

Brian J. Lamb
Presiding Judge

Dean T. Stout
Judge



Tammy L. Grimm
Court Executive Officer

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Superior Court of California County of Inyo

September 22, 2011

Brad R. Hill, Chair
Court Facilities Working Group
c/o Court of Appeal, Fifth District
2424 Ventura Street
Fresno, CA 93721

Dear Hon. Hill and Court Facilities Working Group Members:

On behalf of Inyo County Superior Court, I would like to express our sincere thanks to your Committee for the tremendous and difficult work that you have been tasked with analyzing. As one of the SB 1407 Courthouse projects, we are aware of the \$540 million in courthouse construction funds that became unavailable this year, thereby resulting in delay or cancellation of some Courthouse Facilities projects.

As you are probably aware, selection of the new Inyo Courthouse location went to the Judicial Council to resolve when site selection became controversial within the County. On April 29, 2011, the Judicial Council voted unanimously to site the courthouse in Bishop, which is the County's primary population center. The selection of Bishop by the Judicial Council signified closure to this highly-publicized issue in the County, allowing the citizens to start to move forward. Today, we are working hard in focusing on the new Courthouse project in Bishop, emphasizing the phenomenal benefits that it would bring to the entire County of Inyo. To stop the project now could potentially cause the Court and AOC negative media and public perception after so much hard work was done on obtaining the site location through the "controversial site selection" procedure with the Judicial Council.

It is imperative that the Bishop Court project continue and move forward, on schedule, as planned, for the following reasons:

- a) **Inadequate Facilities.** Currently, there is one courtroom in Bishop in a former school building owned by the City of Bishop and shared with county agencies. We

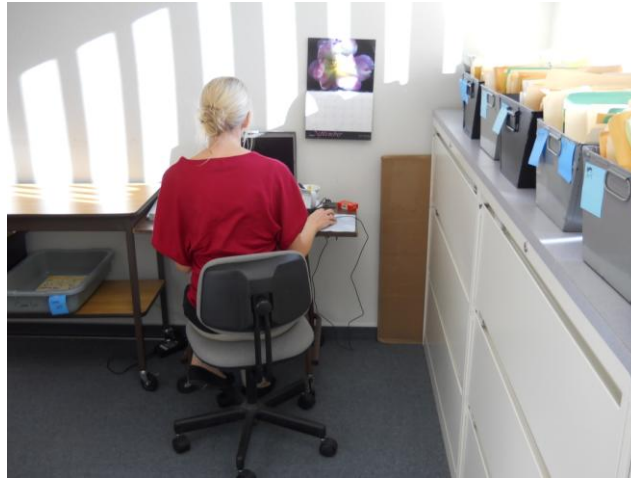
often have the need for two courtrooms, and have to rent the City Council Chambers to create a makeshift Courtroom in an area where litigants do not have to pass through a security screening process. There are severe safety, space, and functional deficiencies with the current Bishop facility, including:

1. Lack of space for Staff. The Accounting Staff of two are crammed into an office meant for one. Our Court's IT Department maintains a small office and has to locate technological equipment offsite due to lack of space.

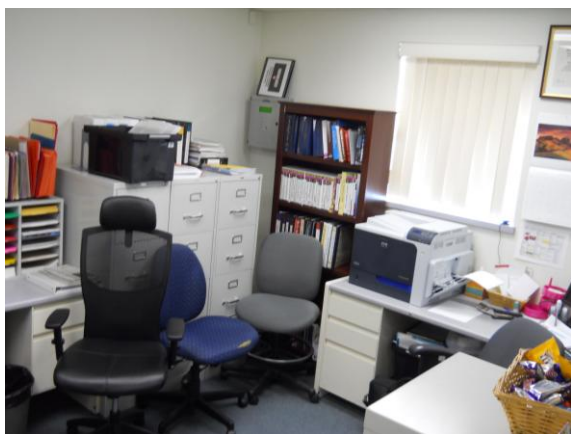
Court clerks and staff have inadequate work space in the current Bishop facility. Work cubicles are tight and lack storage and desk space to adequately work with files. There are only four work cubicles and potentially six clerks reporting to the Bishop facility on any given day.



Many workspaces are half the size of what they should be, and often clerks have to work in an unlit corner on a laptop. As you can see, there is no desk space or room for files or other desk accoutrements.



2. Lack of space for CEO. The CEO does not have a private office, but shares with another work station and desk. This causes great concern when she must deal with confidential matters or counsel employees. The CEO does not have adequate space for materials or conferencing with the judges and her staff.



3. Lack of space for Judicial Officers. The current Bishop facility has one Chambers, which requires one of the Judges to use a makeshift desk in a small library corridor to serve as a desk and workspace.





4. Inadequate Courtroom Facilities. The Courtroom facilities are inadequate for the calendaring needs of Northern Inyo hearings. Currently, there is only one courtroom in Bishop, representing one-quarter of the courtrooms (1 of 4) in the County and 37 percent of the court space in the County. This is a challenge for us in meeting the needs of our clientele.

