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EDITORIAL

Propping up the courts

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Courthouses "should be refuges of safety, and not places of danger," California Supreme Court Chief Justice Ron George declared in a recent speech. In reality, however, California's halls of justice can present security and seismic risks, and it's time for California to do something about it.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger had put together a \$2 billion general obligation bond to pay for some court improvements. But the California Legislature has not passed his measure, which requires a two-thirds vote of the Legislature and approval by state voters.

Enter Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata, D-Oakland, with a new plan. Perata wrote Senate Bill 1407 to raise \$5 billion for as many as 40 overdue court construction projects. SB1407 proposes to raise fees for filing civil suits and probate actions, as well as fines for felonies, misdemeanors and infractions, as well as fix-it tickets and traffic school fees, in order to fund the building.

Curt Child, governmental affairs director for the Judicial Council of California, noted that while those in the judiciary see funding the maintenance and construction of courthouses as a state responsibility, the deterioration of some buildings has hit the "crisis point." At least, there is "a direct nexus between fees and fines and court users," he explained.

SB1407 cleared the Senate, with mostly Democrats and a few Republicans supporting the bill. A third Assembly Committee will consider the bill in mid-July, after which, if it passes, a floor vote will follow. Because it is a revenue bond, there is no need for voter approval.

Assembly members of both parties should pass this bill. The work is needed and the courts have found a way to pay for it.