



GOVERNOR SIGNS EXPEDITED JURY TRIALS ACT

Shorter, less expensive trials will give more Californians access to justice

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SACRAMENTO – Californians will have the option of simplified one-day jury trials in civil matters after Governor Schwarzenegger signed the Expedited Jury Trials Act (AB 2284) Thursday night.

Authored by Assemblymember Noreen Evans (D-Santa Rosa), AB 2284 was co-sponsored by two organizations that are on opposite sides of most issues, the Consumer Attorneys of California and the Civil Justice Association of California. The bill was the result of nearly two years of discussions that also involved the Judicial Council of California, the California Defense Counsel, the California Chamber of Commerce, Consumers Union and representatives of the insurance industry.

AB 2284 is modeled after legislation that has proved to be successful in South Carolina. Under AB 2284, if both sides agree, civil trials can be heard before an eight-member jury, six of whom must agree on a verdict that will be binding with limited right of appeal. Each side will be limited to three hours to present witnesses and evidence, with the object of conducting the entire trial, from jury selection to verdict, in one day.

Because the shortened trials will involve lower costs to both sides, it is hoped AB 2284 will give Californians with smaller claims a chance to have their cases heard and resolved by a jury.

“The expedited jury trials program will promote a central value of CAOC: access to justice by providing the opportunity for efficient and economic jury trials,” said CAOC President Christopher B. Dolan, who was instrumental in the negotiations that led to the bill. “Our court system will benefit through streamlining of case management and trial efficiency.”

Dolan said the idea for AB 2284 came from a suggestion by CAOC member Stephen Goldberg of Woodland Hills. “The bill was a consensus product created after extensive work with some of our traditional foes, such as CJAC and CalChamber,” Dolan said. “We at CAOC thank the Administrative Office of the Courts for their facilitation of the project. We look forward to continuing in our unique partnership with the Defense Bar, the AOC and the Judicial Council to develop educational programs to communicate the benefits of the expedited jury trials program to lawyers, judges and clients throughout the state.”

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