

# Superior Court of California County of Sonoma BUDGET SNAPSHOT



JUDICIAL COUNCIL  
OF CALIFORNIA  
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

February 2015

## Budget and Program Priorities for FY 2015-16

- Replacing our antiquated case management system, which will require substantial investment of funds, time, and local justice partner effort
- Increasing internal capacity and staffing levels to reap the benefits of technology by automating manual processes, eliminating data entry redundancy, improving data quality, and overall moving the court toward a digital state and offering e-Government services as appropriate
- Filling vacant legal process clerk positions in order to restore full public hours, from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm
- Restoring/rehiring personnel in key performance areas (number to be determined after a thorough courtwide assessment and availability of funds) to address backlogs, process reengineering, quality control, succession planning, staff cross-training, and support for collaborative justice programs

### Self-Help / Mediation / Facilitator Services

- Less help available for self-represented litigants, resulting in frustration and confusion in addition to time consuming transactions at filing windows and in front of judges
- As a result of reduced self-help staff, service delivery has been modified to more group-focused education and use of volunteers
- While we have improved our waiting time for mandatory child custody mediation appointments, it is still taking 6-8 weeks

### Court Reporters / Interpreter Services

- While able to cover all courtrooms, we have had to use contractor reporters to live within our budget. This in turn has made coordination of coverage and appeal transcripts more convoluted
- The recent statutory changes and statewide Language Access Plan will continue to consume and require more coordination, record keeping, and automation that thus far have not been fully funded

### Counters / Clerks / Telephones

- Civil information window has been eliminated; lobby/public access has been reduced by one (1) hour daily
- Long lines at counters, and delays in service for Civil, Probate, and Family Law matters
- Wait times are up to 30 minutes in the telephone queue
- Family Law backlog on processing daily work is 2.3 to 3 weeks, and judgment processing time is 5 to 6 weeks
- More time is consumed to request/view files and obtain copies
- Limited availability of subject matter experts to respond to process inquiries

### Staff Impacts / Furloughs / Layoffs / Unfilled Vacancies

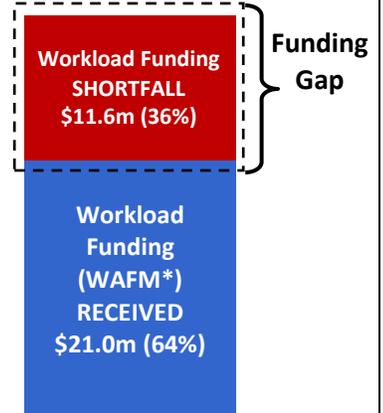
We currently have 50 vacant positions, a 24% staff vacancy rate. The areas more severely impacted are in the supervisory and management levels.

### Court Security / Safety / Facilities

We are approved for a new Criminal Courthouse (anticipated completion date: early 2020). Until then, we continue to grapple with the effects and costs of safety and court security inefficiencies in our current location.

## 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 Sonoma was calculated at \$32.6 million but the court received \$21.0 million. See reverse for a detailed explanation of how WAFM is calculated.**



## Court Demographics

Population Served	490,486
Square Miles Covered	1,768
Total Number of Court Facilities	5

## Court Leadership

Presiding Judge	Hon. Kenneth J. Gross
Court Executive Officer	José Octavio Guillén
Executive Office Contact	(707) 521-6855

## Budget Challenges for FY 2015-16

*Sonoma Court is struggling to meet its mandated requirements in criminal cases, adjusting to criminal justice reforms (AB 109 Criminal Realignment, Proposition 36, and Proposition 47) which leaves fewer resources to address delay reduction in civil, expand alternative dispute resolution programs, and support collaborative justice initiatives. Our reduced level of supervisors and managers has resulted in less attention to long-term planning, training, education, staff development, process reengineering and documentation of best practices.*

## 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.