

As the Judicial Branch struggles with hundreds of millions of dollars in budget cuts, court leaders get creative with ways to maintain productive relationships statewide. At this public meeting of the Judicial Council, the Chief Justice recalled that in better times, a rotating team of Judicial Council members made 3 to 4 site visits a year, often hitting 2 or 3 courts on each journey. After talks with judges and staff, the team reported back to the full Council on what they learned.

Hon. Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye, Chief Justice of California *“That program was very fruitful but unfortunately was cut several years ago as a result of budget reductions.”*

A more economical approach is the Council’s new liaison initiative. The Chief named a small team of Council members to each of the 58 courts – to open lines of personalized, informal communication.

Hon. Douglas P. Miller, Calif. Judicial Council *“We are making sure that each trial court has direct access to the Judicial Council, a point of contact to raise concerns and issues. We will rely on Judicial Council members to bring back to the Council any and all issues and concerns.”*

Justice Miller reported that the new liaison initiative is already working.

Hon. Douglas P. Miller, Calif. Judicial Council *“I have brought back a number of incredibly good ideas that I heard from the judges and a number of incredible concerns and immediate and critical concerns that they have. That’s the value of this program.”*

Liaisons have also been assigned to each of the 12 divisions of the Administrative Office of the Courts.

Another efficiency measure has been in development for more than a year. The Trial Court Presiding Judges Advisory Committee and the Court Executives Advisory Committee presented information on the Business Process Reengineering Services program. It’s designed to help trial courts improve productivity, increase efficiencies and reduce costs.

Kim Turner, Marin CEO *“We’re not here to say that this is the new new thing that trial courts are going to do, you know, that they’ve never thought of before. Many courts have been engaged in this process over a long time.”*

Rather, assistance will be available to courts that need it, and ask for it.

Alan Carlson, Orange CEO *“So BPR has been and will continue to be one key tool the courts can use to increase our productivity and reduce costs. As Kim indicated, it’s not a panacea, we can’t get to the point where we do everything with nothing. We have to stop at some point and have a certain number of people to get the work done. But clearly it can make a difference and reduce the impact of the resource cuts that we’ve had in the last couple of years.”*

Council members also considered a proposal to amend ethics standards for private arbitrators. The change would require arbitrators to disclose past professional discipline.

Hon. Terry Friedman, Calif. Judicial Council *“That the more sunshine, as Justice Brandeis said many years ago, the better, to enhance public confidence and enhance transparency.”*

But the Council deferred its decision, until the Rules and Projects Committee determines the appropriate process for reviewing the recommendations.

Council members were also advised that the Strategic Evaluations Committee expects to submit its report on the AOC in April. Details on that and all other agenda items are on the Council’s website.

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