



CONSUMER ATTORNEYS OF CALIFORNIA

Seeking Justice for All

Court budget travails underscore need for tax measure CAOC calls for support of Brown's November ballot proposal

SACRAMENTO (June 13, 2012) – As state budget negotiators edged closer to finalizing \$544 million in court cuts for 2012-13, Consumer Attorneys of California's top leader said the wobbly fiscal status of the state justice system underscores the need for Gov. Jerry Brown's proposed tax hike on the November ballot.

CAOC President Niall McCarthy said voter approval of the governor's tax plan is essential to ensure that money can be freed up for other bedrock services such as the judicial system.

"We've seen hard times, and the coming year will be as tough as ever for our courts," said CAOC President Niall McCarthy. "But next year we'll be standing right at the cliff edge if we don't find more revenue."

CAOC was one of the first organizations to come out in support of the governor's ballot measure, which combines a quarter-cent sales tax boost with an income tax increase for the well-off. The organization last month contributed \$250,000 to the effort to put the measure on the ballot.

McCarthy's comments came after he and other legal leaders joined for a "Stand Up For Justice" rally that drew about 150 attorneys, paralegals, judges and court workers Wednesday under the sweltering noontime sun outside the Sacramento County Superior Court building a few blocks from the state Capitol.

Meanwhile at the statehouse, budget negotiators continued the rush to beat a Friday deadline to wrap up the state's fiscal blueprint for 2012-13.

As now envisioned by the majority Democrats, funding for the courts is slated to be slashed by \$544 million, with \$240 million diverted from planned court construction projects, \$235 million siphoned from trial court reserves, \$50 million in pro rata cuts to local courts, \$15 million from the Administrative Office of the Courts and \$4 million in higher pension contributions from state court employees.

In addition, the civil justice system is being hit with a \$50-million increase in civil filing fees, including a boost for motions, complex case filings, wills and unlimited civil first paper. Jury fees would be required in the early phases of a case and no longer would be refundable.

While the cuts and fee increases have been tough to take, McCarthy said the hit on the courts could have been far worse without the aggressive advocacy of CAOC and other participants in the Open Courts Coalition, a disparate collection of groups that includes judges as well as attorneys from the normally adversarial defense and plaintiff bars.

The coalition was able, for instance, to derail early plans to siphon the construction funds away from the courts for use by other government programs. Instead, the construction money is now set to help fund general court operations in the coming year.

"We were able to ease some of the pain," McCarthy said. "But in the end, we need to step up as a state and put an end to this downward spiral. We need to show support for our courts and other cornerstones of our democracy. California's future depends on it."

Consumer Attorneys of California is a professional organization of plaintiffs' attorneys representing consumers seeking accountability against wrongdoers in cases involving personal injury, product liability, environmental degradation and other causes.

For more information:

**J.G. Preston, CAOC Press Secretary, 916- 669-7126, jgpreston@caoc.org
Eric Bailey, CAOC Communications Director, 916-669-7122, ebailey@caoc.org**