

# Common Sense Take on CCMS

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Trial courts throughout California rely on "case management systems." The term refers to the inclusion of all case information (including defendant information, attorney of record, hearing dates, outstanding warrants, and disposition of cases) in a computer database for easy access by court staff, courts' justice partners, and the public. The information is used to track cases and to organize them on a judicial calendar. Case management systems are important tools that enable California's 58 trial courts to run smoothly and efficiently. Trial courts have traditionally relied on local case management systems to manage this information.

The California Judicial Council has actively pursued and promoted the creation and implementation of a statewide case management system called the California Case Management System (CCMS). The CCMS project is aimed at modernizing case information databases statewide, providing a single uniform system, and promoting the ease of information-sharing between courts and other justice system agencies. Statewide uniformity is a laudable goal, and we support it.

However, when we first learned of the CCMS project over five years ago, its scope and expense were mere shadows of what they are today and it was presented at a fraction of its now-estimated cost. It started as a \$260.2 million dollar project with only six pilot courts involved and it entailed the use of a limited number of case types. In five years, the price tag has ballooned from a quarter billion dollars to \$1.75 billion dollars. That is "billion" with a "B."

Mind you, this \$1.75 billion dollar price tag does not include all of the system's actual costs. It does not include the trial courts' local costs of ongoing operation and maintenance of the massive new system. On a statewide level, these costs total an additional \$250 million. To cover these costs, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) proposes additional expenditures that will be passed along to each trial court. The first and the only time the AOC estimated this cost was in 2006. At that time, the cost projection for Yolo Superior Court to deploy, implement, and utilize CCMS was \$641,120, with an ongoing annual fee of \$177,000. Yolo Superior Court already has a case management system that works very well and is expected to work well for years to come. It's a system that costs only \$25,000 annually to operate. Why would we (and why should we) trade in a reliable \$25,000/year system for an unproven system that costs \$177,000 annually?

This hefty price tag also fails to include "soft costs" necessary to run the system. Without question, additional personnel will be needed to operate a complicated new computer system and to navigate through multiple screens. More time will be needed to upload and manage the screens. Courtroom clerks will have to learn hundreds of codes to input into the system. Massive training programs must be developed and implemented for judicial officers and court staff.

We are now in an unprecedented state budget crisis that necessitates and demands close scrutiny of cost expenditures at the local and state levels. The state's fiscal condition has already hit the judicial branch with hundreds of millions of dollars in reductions. For the first time in the state's history, courthouses have been forced to close statewide one day per month, diluting access for the most vulnerable of the state's population at a time when we need our courts the most. Because of these crippling budget reductions, trial courts are already faced with doing far more with much less. This means stretching an already insufficient staff to handle the court's day to day business and the work that piles up when the courts must close once per month. Courts throughout California are being forced to contemplate and implement some of the most difficult decisions, including laying off long-time loyal and hard-working staff.

Before we devote increasingly scarce resources to CCMS, the AOC should formulate a comprehensive business plan that clearly sets forth the goals to be accomplished by CCMS and the means of testing these goals' fulfillment. Before the administrative arm of the judiciary makes decisions that separately affect 58 counties, trial courts should be given a voice regarding how these goals can be accomplished on a local level.

At Yolo Superior Court, we have been and are making every effort to make fiscally conservative decisions to maximize our resources, maintain service levels, and plan for tough times ahead. We have continually updated and changed our strategy as the budget forecasts have worsened.

In these lean times, we think the state's judicial leadership should take a collective breather. Money slated for CCMS should be allocated to trial courts so that they can fulfill their most basic and fundamental mission under the constitution: Keeping courthouses and courtrooms accessible and open to the public.

While a CCMS system is indeed a worthy goal, it should not be pursued without a thorough cost-benefit analysis, without consideration of the true costs to local courts, and at a minimum, should be deferred in these troubled financial times.

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