

April 14, 2021

Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee
State Capitol, Room 5019
Sacramento, California 95814

Senator Nancy Skinner, Senate Budget Chair
Jessica Bartholow, Chief of Staff
Katerina Robinson, Legislative Director
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Sacramento, California 95814

Assemblymember Phillip Ting, Assembly Budget Chair
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Via electronic mail to:

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Subject: LETTER IN SUPPORT OF COUNTY LAW LIBRARY FUNDING

The San Diego County Bar Association is an approximate 9,000-member voluntary legal bar association for all of San Diego County. Our mission is to connect lawyers and to support their success and fulfillment. We do this by, among other things, advocating for the legal profession and doing what we can to assist attorneys in developing their practices. While our efforts center around supporting lawyers and the legal community, we also stand for the prospect that everyone deserves access to legal resources in our system, as evidenced by our Lawyer Referral and Information Service, which helps connect community members with vetted lawyers. Despite those efforts, we know from studies that as high as 77 percent of family law cases in San Diego are filed by self-represented litigants.

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This is what makes the work of our local county law library critical.

Law libraries, including our San Diego Law Library, must exist to ensure access to critical legal resources for all Californians. The library’s motto, “Law Made Public,” is more than a tag line: the San Diego Law Library helps anyone with a legal question. Library staff are essential to helping self-represented litigants navigate the system. It provides targeted referrals to non-profits for those facing eviction, domestic violence, child custody disputes, debt collection lawsuits, wrongful termination, and decisions about end-of-life care and estate planning. The San Diego Law Library also host workshops, clinics, and classes to educate the public about their legal rights, often in partnership with local legal aid organizations, government agencies, and community non-profits.

In San Diego County, the San Diego County Bar Association has partnered with our County Law Library to host the Civil Appellate Self-Help Workshop, and the Access to Appellate Justice programs. The former is a monthly program offered remotely since COVID-19, during which staff from the Court of Appeal and volunteer attorneys from the San Diego County Bar Association help individuals understand and navigate the appellate process. The latter is a pilot program that connects indigent and low income self-represented parties to an appeal with attorneys who are willing to provide legal services at no charge. These programs improve our community’s access to justice at the appellate level, where more than one third of litigants in our Court of Appeal are self-represented.

The San Diego Law Library also provides practical support to our lawyers, helping attorneys find relevant sources more efficiently and providing free access to costly resources. During the pandemic, our San Diego Law Library pivoted to serve our community virtually and remotely, implementing chat reference services, emailing patrons needed legal forms and research materials, connecting patrons to legal databases at home, and offering virtual legal clinics and classes.

This critical work requires funding.

Because the Law Library is a “special district governmental organization” under California Business and Professions Code sections 6300-6364, it is not considered a state, county, or city entity. There are no other funding provisions besides the \$38 per filing fee in San Diego County and \$12 filing fee for small claims matters—which constitute 97% of the San Diego Law Library’s revenue. In the last five years, however, the revenue from filing fees has decreased nearly 40%, but the cost of legal materials has increased nearly 60%. These statistics don’t yet take into account the dramatic impact COVID-19 had on the courts, which shut down completely and are slowly re-opening, and the reduction in filings and, therefore, filing fees.

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The San Diego County Bar Association supports the San Diego Law Library's request for supplemental county law library funding and respectfully requests that you provide additional funding for county law libraries while drafting the May revised budget to protect access to legal resources.

Respectfully,



Renee N. G. Stackhouse
President, San Diego County Bar Association

cc: Gina Catalano, Assistant Director, User Experience
San Diego Law Library
gcatalano@sdlawlibrary.org

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