



NEWS RELEASE

Release Number: 58

Release Date: October 24, 2008

JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF
CALIFORNIA
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
OF THE COURTS
Public Information Office
455 Golden Gate Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102-3688
www.courtinfo.ca.gov

415-865-7740

Lynn Holton
Public Information Officer

Judicial Council Approves Court Construction for Trial Courts

Other Actions Taken at Public Meeting Today

San Francisco—The Judicial Council of California today approved a list of 41 projects to renovate or construct state courthouses funded by Senate Bill 1407, newly enacted legislation that creates enhanced revenues for courthouse improvements.

The 41 courthouse projects are located in 34 counties across the state. Together with other projects now underway that have been funded by the state and counties, trial courts in 48 of California's 58 counties will be provided new or renovated courthouses over the next decade.

SB 1407, authored by Senator Don Perata and recently approved by the Governor and the Legislature, provides revenue lease bonds to help the state upgrade courthouses, many of which are in disrepair. Recent estimates show that 90 percent of courthouses need improvements to protect the safety and security of the public, litigants, jurors, and families who do business in our courts.

Based on estimates of various enhanced revenue streams, nearly \$300 million in annual revenue will pay for preconstruction costs and debt service payments on construction costs of the 41 projects. That amount also will provide \$40 million annually for security improvements, life safety and code compliance, and courthouse repairs for which the state is responsible.

The council also approved changes to its procedure for selecting courthouse projects and moving them through the funding process consistent with SB 1407. The procedure sorts proposed projects into five priority need groups: immediate, critical, high, medium, and low. In accordance with the new legislation, the projects selected by the council today are from the "immediate" and "critical" need groups.

The 41 projects are listed on the California Courts Web site at <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/occm/documents/sb1407projectlist.pdf>. Information on courthouse projects previously selected is available at <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/occm./projects.htm>.

In 2002, the state was given responsibility for California's courthouses under the landmark Trial Court Facilities Act. Courthouse construction and renovation projects that are funded under this act and under Senate Bill 1407 are implemented by the Administrative Office of the Courts' Office of Court Construction and Management. Inquiries from the public and companies interested in participating in the projects should be sent to OCCM@jud.ca.gov.

OTHER ACTIONS

In other business, the Judicial Council took the following actions:

Judicial Workload Update: Confirmed the need for the Legislature to create 50 new judgeships in the trial courts that were identified in 2007 as the final part of the council's three-year plan to create 150 judgeships. The request for 150 judges was made in response to the rapid growth in California's population and trial court caseload and the historic shortage of judicial positions in the state.

The council also approved an updated priority list of 100 additional judgeships for which it would seek legislative authority and funding in the future. This new request is based on the most recent Judicial Workload Assessment, which measures the need for judicial resources in California courts.

Juvenile Dependency Courts: Adopted new juvenile dependency court performance measures that will help courts assess compliance with mandated hearing time frames; ensure children's placement in safe and permanent homes; promote child and family well-being; and provide fair and timely treatment for all court participants. The measures, contained in new rule 5.505 of the California Rules of Court, comply with the Child Welfare Leadership and Performance Accountability Act of 2006. The council also approved the *Implementation Guide to Juvenile Dependency Court Performance Measures* as a companion publication to the rule and directed the Administrative Office of the Courts to review the implementation of rule 5.505 in the trial courts and report back to the Judicial Council.

Adoption Month: Approved a recommendation that it declare November as "Court Adoption and Permanency Month." The goal is to highlight innovative efforts aimed at expediting adoption and permanency while raising awareness of the need for safe and permanent homes for children.

Naming of New Court Facility: Approved a recommendation by Presiding Judge Terence L. Bruiniers, of the Superior Court of Contra Costa County, and the Contra Costa County Bar Association to name the new trial court facility in Pittsburgh the “Richard E. Arnason Justice Center.” The court facility will honor retired Judge Arnason for his many accomplishments and contributions as a distinguished jurist and pioneering member of the bar in eastern Contra Costa County. Construction of the court facility will begin soon. When completed, it will be the first new state-funded trial court facility in the state.

New and Amended Court Rules: Approved 41 reports on the consent agenda proposing new and amended rules of court and court forms in appellate procedure, criminal law, civil law and small claims, court interpreting, court security, family and juvenile law, and probate. Two of those reports follow.

Jury Instructions: Approved the publication of revisions and additions to the *Judicial Council of California Civil Jury Instructions (CACI)*, which were first published in September 2003 and last revised in April 2008. This proposal includes 60 new, revised, or revoked instructions and verdict forms. Included among them are revisions to the instructions and verdict forms on malicious prosecution, defamation, and elder abuse.

Court Security Plans: Adopted two new rules of court to improve court security plans, as required by Government Code section 69925. The new rules specify the subject areas to be addressed by court security plans; establish a process for review of such plans; and specify the most efficient practices for providing court security. One of the 39 subject areas to be included in court security plans will be “public access to court proceedings,” as the result of a comment submitted by Senator Gloria Romero.

Today’s meeting may be heard on an archived audiocast at <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/jc/meetings.htm>. The complete agenda and reports are at <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/jc/documents/age102408.pdf>.

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The Judicial Council is the policymaking body of the California courts, the largest court system in the nation. Under the leadership of the Chief Justice and in accordance with the California Constitution, the council is responsible for ensuring the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice. The Administrative Office of the Courts carries out the official actions of the council and promotes leadership and excellence in court administration.