



Background on the Bench-Bar Coalition

In 1993, under the leadership of the California Association of Local Bars (CALB), the State Bar of California, and the Judicial Council, a statewide Bench-Bar Coalition (BBC) was formed to enhance communication and coordinate the activities of the judicial community with the state, local, and specialty bars on issues of common interest—particularly in the legislative arena. Securing adequate, dependable, and stable funding for the trial courts has been a primary focus for the BBC. BBC membership includes judges and the presidents, past-presidents, presidents-elect, executive directors, or other person(s) designated by the president, of a state, local, minority or specialty bar association; legal services organization; or statewide organization dedicated to improving the justice system.

The BBC is currently cochaired by Ms. Danni R. Murphy, former member of the State Bar Board of Governors and past president of the Orange County Bar Association and Judge Mary Ann O'Malley, Judge of the Superior Court of California, County of Contra Costa, and former chair of the Trial Court Presiding Judges Advisory Committee. Ms. Murphy represents the Southern California region and Judge O'Malley, the Northern/Central California region. Members of the BBC's Executive Committee support the cochaairs in carrying out leadership responsibilities on quarterly conference calls, meetings, working groups, and related coalition activities.

In addition to its conference calls, the Bench-Bar Coalition holds meetings in conjunction with the State Bar of California and the judicial branch. The statewide BBC also participates in Day in Sacramento events, in which small groups of judges and bar leaders meet with their legislators to discuss issues of mutual interest, with emphasis on the judicial branch budget. Judicial Council members and leaders of special commissions and task forces also are invited to participate in this event, the first of which each year is held in conjunction with the State of the Judiciary address by the Chief Justice of California. The Administrative Office of the Courts' (AOC) Office of Governmental Affairs coordinates BBC activities.

Among the benefits derived from the coalition has been the development of strong working relationships and better communication between the judiciary and members of the bar, as well as enhanced advocacy efforts with the Legislature. Subject areas of joint interest include the judicial branch budget and the need for stable, adequate funding; access to justice; jury system improvement; alternative dispute resolution; court technology; new judgeships; and judges' compensation. The bar has kept the coalition informed about issues important to the Commission on Equal Access to Justice and the State Bar.

For more information about the BBC or the BBC Day in Sacramento, please contact Dia Poole, the AOC's liaison to the BBC, at (916) 323-3121 phone, (916) 323-4347 fax, or email to dia.poole@jud.ca.gov.