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Judicial Council Seeks Budget to Keep Courts Open and Serve Public

Council Also Seeks New Judgeships and Opposes AB 1208

San Francisco – Recognizing that cumulative budget reductions of \$653 million over the past four years are unsustainable, the Judicial Council of California today agreed that its top legislative priority in 2012 will be to advocate for a judicial branch budget that will protect critical services to the public and keep courts open.

“State courts are on the frontlines of the economic crisis,” declared Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye, Chair of the Judicial Council. “It is essential that judicial branch funding be stabilized in order to keep our courtrooms open and protect the public. To cut the budget further almost certainly will have unwelcome consequences for public safety and the viability of order in our communities.”

This fiscal year, the final judicial branch budget included \$350 million in reductions for trial and appellate courts and \$750 million in loans and redirections to the General Fund. Therefore, the total budget contribution by the judicial branch was \$1.1 billion. Funding allocations to the judicial branch this fiscal year amount to only 2.4 percent of the total State Budget and 1.4 percent of the General Fund.

To restore part of the budget, the council will seek a combination of solutions including General Fund restoration, legislation to implement cost savings and efficiencies, new revenue, and the use of existing revenue, including statewide funds as well as trial court fund balances.

Other Legislative Priorities

At today’s meeting, the council approved another four legislative priorities for 2012:

- Continue to oppose Assembly Bill 1208 and similar efforts to legislate

(more)

fundamental judicial branch governance, lessen the role of the Judicial Council in determining the allocation of funds to the trial courts, or reduce the council's role in ensuring the stability of and providing oversight over trial court operations. The council voted to oppose AB 1208 with one abstention. In 2011, the council opposed AB 1208 through its Policy Coordination and Liaison Committee.

- Continue to advocate for new judgeships. The council has acted repeatedly in recent years to authorize the sponsorship of legislation to secure the 150 most critically needed judgeships. Fifty of these judgeships have been approved, funded, and appointed.
- Ratify the authority of the council to convert vacant subordinate judicial officer positions to judgeships in eligible courts.
- Monitor pension reform proposals as they impact the judicial branch and advocate as appropriate and coordinate these efforts with the California Judges Association and the Judicial Retention and Recruitment Working Group.

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The Judicial Council is the policymaking body of the California courts, the largest court system in the nation. Under the leadership of the Chief Justice and in accordance with the California Constitution, the council is responsible for ensuring the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice. The Administrative Office of the Courts carries out the official actions of the council and ensures leadership and excellence in court administration.