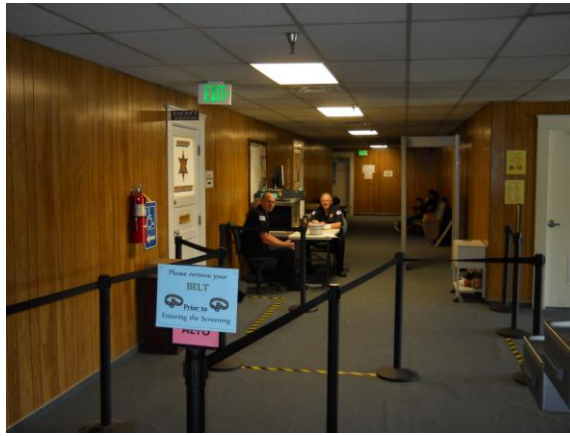
Further, one courtroom means that we are usually forced to place jury trials on calendar in Independence, where there are three courtroom options but 40 miles from Bishop one-way. This means judges, staff, jurors, attorneys, and parties must travel to Independence for a trial when it could be handled in Bishop if the space was available.

50 percent or more of the court's jury trials are held in Independence due to the constraints created by having only one courtroom in Bishop.

Further, the Courtroom is in need of maintenance and repair; chairs are losing bolts and are loose from the floor, which cause a safety concern. The current courtroom has no holding facilities or secure areas for attorneys to meet with their counsel.



5. Inadequate security. Security remains inadequate. In May 2010, the Bishop Courthouse location implemented perimeter screening for all entrants to the Courtroom and/or clerk office. Security is still a problem as people must exit the secure area to talk to counsel, seek bathroom facilities, or attend a hearing in a room rented by the County. Perimeter security screeners do not carry weapons. Further, if Court is being held in a temporary location- such as City Council Chambers- there is no screening required for entry.



6. Inadequate storage. Storage in Bishop is virtually non-existent. The Court presently rents three off-site facilities for storage of files and Court Property. Due to lack of space, the Bishop facility must often pile materials and files in the Jury Deliberation Room or in the Staff Bathroom, which is an inconvenience. One unisex bathroom exists for all staff to share, including Judicial Officers.





7. Lack of space results in limitations of services. Space limitations for files, clerks, and people visiting the Court result in the court's inability to provide full services in both locations. The historic and consistent practice of the court has been to accept civil, family, and juvenile filings in Independence; space limitations in Bishop prevent the court from being able to help the often self-represented litigants in these cases file complex court documents.



- b) **Create Better Access to Court and County Services Based on Population Distribution Countywide.** Most Inyo County residents live and/or work in the greater Bishop area. Most court business therefore is initiated in the Bishop area, with three-quarters of all criminal and civil filings originating out of the Bishop Clerk's Office. The new Bishop court facility will allow greater access to the County's residents and would allow us the space for files, court staff, and judicial officers so that our services could be expanded to take all case types. All County justice partners and social service agencies have offices in Bishop, and 100% of the county's practicing attorneys maintain their law offices in Bishop. The new facility would provide the public greater access to the community resources that they need. The new Bishop facility will give the public and the court a greater capacity to help litigants and victims who need access to these important- and essential- legal support services and community partners.
- c) **Convenience for Jurors.** Bishop is where the majority of jurors reside or work. 79% of all jurors who serve jury duty in Independence reside in Bishop. All jurors who serve jury duty in the Bishop area live in the Bishop area. The new Bishop location allows more jury trials to be held in Bishop, which will save the jurors the 42 mile one-way commute to Independence. The new Bishop facility would create two courtrooms, instead of the present one-courtroom facility that we have, which will allow the court to schedule long jury trials in Bishop- a practice that presently does not occur with frequency. Bishop is more convenient for transportation as bus services are available for residents; the first choice site of the new location has a bus stop right at the corner, which will allow those without vehicles greater ease to get to Court.
- d) **Increase Public Trust and Confidence for the Court, and Create a Central Community Building that can be the Pride of Inyo County.** The County is in need of a building in central Bishop that can bring together the community. This project will do that. With landscape and planning, the Court could potentially be the center of community events and could create a sense of unity that is needed. A functional courthouse that increases services and accessibility will increase the public's trust and confidence in the justice system- especially after the original controversy surrounding the courthouse location.
- e) **Completion of the new Courthouse Facility in Bishop will create a net savings to the Court in ongoing operating costs and expenses.** The completion of the new Bishop Courthouse will result in cost savings in the following areas:
- a. Storage. The Court will be able to eliminate three storage units in Bishop.
 - b. Transportation costs: The Court will be able to abolish jury mileage costs on trials conducted in Bishop.
 - c. Mileage between Independence and Bishop on the Court owned vehicle will be reduced as fewer trips will be made.
 - d. Costs to rent-out a City-owned Council Chambers when a second courtroom is necessary will be eliminated;
 - e. Costs to rent space for public meetings with the City will no longer occur;

- f. Rent for ADR and Self-Help will be eliminated as self-help moves to the Court for greater accessibility and use by self-represented and pro per litigants;
- g. Local reporter and interpreter mileage and fees for those residing in Bishop will be eradicated.

For the reasons stated above, the Superior Court of California, County of Inyo respectfully requests that the Court Facilities Working Group recommend that the Bishop Courthouse project proceed as scheduled, with no delay or limitation on moving to the next project phase. Further, the Court requests that the AOC be allowed to negotiate and purchase the property for the first-choice site location, which is City-owned, while the City Council is interested and willing to move forward with appraisal and site acquisition steps necessary to enter such a land purchase. Delay or cancellation would possibly create public concerns similar to what occurred in the site selection process. The Bishop Courthouse location is needed for successful court administration and judicial effectiveness. It is time for our community to unite and move together forward for the benefit of the citizens and for essential access to justice.

If you have any questions, or if I can be of any additional assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me at tammy.grimm@inyocourt.ca.gov or (760) 872-6728 desk or (760) 920-8110 cell.

Sincerely,

Tammy L. Grimm
Court Executive Officer

