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## FACT SHEET

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### Trust and Confidence in the California Courts

Trust and confidence in our state courts is essential to the rule of law and, therefore, of paramount importance. The California Constitution directs the Judicial Council to improve the administration of justice by surveying judicial business and recommending improvements. Feedback from the public and other stakeholders helps to inform the council's strategic planning and priority setting for the branch. In 2005, the council undertook a statewide survey of the public and of practicing attorneys to determine current levels of trust and confidence in the state courts, and to obtain information concerning expectations and performance of the state courts. The 2005 survey reached over 2,400 members of the public and over 500 practicing attorneys.

#### Changes Since Prior Study

A statewide survey of public trust and confidence in the California courts was last conducted in 1992. Since that time, dramatic changes in both the state's demographics and in court administration have taken place. Almost one-third of the representative sample of Californians reached by the 2005 survey was born outside the United States. Almost half reported an ethnic identity other than white. One out of five was interviewed in a language other than English. Administrative changes since 1992 include statewide court unification, shifts from local to state funding of the trial courts and from local to state ownership of court facilities, and the establishment of many innovative collaborative justice programs such as drug courts.

#### 2005 Survey Findings

Extensive findings of the 2005 survey include the following:

- Public trust and confidence in the state courts has significantly improved since 1992. Sixty-seven percent of the Californian public has an overall positive opinion of the courts today, compared to less than half in 1992. For practicing attorneys, the percentages are 82 percent today, compared to 79 percent in 1992.

- The most important factor predictive of the public's confidence in the courts is a perception of whether *fair procedures* are practiced. A perception of *fair outcomes* is the second most importance factor for the public. For practicing attorneys, the reverse is true: a perception of *fair outcomes* is most predictive of confidence, while a perception of *fair procedures* is secondary.
- The public's sense of how much they know about the courts remains unchanged since 1992, with two out of three responding that they are only somewhat familiar or not at all familiar with the court system. At the same time, 55 percent feels it is very important for the courts to report regularly on their job performance to the public.

A report on the methodology and findings of the 2005 survey may be downloaded from the Web site address provided below under "Additional Resources."

#### How Will the Findings Be Used?

The council, through its strategic planning process, has already begun steps to further develop and act upon recommendations for improving trust and confidence in the courts, based upon the 2005 survey findings. The council also is widely disseminating the findings to the bench, the bar, other justice partners, and the public.

#### Continuing Efforts

The council intends to institutionalize efforts for understanding and improving trust and confidence in the California courts. Work is under way to survey court users, judicial officers, and court staff in the coming year. The council will continue to conduct cyclical surveys of the public, attorneys, court constituents, and other justice partners in order to measure progress and develop actions that will ensure the broadest possible trust and confidence in the California courts.

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#### Additional Resources:

The 2005 survey report is available at [www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/4\\_37pubtrust.htm](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/4_37pubtrust.htm)