



# CONSUMER ATTORNEYS OF CALIFORNIA

*Seeking Justice for All*

## More bad budget news out of California court houses CAOC pegs effort to fix court budget woes a top priority for 2013

**SACRAMENTO** (Nov. 30, 2012) – With fresh news today of yet another county court system suffering budgetary distress, CAOC President Brian Kabateck said the hunt for solutions to the ongoing fiscal problems gripping California's justice system is now his organization's top priority.

San Mateo County Superior Court officials announced earlier today that the state's court budget problems, which have slashed funding by more than \$1 billion over the past five years, will mean a severe cutback in the hours of operation for the clerk's office.

It follows an announcement last week by Los Angeles County court officials 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 as the county grapples with a deficit that could mount to \$85 million heading into the 2013-14 fiscal year.

"What we're seeing in San Mateo and Los Angeles are just the latest examples of what courts all over the state are facing," Kabateck said. "We can't ignore this situation any longer. Our courts serve a vital role in society, but in recent years they've endured budget cuts that are threatening the administration of both criminal and civil justice. It has to stop."

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 an independent third branch of government.

In San Mateo, the court clerk's office will see its hours slashed dramatically, with doors shutting to the public Monday-Thursday at 2 p.m., three hours earlier than normal, and even earlier on Fridays with a noon shutdown. Among the matters that will be hit are public access to court records and the ability to file legal papers in both criminal and civil cases, as well as small claims, family law, probate, traffic and juvenile cases.

While not as dramatic as the slated courthouse closings in Los Angeles, the bad news from San Mateo "underscores just how widespread these problems are," Kabateck said. "Our state needs to get serious about finding solutions to a crisis that just isn't going away. Our courts are an independent branch of government and need to be treated as such."

*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.*

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