



The Capitol Connection

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS • OFFICE OF GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

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Legislative Calendar

April 22 and 29
Last day to hear/report Sen and Asm fiscal bills to fiscal committees.

April 29 and May 6
Last day to hear/report Sen and Asm non-fiscal bills to floor.

CHIEF JUSTICE VOICES JUDICIAL BRANCH PRIORITIES TO THE LEGISLATURE

In his tenth annual State of the Judiciary address to a joint session of the California Legislature, Chief Justice Ronald M. George reviewed proposed amendments to Article VI of the State Constitution and other judicial branch priorities such as the need for new judgeships, a court facilities bond, and a uniform civil filing fee.

The Chief Justice emphasized the need for a court facilities bond. Chief Justice George spoke of the need to upgrade courthouses as they transfer from county to state ownership, to ensure their seismic safety, and to build new courthouses that will address growth in the state. Senator Escutia has introduced Senate Bill 395 to

address this need. The Chief Justice also highlighted the need for safe and accessible buildings for court employees and users.

Chief Justice George also outlined the importance of amending the judicial article (Article VI) of the state Constitution to “provide greater stability, accountability, and protection of access to justice for all Californians.” Under consideration at this time are proposals integrating the State Appropriations Limit (SAL) in the Constitution to ensure funding and accountability for the trial court base budget, provide for the orderly addition of judgeships, and to increase judicial officers’ terms from six to ten years.



Chief Ronald George addresses a sea of legislators. Photo: Erika Johnson

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LEGISLATOR PROFILE: ASSEMBLY MEMBER VAN TRAN



Asm. Van Tran (R-Garden Grove) is one of fifteen attorneys in the Assembly.

Van Tran was elected to the State Assembly in November 2004 as the first Vietnamese American in the California Legislature. He represents the 68th Assembly District in Orange County, including the cities of Anaheim, Costa Mesa, Fountain Valley, Garden Grove, Newport Beach, Stanton, and Westminster.

Prior to serving in the Assembly, Tran was a managing partner in a law practice, served on the Garden Grove Planning Commission, and as Deputy Mayor of Garden Grove.

Assemblyman Tran currently serves on the Business and Professions, Banking and Finance, and Environmental Safety

and Toxic Materials Committees. Additionally, he is a member of the Select Committee on Critical Issues and the Asian Pacific Islander Joint Caucus.

“The Legislature has a lot of work to do, from balancing the budget to removing barriers that hurt job creation,” Tran said. “I’ve started to work on these problems right away, because that’s what Californians do – we roll up our sleeves, get to work and solve problems.”

Since his election to the Assembly, Tran reports that he has made quick work to advance common-sense solutions to some of the biggest problems facing California. His efforts include Assembly Bill 199, an act to expand the number of enterprise zones in California and help create new jobs, and Assembly Bill 38, cutting the excessive sal-

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UPDATE ON JUDICIAL COUNCIL-SPONSORED LEGISLATION

New Judgeships/SJO Conversions

Securing new judgeships is an immediate objective for the judicial branch. California courts face a critical need for more judges, and fast-growing counties are especially in need. Over the last twenty years, California has experienced a 50 percent increase in population. Yet, since 1988, only 41 judgeships have been added to the trial courts statewide. A detailed analysis of judicial workload identified a need for approximately 355 judges statewide. Considering the state's ongoing fiscal crisis, the Judicial Council is requesting only the most critically needed 150 judgeships over a three-year period.

In addition to the proposed 150 new judgeships, the judgeship bill is anticipated to include provisions that would allow for the conversion of certain eligible subordinate judicial officer positions to be converted to judgeships. A 2000 study by the National Center for State Courts noted that subordinate judicial officers positions were created and funded at the county level to address courts' need for judicial resources when new judgeships were not created through the legislative process. In the ten-year period from 1989-1999, the total number of judges in California increased by one percent (from 1460

to 1479), while the total number of subordinate judicial officers increased by 60 percent (from 250 to 401). Statewide, subordinate judicial officers make up 22 percent of the Superior Court bench.

SJO positions would be converted to judge positions when (1) a commissioner or referee voluntarily vacates one of the positions on the list, or (2) the Governor appoints as a judge an SJO in a court that has a position eligible for conversion.

