



NEWS RELEASE

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Judicial Council Approves Budget Allocations to Trial Courts

Funding allocations are the first using a new methodology based on workload, shifting funding from some courts to others

SAN FRANCISCO—At its public meeting today, the [Judicial Council](#) approved [recommendations](#) from its [Trial Court Budget Advisory Committee](#) on allocating funds to the trial courts for fiscal year 2013–2014. The committee of judges and court executives developed its funding recommendations at a [public meeting on July 9](#) and based them upon workload, requiring shifts in base historical funding from some courts to others.

“How our limited funding is allocated affects every court and every court user, as up and down our state we continue to see courthouse closures, reduced hours, and staff layoffs and furloughs,” said Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye, chair of the Judicial Council. “So, I was especially appreciative of the statewide perspective that the committee members brought to the task of coming up with an allocation formula that brings a more equitable distribution model to the trial courts.”

This fiscal year’s budget allocations include the first using the new workload-based methodology approved by the council at its April meeting to be phased in over five years. The new methodology will be used to allocate each court’s share of the \$60 million in new trial court funding that the Legislature included in this year’s budget. Per the state budget, each court is required by September 1, 2013, to detail in writing how it plans to use the new funds to maintain or increase public access to justice.

Despite the new money in this year’s budget, the courts continue to be underfunded. In the last several years, state General Fund support for the judicial branch has been cut by \$1 billion, and the trial courts are still dealing with nearly a half-billion dollars in ongoing cuts.

Latest Court Statistics Could Signal Reduced Access to Justice Due to Budget Cuts

During its meeting, the council received a preview of the 2013 Court Statistics Report (CSR), which will include detailed caseload information for fiscal year 2011–2012 and combine 10-year statewide summaries of superior court filings and dispositions.

The overall number of case filings has declined in recent years, and the preliminary statistics show that this trend is due almost exclusively to the decline in filings for small claims, traffic, misdemeanors, and other limited-jurisdiction cases. The decline in these types of limited-jurisdiction cases coincides with the multi-year budget cuts to the judicial branch budget that have led to reduced courthouse hours and closures.

Many council members at the meeting cautioned against drawing concrete conclusions from the statistics, particularly since there has been an increase in felonies and more complex cases, but did offer other possible explanations for the decrease in filings for limited-jurisdiction cases.

“There may be a correlation between the reduced filings in the misdemeanor and traffic areas with reductions in law enforcement,” said Judge Mary Ann O’Malley, Superior Court of Contra Costa County. “In our county, we asked the District Attorney’s office about the decrease in its filings, and the office told us that law enforcement was bringing it fewer cases.” She also indicated that cuts in social service agencies could affect the number of filings.

The final report is expected in the next few weeks and will contain similar workload indicators for the California Supreme Court and Courts of Appeal. The Judicial Council publishes the report each year in compliance with Article VI, section 6 of the state Constitution, which requires the council to survey the conditions and business of the California courts.

Other actions at the council meeting:

Funding for Parolee Reentry Court Programs: The council approved a [recommendation](#) to enter into an interagency agreement with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) that will provide \$3 million in funding from the CDCR to support and expand existing parolee reentry courts at the Superior Courts of Alameda, Los Angeles, Santa Clara, and San Diego Counties, with the goal of reducing recidivism among the parolee population. [Reentry court programs](#) provide an alternative to incarceration for parole violators with a history of substance abuse and/or mental illness, combining treatment with ongoing judicial monitoring and intensive supervision. More than 1,200 parolees have participated in the reentry court pilot programs.

The Administrative Office of the Courts collects data on the pilot reentry courts and is charged with evaluating the program in cooperation with CDCR. Findings from the evaluation are scheduled to be released in early 2014.

Audit Report on the Superior Court of Santa Barbara County: The council accepted an [audit report on the Superior Court of Santa Barbara County](#). Judicial Council acceptance of audit reports is the last step to finalize them before their placement on the California Courts public website. Acceptance and [publication of audit reports](#) enhances accountability and provides the courts with information to minimize financial, compliance, and operational risk.

The [meeting agenda and reports](#) considered during the meeting are posted on the California Courts website. In addition, an archived audiocast broken out by meeting agenda item will also be posted to the website.

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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 promotes leadership and excellence in court administration.