



CONSUMER ATTORNEYS OF CALIFORNIA

Seeking Justice for All

Bill to ease COVID-19 courts backlog wins key OK

SB 1146 enshrines use of web depositions and email service of process

SACRAMENTO (August 12, 2020) – A measure that would preserve the use of web video and other internet technology to address the growing backlog of civil court cases caused by COVID-19 courthouse shutdowns won approval from a key policy committee today.

The Assembly Judiciary Committee voted to push the bill, SB 1146 by Sen. Tom Umberg (D-Santa Ana) and co-sponsored by Consumer Attorneys of California and California Defense Counsel, to the Assembly floor for consideration.

SB 1146 will help address a critical issue dogging California courts. Progress on civil cases has been halted or dramatically throttled back by the coronavirus pandemic. A logjam of hearings and trials has been the result, with court leaders announcing that civil cases will be at the back of the line, pushed into 2021 or later.

Umberg's bill will help by enshrining in statute emergency actions taken in recent months by Gov. Gavin Newsom and state court leaders that have allowed remote video depositions and e-service of process during the health crisis.

It also will extend deadlines for discovery actions such as the exchange of expert witness information, mandatory settlement conferences, and summary judgment motions for the same length of time as any continuance or postponement of a trial.

Those emergency actions were taken to limit public exposure to COVID-19 while keeping civil cases moving toward resolution, but they do not extend after the health crisis is over. Meanwhile, the backlog of cases is expected to outlast the pandemic. SB 1146 will help clear that lengthy queue by making remote depositions and e-service a permanent working part of California civil cases.

“This legislation is another important step to ensure the justice system can continue to function despite the devastating impact of the pandemic,” said CAOC President Micha Star Liberty. “It won't just help now, but far into the future.”

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