other financing sources. The majority of the courts' revenue comes from the state, and the vast majority of state funding is provided by the Trial Court Trust Fund (TCTF). State financing sources also include reimbursements for court interpreters and other costs. Grant funding for child support commissioners and facilitators is a significant portion of grant revenue. Local fees, local reimbursements, and the recovery of costs for comprehensive collection programs make up a significant portion of other financing sources revenue. Reimbursements are paid to the courts in the amounts they are authorized to spend. Grant funding is allocated to the courts based on amounts they are awarded based on grant applications and program criteria. Local fees and collections are distributed to the courts according to schedules and statutes that govern how much courts are entitled to retain from what is collected. However, these other financing sources account for only a modest amount of all trial court revenues. The majority of funds distributed from the TCTF to the trial courts is determined by way of a statewide filings-based formula called the Workload-based Allocation and Funding Methodology (WAFM) which allocates funds based on each court's share of the estimated statewide funding need calculated from a three-year average of filings and case type at each court.

### **WAFM**

The WAFM calculation begins with resources assessment study which assigns a relative time value to each type of case (felony, unlimited civil, family law, etc.). That value is determined through time studies performed at the courts and research in clerk's offices, self-help centers, and courtrooms. As a result, this method assesses the average amount of processing time each case type requires of court staff. We then multiply this amount of time, called a caseweight, by the court's three-year average of the number of cases filed for that case type. We use the sum of the calculated times for all case types to estimate a staffing need. WAFM then determines an overall 'workload based' funding need for each trial court using that staffing need in combination with information on court employees compensation, operating expenses, and equipment expenditures. WAFM was created by the Judicial Council to establish an equitable way to allocate money to the courts. Prior to WAFM, courts received a share of TCTF funds based on how much funding they received historically from their counties (when trial courts were funded by the counties rather than by the State). The change from local to state funding occurred in 1997 with the passage of the Lockyer-Isenberg Trial Court Funding Act of 1997 (AB 233; Ch. 850, Statutes of 1997). Unfortunately, even with the introduction and use of WAFM as a model, California's courts suffer a shortfall in funding. In fact, courts currently share funding that is less than 100% of their estimated need, which means that just about every court in California receives less money than it needs to serve the public. It is important to stress that WAFM provides a mechanism to distribute money to the courts, but it does not mean there is sufficient money to fund court operations and services.

### **Impact of legislation and ballot initiatives**

Some bills that become law require the courts to perform new functions without providing funding to support those new functions. For example, SB 1134 (Leno; Ch. 785, Statutes of 2016) requires all California courts (trial courts, Courts of Appeal, and the Supreme Court) to rehear specified habeas corpus petitions because that bill changed the standard of review for such cases. As a result of these "do-over" filings and hearings without an appropriation of funding, court revenues must be spent hearing cases a second time, delaying for weeks and months any new cases because no funding was appropriated with this bill. The same is true for ballot initiatives. Prop. 64 allows people who previously had convictions for specified marijuana crimes to petition the courts to have their convictions vacated. Tens of thousands of people in California have been convicted of marijuana violations; they may now be eligible to ask the courts to undo their convictions, but the initiative didn't include funding to help the courts process these requests. That means that courts will spend their revenues to address these marijuana issues, rather than hearing new cases that are filed.

### **Other factors**

Even though fewer cases were filed in 2015 than in 2014, courts are still underfunded no less than \$430 million because: (1) Courts have been historically underfunded. Even though filings are down, they are not down enough to close the gap between what courts need and what they have. (2) More people are representing themselves in court. Since individuals are largely unfamiliar with court procedures, these cases take longer than cases that are tried by lawyers. (3) There are more criminal cases going to trial. Statistics show that since the passage of AB 109 (realignment) and Prop. 47 (felonies converted to misdemeanors in certain cases), the number of trials has increased *and* the length and complexity of trials have also increased. (4) Language services are becoming more critical. The courts face new and increasing responsibilities to manage and provide interpreter services for litigants who are not English speakers. While the services of interpreters are often reimbursed, management and logistics associated with language access are not. (5) Since realignment there have been significant changes to how people are sentenced and the duration courts retain jurisdiction over them, resulting in new hearings, increased paperwork, and other logistics that must be managed by the courts.