

California Courts News Transcript

Title: Judicial Council on Budget Allocations/CCMS

Date: 10/23/09

The Judicial Council had an unusual session this time. First the new and re-appointed members were sworn in.

All: *"I do."*

One of the highlights of the agenda: allocation of special fund money to support statewide administrative and technology infrastructure, judicial education, complex litigation, alternative dispute resolution, self help and other programs.

For the past few years, for efficiency's sake, these special fund budgets were handled by the Council's Executive and Planning Committee. This time they put it on the full council's agenda – the public meeting – because there are different viewpoints about technology funding.

Justice Richard D. Huffman, 4th Appellate District: *"This type of thing needs to be brought out publicly, we need to get it out on the net, so that people know what the issues are, they can agree or disagree, but at least we do it in an environment where we can be held accountable for the decision that we make."*

The cornerstone technology initiative is the Court Case Management System, called CCMS. The plan calls for development of a case management system unifying all 58 courts in the state. CCMS promises dramatic improvements to day-to-day business operations for the courts and their users – litigants, jurors, attorneys, victims and witnesses. Plus CCMS will provide significant advantages to law enforcement and child welfare and support services. Interim applications are already in production in several courts around the state. But the judicial branch is now absorbing huge budget cuts.

Hon. Ronald M. George, Chief Justice of the Calif. Supreme Court: *"Really there is no fat in our budget. We're through the flesh, we're into the bone and we've had to take very substantial measures to deal with almost \$450 million in cuts."*

One of those measures was to redirect \$130 million from CCMS and other projects to fill the budget holes. So the proposed funding level for CCMS this year, \$90 million, was substantially reduced from what was originally planned. 68% less, in fact; just enough for maintenance and to support continued development. Deployment in the courts will have to go much much slower than planned; initially to just three courts: San Diego, Ventura and San Luis Obispo.

The Chief Justice recently spoke with Governor Schwarzenegger.

Hon. Ronald M. George, Chief Justice of the Calif. Supreme Court: *"I will tell you that the governor was visibly displeased upon learning that the case management system would be delayed in its completion. He, like his two predecessors, with whom I have met over the years, have urged us, even criticized us, for not having a system, a technology system that is statewide."*

California Courts News Transcript

Judge Edmon said she had concerns about the allocation proposal, which significantly reduces fund balances.

Hon. Lee Smalley Edmon, L.A. Assistant Presiding Judge: *"It's a hard conversation to have because I will tell you these are incredibly worthy projects. I like CCMS. I wish we had CCMS in L.A. In my view it's not prudent to spend down the overall funds to that level."*

Hon. Ronald M. George, Chief Justice of the Calif. Supreme Court Chief: *"I am convinced that it's financially prudent and not in any sense reckless to go ahead with recommendations that have been made to us."*

Many courts, like San Diego, currently have ancient computer systems propped up precariously by out of date technology. They believe modernization is necessary, as soon as possible.

Hon Kenneth K. So, San Diego Presiding Judge: *"We're running this 30 year old main frame, Cobol. The programmers are either retiring or deceased, and quite honestly, hoping that this does not crash is not a prudent plan."*

San Diego has partially transitioned to CCMS.

Mike Roddy, San Diego CEO: *"In our particular instance we cannot go back, we cannot stand still, we have got to find a way to move forward, even if that means baby steps and a very reduced budget."*

Hon. Lee Smalley Edmon, L.A. Assistant Presiding Judge: *"I acknowledge that there are a number of courts around the state that have already implemented some CCMS and are incredibly dependent on it and there's no question that should be a top priority of ours to maintain those operations in those courts. Seems to me our top priority ought to be to keeping our courts open, keeping them accessible to the public."*

Mike Roddy, San Diego CEO: *"Technology provides access as much as opening the doors to the public every morning. Without that we can't run our courts either, so I do hope we support the recommendations."*

Some courts say they're very eager to move forward – which will be economical in the long run. Ventura, for example, is currently supporting three separate case management systems.

Mike Planet, Ventura CEO: *"Our planning envisions moving off of 3 to one. Delays in that mean we have to maintain and continue those costs into the future."*

Many courts also want the efficiencies that CCMS will provide.

Mike Planet, Ventura CEO: *"It enhances our ability frankly to provide services at a time where we're losing staff, we're losing court hours, and the business still keeps rolling in. So I would encourage the council's support."*

California Courts News Transcript

Justice Brad R. Hill, Fifth Appellate District *“I would just make the motion that we approve the recommendations so that we can keep this limited funding moving forward and hopefully as things progress and as times get better, we can have the CCMS program that I think we all agree is best for our court system and best for the state of California in terms of biggest bang for the buck for the taxpayers.”*

In the end, the Council approved the allocations, with one dissent from Judge Edmon.

Hon. Ronald M. George, Chief Justice of the Calif. Supreme Court: *“All in favor? Aye. Opposed? No.”*

I’m Leanne Kozak reporting from San Francisco for California Courts News.

[end]