



NEWS RELEASE

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Los Angeles Superior Court Consolidation Plan

State funding reductions made over the past several years leave the Los Angeles Superior Court facing an annual shortfall of \$195 million. A series of staff reductions and other budget cutting measures have reduced annual spending by \$110 million to-date (more than 15% of the Court's discretionary budget). But by the end of this fiscal year on June 30, 2013, the Court must reduce its budget by \$85 million dollars.

The situation demands a significant restructuring of the Court. "For the past decade or more, we have lived up to the promise of providing "neighborhood courts" across the county," said Presiding Judge David S. Wesley. "That meant full-service courthouses in many locations. But we no longer have the resources to do so. We are now being forced by budget cuts to make changes that will disadvantage litigants, attorneys, justice system partners and all court users across the spectrum and across our court."

With the need to find \$85 million dollars in permanent budget solutions as a starting point, more than 50 judges and staff spent five months evaluating alternative ways to achieve the goal of maintaining access to justice in all litigation types. The planning effort included hundreds of hours of analysis of caseloads; examination of best practices in case processing; study of court facilities; examination of automation alternatives; and consultation with hundreds of attorneys, justice system partners, law enforcement agencies, county agencies, and other affected stakeholders. These efforts made it clear that the only way to maintain access to all case types would be to consolidate services in fewer locations. The resulting recommendations were unanimously adopted by the Budget Working Group, the Supervising Judges of the Superior Court and the Court's Executive Committee.

More-more-more

Thus the Court will, over the next few months, and with notice to affected parties, consolidate in the following ways:

- The Court will close 8 courthouses completely (Beacon Street, Huntington Park, Kenyon Juvenile, Malibu, Pomona North, San Pedro, West Los Angeles; Whittier) and remove most court work from 2 locations (Beverly Hills, Catalina);
- Criminal and traffic workload presently located in the 8 courthouses to be closed will be moved to nearby courthouses;
- Juvenile cases now heard at Kenyon Juvenile Justice Center will be moved to other courthouses;
- Small claims cases heard only at courthouses in: Alhambra, Downey, Inglewood, Lancaster, Van Nuys and downtown Los Angeles (Mosk);
- Unlawful detainer (landlord-tenant) cases heard only in: Lancaster, Long Beach, Pasadena, Santa Monica and downtown Los Angeles (Mosk);
- Limited civil collections-related cases heard only in: Chatsworth and Norwalk;
- Other limited civil cases heard only in downtown Los Angeles (Mosk);
- Personal injury-related cases heard only in downtown Los Angeles (Mosk);
- Probate cases will be heard in Lancaster and downtown Los Angeles (Mosk), except for exceptional cases;
- Many general civil cases going to trial may be moved to dedicated trial courts located around the county;

In addition, the Court plans to eliminate its alternative dispute resolution center, further reduce the use of court-employed court reporters, and lay off all juvenile Referees.

All of these consolidations are necessitated by a planned reduction in the Court's workforce by 511 positions bringing the total workforce reduction over the last four years to over 24 percent. "Justice requires a court. But what we once counted on – that courts would be open, available and ready to dispense prompt justice – no longer exists in California," said Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye in her annual State of the Judiciary speech. Plans such as those outlined above are being implemented across the state of California. San Bernardino is closing courthouses that will require litigants to travel more than 130 miles to the nearest courthouse; Fresno Superior Court has closed all courthouses outside the city of Fresno.

"The day of reckoning has arrived for the Los Angeles County justice system," said Wesley. "This is our last-ditch effort to save access to justice in Los Angeles County. The impacts of years of draconian cuts in state court funding can no longer be delayed. We are now forced to bring our court operations into line with the resources provided by the Governor and legislature. The result will be reduced services, long lines and travel distances that may well deter people from seeking and getting the justice they deserve. It is a sad irony that, as our economy is turning the corner, our justice system is going downhill."

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