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NEWS RELEASE

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State Court Leaders Oppose More Reductions in Judicial Branch Budget

Sacramento—In an unprecedented letter to the Governor and members of the state Legislature, all 122 leaders of the California trial and appellate courts have expressed their “strong and unified opposition” to legislative efforts that would further reduce the judicial branch budget and erode the civil rights of Californians.

“The impact of this action would be nothing short of catastrophic to the administration of justice and the public we serve,” court leaders declared in response to a proposal last week to reduce the judicial branch budget by \$150 million, on top of a \$200 million budget cut made earlier this year. “The impact of any additional reductions will affect the civil rights of every Californian and render precarious our democratic ideal of justice for all.

“The public may find the clerk’s office closed or courtrooms not in session, as public counter and courtroom hours will be reduced,” the court leaders said. “Conceivably, even entire caseloads may be unserved, as courts may be required to dedicate all available resources to the highest priority filings, like criminal and juvenile proceedings. Victims of domestic violence may not receive protective orders in a timely manner.”

Court leaders also voiced their support for California Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye, who stated last week that the additional budget reductions mean that “courts cannot provide . . . fundamental services or protect the rights of Californians. By marginalizing the courts, California strikes a blow against justice.”

The letter was signed by the 6 administrative presiding justices of the California Courts of Appeal and the 58 presiding judges and 58 court executive officers of the California trial courts.

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“This is the third consecutive year of crippling budget reductions,” the letter declared, noting that the new budget cut of \$150 million means that the judicial branch will have absorbed a cumulative reduction of more than 30 percent in General Fund support.

“In the past two fiscal years, the branch has experienced devastating budget reductions resulting in a permanent decrease in baseline funding of \$297 million,” the letter continues. “In the proposed budget put forward in January, and the budget approved by the Legislature in March, you asked the branch to take an additional unallocated \$200 million cut, loan the State General Fund \$350 million from our State Court Facilities Construction Fund, and loan the State General Fund \$90 million from our Immediate and Critical Needs Account. The branch willingly concurred with your proposals.

“The proposal to take an additional \$150 million cut from the trial courts was and will be unsupportable. The branch represents approximately 2.88% of the state budget, yet the reductions and other budget solutions of \$790 million proposed for this year alone represent 3.5% of the state’s budget solution.

“The public will experience longer lines, backlogs in the processing of filings and judicial orders, and significant encroachment on due process rights of defendants as interpreters become less available and other courtroom support services are sharply diminished. These are but a few of the known impacts to the public if additional cuts are made to the judiciary,” the letter stated.

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