



CONSUMER ATTORNEYS OF CALIFORNIA

Seeking Justice for All

CAOC to address courts' ongoing budgetary blues

LA faces up to \$85 million in cuts, closure of 10 county courthouses

SACRAMENTO (Nov. 14, 2012) – In the wake of grim budgetary news out of the Los Angeles County courts, CAOC 2013 President Brian Kabateck vowed today to redouble the organization's efforts to work for more stable funding for the California justice system.

Los Angeles County court officials announced during a morning meeting that ongoing budgetary issues will force the closure of 10 courthouses scattered throughout the county as well as hit facilities that handle juvenile cases, family law and adoptions. In addition, a dozen criminal courtrooms will be shuttered. The changes are part of a plan to trim between \$56 million and \$85 million heading into the 2013-14 fiscal year.

"We are going to work hard as an organization to help out our courts across the board," Kabateck said. "We're appalled that ongoing funding problems are rearing up again to restrict access to courts that handle some of our society's thorniest problems, including juvenile cases, domestic violence and other issues."

CAOC has been at the forefront of efforts by the state's ad hoc Open Courts Coalition to craft a solution to the state court systems' ongoing funding problems. CAOC 2012 President Niall McCarthy and CAOC member Paul Kiesel co-chair the OCC. The push is to find a way to give the courts a more independent funding stream and budgetary autonomy befitting their status as a separate and independent third branch of government.

The courthouses that will close in Los Angeles County are the Kenyon Juvenile Justice Center, Catalina Island, Beacon Street, Huntington Park, Whittier, Pomona North, San Pedro, Malibu, West LA and Beverly Hills. Court administrators also announced efforts to streamline some services in a bid to save operating money, including setting up two collection courts for settling credit card debt disputes and other small cases that represent more than half of all civil limited jurisdiction cases.

One change could cause problems for consumers seeking redress through personal injury cases. Such cases will no longer be assigned to courtrooms that run on their own independent calendar. Instead they'll be assigned to two master calendar judges, a switch that could cause delays and other difficulties, Kabateck said.

Although bigger cases would be shifted back to independent calendar courts, Kabateck expressed concern that court administrators have yet to establish a gatekeeper function to winnow out more intricate "catastrophic" cases.

"Every consumer attorney knows the definition of a catastrophic case – whatever case they're working on at that particular moment," Kabateck said. "If the courts don't have hard and fast rules, they're going to have a line of lawyers down the hall and around the corner. We support the Los Angeles Superior Court Presiding Judge and all the judges in leadership. We will work tirelessly in Sacramento to return funding to the courts throughout the state."

For more information:

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