

# Superior Court of California County of Tulare BUDGET SNAPSHOT

March 2017



JUDICIAL COUNCIL  
OF CALIFORNIA  
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Bret Hillman, Presiding Judge

LaRayne Cleek, Interim Court Executive Officer

(559) 730-5000

## Court Service Highlights in the Current Year

- Increased collaboration with local justice partners
- Expanded IT/technology solutions

## Court Service Highlights in Detail

### Increased collaboration with local justice partners

- We assigned all collaborative court programs to a single judge for consistency, fairness and better use of judicial officer time.
- Efficiencies with local partners have resulted in faster turn-around times in receiving probation reports, bail and OR recommendations, and other interagency documents, resulting in less waiting time and more efficient court visits for the public.
- Court users and partners now can request records online sometimes at no cost to them for scans and emails.

### Expanded IT/technology solutions

- Scanners have been added to the felony divisions so staff can scan and attach criminal minute orders in the new case management system. Expansion to misdemeanor divisions is planned for this year.
- We established a secondary communications site so that the Visalia courthouse remains operational in case of an emergency.
- We installed an enterprise virtual array that more efficiently supports the court's online data storage and management, and increases storage limits.
- Staff completed enterprise security training to learn how to protect the court technology network from viruses, malware and other external attacks, and how to better protect court data.

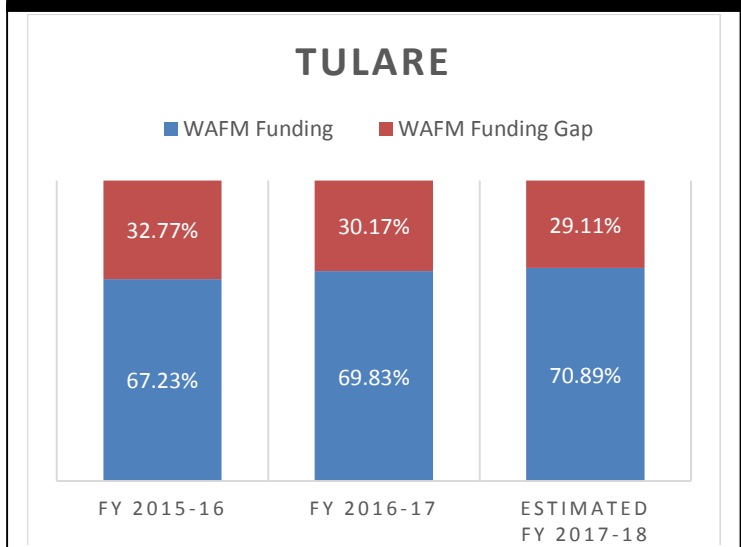
### Other operations improvements

In an effort to reduce the costs of renting space, we reduced the number of felony trial departments and relocated the Visalia small claims and traffic court departments to the newly freed-up courtroom.

## Budget Challenges and Priorities

- Despite public need for court services, the South County Justice Center remains underutilized; the entire third floor is closed due to a lack of staff and judges.
- We continue to struggle finding certified interpreters for criminal cases, which hinders our ability to expand interpreter services into civil and family law cases.
- Positions remain vacant and unfilled because there is no money to hire into them.
- We lack the resources to adequately implement a new court records management system/division, which includes the maintenance of court records.
- The court is underfunded by nearly one-third of our need. (See chart below.)

## Workload Allocation & Funding Gap (see reverse)



## Court Demographics

Population Served	459,446
Square Miles Covered	4,839
Total Number of Court Facilities	6

## 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.