



## Survey: court funding crisis worse than thought

### CAOC renews call for restoring adequate financial support

**SACRAMENTO (April 9, 2013)** – A statewide survey of California’s Superior Court presiding judges shows the impact of the ongoing court funding crisis is even worse than was previously believed.

The survey, conducted for the Trial Court Presiding Judges’ Advisory Committee chaired by Sacramento Superior Court Presiding Judge Laurie Earl, found even more courthouses and courtrooms have been closed and more court employees have been eliminated than had been revealed in [a recent report](#) by the state Assembly Judiciary Committee, indicating the problems caused by cuts to court budgets are only growing worse.

Among the disquieting facts:

- At least 53 courthouses have been closed, and Los Angeles County has announced plans to close eight more.
- At least 175 courtrooms have been closed.
- 25 courts have closed at least one branch court.
- At least 20 counties have announced furlough days this fiscal year, with courts in those counties closed on average more than one day a month.
- 16 courts have closed at least one location where traffic cases were heard, meaning people affected will have to travel farther and take more time to take care of routine business.
- Nine counties have eliminated night court.
- Ten counties have reduced their small claims court sessions.
- Innovative specialty courts (such as domestic violence court, drug court, mental health court and others) have been cut in 18 counties.
- 31 courts have reduced the hours public windows are open, by an average of more than five hours a week, and many counties report having fewer clerks staffing the windows that are open.
- 38 counties have reduced self-help services.
- At least 19 courts have seen an increase in the time for custody mediation.
- 11 counties are unable to process domestic violence restraining orders the same day they are filled.
- 20 courts report increased backlogs of civil cases.
- Court staffing levels are nearly 20% below the level of five years ago, a loss of 4,170 employees (temporary and permanent).

[The report filed by Judge Earl](#) also includes specific anecdotal information on the impact of court cuts in many of the counties, such as four-hour waits to pay a traffic ticket in San Francisco, five-month waits for traffic trials in San Diego, and callers seeking information about traffic court in San Mateo being put on hold for up to 45 minutes.

A Los Angeles County court official quoted in the report offers a sobering outlook: “When traffic tickets cannot be resolved timely, traffic laws lose their force. When people cannot depend upon the courts to help them settle domestic disputes, they will take matters into their own hands. When people cannot find

relief in the civil courts, predators are emboldened. None of these sorts of impacts show up in our statistics. They will, however, signal to all those involved a failure of California government to provide for the welfare of Californians.”

The survey was returned by presiding judges in 48 of California’s 58 counties, representing 97% of the bench officers in the state.

Consumer Attorneys of California is pushing for state lawmakers to reject a budget proposal to slash \$200 million in court construction money and instead begin restoring some of the \$1.1 billion in general fund revenue cut over the past five years.

“Our courts are essential to ensure fair and equitable justice for all members of society,” said CAOC President Brian Kabateck said. “This survey shows the cuts already implemented are affecting a wide range of Californians, in all walks of life, and business as well. And as bad as things are, they will get worse unless we take the steps necessary to treat our judicial system like the equal third branch of government it is.”

*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:**

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