



Judicial Branch Budget Snapshot Superior Court of California County of Trinity

Key Budget Challenges/Priorities

- Trinity is a very small court which has been chronically understaffed; backlogs are growing and quality is suffering.
- Court is unable to fulfill its most basic, highest priority mission of providing access to justice for all.

Budget Impacts

General Budget Reduction Impacts to the Public

- Self-represented litigants (SLRs) travel long distances due to the large geographic size of the county and are often inconvenienced or delayed in receiving services. In some instances litigants must travel to neighboring counties for free or low cost services that are no longer offered in Trinity due to loss of grant funding (i.e., the Court's Supervised Visitation Program).
- Jurors in remote communities must travel 1 hour or more to the main courthouse for trials because the court lacks the facilities and resources to hold trials in remote branch locations.
- Court lacks a juror assembly room in the historic courthouse so jurors are subjected to over crowded and substandard conditions often standing for extended periods of time or reduced to sitting on the floor in the hallways because the building cannot accommodate the influx of people during the jury selection process. Because of the building's "historical" designation title did not transfer to the State under the Trial Court Facilities Act of 2002 (SB 1732) so legislation prohibits the State from spending courthouse construction and modernization funds on the building to improve the facility and conditions for the jurors.
- New courthouse construction projects have been adversely impacted Statewide due to the budget crisis so projects for small courts like Trinity have been put on hold indefinitely despite critical needs.
- Court's ability to improve public access using modern technology and automation is compromised due to ongoing reductions and reserves being depleted to back-fill budget shortfalls. Furthermore, new legislation prohibits courts from having more than a 1% reserve so these types of improvements may never occur in Trinity.

Reduced Public Access:

Self-Help/Mediator/Facilitator Services

- Family Law Facilitator/Self-Help attorney's hours reduced to two days per month; court reserves not available to supplant program funding.
- Facilitator resigned after finding full-time work in a neighboring county, diminishing services to Trinity court users.
- Self help services for landlord/tenant disputes have been discontinued diminishing services to court users.

Reduced Public Access: Court Reporters/Interpreters

- Court has only one court reporter employee and no pro tem court reporters reside in the county. Additional needs are met by out of county providers at an increased expense due to travel related costs.
- Court has no interpreter employees and must contract all mandated services with out of county providers often at a premium.

Reduced Public Access: Public Service Counters and Clerks

- Court has made concerted efforts to maintain its normal business hours; however, increased vacancy rates, years of "ongoing" reductions and the inability to carry a reserve has impacted our ability to sustain current service levels. The court is preparing its sixty (60) days notice to reduce hours to the public effective FY13/14 per Gov. Code.
- Court has used extra help and contractors to fill voids where vacancies exist but frequent turnover reduces efficiency. New legislation has been proposed to prohibit trial courts from using contractors which could further limit our ability to deliver services to the public if personal service costs can't be controlled and courts lose local control over these types of decisions.

Closures: Courtrooms, Specialty Courts and Courthouses

- Court was closed due to mandatory statewide closures in 2009.
- Court eliminated its Juvenile Drug Court Program (funded under the Collaborative Justice Focus Abuse Grant) in FY12/13 after funding was diminished and justice partners determined they had insufficient resources to support the program when serious felonies are on the rise in our county. This was a significant loss to juveniles in our community who may have benefited from this otherwise successful program.
- Court shares a historic county-owned courthouse facility located in Weaverville, and struggles with limited space, poor security, and antiquated infrastructure.
- A judicial team travels to two remote branch locations in Hayfork (monthly) and Mad River (every other month); a 1- and 2-hour drive respectively.

The efficacy of this practice will be reassessed in FY13/14 due to "ongoing" budget reductions and the elimination of reserves. Should the court determine it no longer has the resources to support these branch locations, it will have an adverse affect on court users who will be required to travel to the main courthouse in the county seat.

Staff Reductions: Furloughs, Layoffs, Unfilled Vacancies

- Unfilled vacancies grew from 20 % to 29% diminishing staffing levels.
- Skeleton crews are burdened with increased workload.
- All staff furloughed one day per month for 16 months (Sept 2009 through Dec 2010).
- Staff agreed to additional concessions through labor bargaining agreements in 2010 and 2011.

Impacts: Court Security Services

- Court security manpower needs have increased with the implementation of the weapons screening station at the historic courthouse in 2009 (a court security best practice) and increases in serious crimes in our county, however the funding allocations have remained static.
- Inadequate security services, and poorly configured facilities in the historic building make the transport of in-mates dangerous and lack of technological security equipment puts judges, court staff, and the public at risk.

Fewer Judicial Officers

- Court has one judge vacancy and one part-time SJO vacancy.
- While caseload has remained static, types of criminal cases has qualitatively altered; number of serious/violent felonies is increasing, making trials longer, pleas more difficult to obtain, creating more courtroom activity pretrial conferences, motions, etc.

Annual Allocation*

Total Allocation FY 2008-2009	\$ 1,569,002
Est. Allocation FY 2012-2013**	\$ 1,274,720
Percentage change	-18.8%

*Does not reflect unfunded cost increases

**For comparison purposes only, includes court security funding

Case Statistics (Fiscal Year 2010-11)

Felony filings	265
Misdemeanor filings (incl. traffic)	647
Infraction filings (incl. traffic)	2,737
Civil filings	220
Family and juvenile filings	439

Trinity Facilities Overview

Number of court facilities	1
Capital construction projects	0

Court Leadership

Presiding Judge	Hon. Elizabeth W. Johnson
Court Executive Officer	Laurie Wills

Judicial Workload/Employees as of Dec. 2012:

Population served	13,722
Judicial officers (authorized)	2.3
Judicial officers needed	1.6
Authorized / Filled staff positions FY 08-09	18 (A) / 15 (F)
Authorized / Filled staff positions FY 12-13	18 (A) / 14 (F)