

Budget Adds Money for Court Security

The Recorder and www.callaw.com

By Cheryl Miller

May 15, 2007

SACRAMENTO — California's courthouses would receive an additional \$36.6 million to beef up security as part of a \$145 billion revised spending plan that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger released Monday.

The money should pay for enough guards and screeners to bring every courthouse into compliance with security standards (.pdf) created by a working group of judicial administrators and sheriffs, said Kate Howard, director of the judiciary's Office of Governmental Affairs.

"We are thrilled that the governor has taken action to address the critical funding needed to keep our courthouses safe," Howard said.

The court security standards attempt to make uniform everything from staffing levels to screening stations to ammunition costs among the state's many courthouses. The state, however, has never provided enough money for courts to meet those standards, Howard said.

The Administrative Office of the Courts could not immediately provide a list Monday of what the new funding would bring to each courthouse.

The governor's revised budget, which adjusts the original spending projections Schwarzenegger outlined in January, retains funding to create 50 new judgeships during the 2007-08 fiscal year. Money also remains for courthouse fixes or new construction in Fresno, Contra Costa, Plumas, Sierra and Mono counties.

Last month, the administration also proposed funding for early courthouse construction work in Madera, San Bernardino, San Joaquin, Riverside, Tulare, San Benito, Calaveras and Lassen counties. But the governor's plans to pay for much of that work with \$2 billion in general obligation bonds has stalled in the Legislature.

Judicial officials are talking with lawmakers about finding other sources of money, including lease-revenue bonds that don't require voter approval, Howard said.

"There are a variety of other options that could be considered," she said.

But judicial hopes to boost pensions for judges appointed after 1994 appear to have faded this year. Politically powerful labor unions are not eager to see

judges win improved retirement plans while the governor is reviewing future funding for their own members' retirement accounts.

Still, the court's overall budget fared well in the revise, compared to other programs. To compensate for a dip in tax revenues, the governor is proposing to freeze public welfare benefits while eliminating funding for a popular program that pays farmers to keep their land in agricultural use.

Legislative Democrats immediately assailed the plan as "mean-spirited" and an attack on the poor, while Republicans criticized the Republican governor for unveiling a spending plan that carries a \$1.4 billion deficit.