SB 56 was introduced as a "spot bill" by Senator Joseph Dunn (D-Santa Ana) to address the need for new judgeships and conversion of SJOs. Senator Dunn intends to seek numerous co-authors to reflect the strong bi-partisan support for new judgeships.

For more information about SB 56, contact Eraina Ortega at eraina.ortega@jud.ca.gov

Uniform Civil Fee Proposal

Courts and court users faced confusion and difficulty after the implementation of numerous new and increased fees passed with the 2003-04 Budget Act. These issues led the Chief Justice to appoint the Court Fees Working Group (CFWG). In April 2004, the CFWG made unanimous rec-

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BENCH-BAR COALITION IMPACT FELT AT THE STATE CAPITOL



Participants take notes during the briefing prior to their legislative appointments.

By the time Chief Justice Ronald M. George began his State of the Judiciary Address on Tuesday, March 15, more than half of the state legislators in attendance had a good idea of the key issues he'd cover.

Shortly after ten o'clock that morning, 45 members of the statewide Bench-Bar Coalition (BBC) fanned out across the State Capitol for 65 scheduled appointments with legislators and staff of leadership and key policy and fiscal committees – spreading the word about the need to create new judgeships, increase public safety through improvements to court security, and adequately fund efforts to revamp court facilities. Members of the Judicial Council also participated in the legislative visits.

The BBC, whose members include judges, legal services providers, and state, local, minority and specialty bar leaders, was formed in 1993 to promote communication between the bench and bar on issues of mutual interest –

particularly in the legislative arena. The coalition is currently chaired by Miriam Krinsky, executive director of the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles, and Anthony Capozzi, immediate past president of the State Bar of California.

The overall structure of this month's Day in Sacramento event differed significantly from previous years (see "Bench-Bar Coalition Meets with Legislators on Court Budgets," *The Capitol Connection*, June 2004). BBC members were divided into eleven smaller geographic "teams," making it easier to meet with legislators representing districts where BBC members live and work.



Ron Overholt, Mary Viviano, and Chris Schneider (l-r) discuss Central Valley legislative appointments with Kate Howard.

Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) Director William C. Vickrey, Chief Deputy Director Ronald G. Overholt, and Office of Governmental Affairs Director Kathleen Howard briefed the group on Judicial Council-sponsored legislative proposals. Each member received background materials on the pro-

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LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

The following is an update of the first year of the 2005-2006 legislative session on selected bills of interest to the courts. ♦ denotes bills first reported in this issue.

COURT OPERATIONS

AB 176 (Bermúdez), as introduced. Trial courts: limited term employees

Existing law prohibits the employment of any temporary employee in the trial court for a period exceeding 180 calendar days, except for court reporters under certain conditions. This bill would prohibit the employment of any limited-term employee in the trial court for a period exceeding 180 calendar days, except for court reporters under certain conditions. The bill would provide that any limited-term employee employed for more than 180 calendar days is a regular employee, except for those court reporters otherwise excluded.

Status: Assembly Public Employees, Retirement, and Social Security. Set for hearing April 6, 2005.

JC Position: Oppose

SB 56 (Dunn), as introduced. New judgeships.

Authorizes an unspecified number of additional judges for assignment to the various counties, as determined by the Judicial Council.

Notes: SB 56 is a "spot bill" for the Judicial Council's proposal to add 150 new judgeships over three years and to allow conversion of 161 subordinate judicial officers positions to judgeships.

Status: Awaiting committee assignment.

JC Position: Sponsor

SB 57 (Alarcón), as introduced. Fines and forfeitures.

Authorizes a county board of supervisors to levy a new \$2 penalty assessment for every \$10, upon every fine, penalty, or forfeiture imposed and collected by the courts for specified criminal offenses. In addition, a county board can levy another \$2 penalty assessment for every \$10 upon every fine, penalty, or forfeiture imposed and collected by the courts for seat belt, speed limit, DUI and domestic violence violations. Counties have discretion to spend up to 15% of the revenue generated on trauma care facilities that provide pediatric trauma care.

Notes: The second \$2 assessment presents problems for court CCMS systems since it only applies to four categories of offenses.

Status: Senate Public Safety Committee. Set for hearing April 19, 2005.

JC Position: Oppose

SB 395 (Escutia), as introduced. Court facilities bond.

States the intent of the Legislature to enact the California Court Facilities Bond Act of 2006 to acquire, rehabilitate, construct, and finance court facilities.

Notes: SB 395 is a "spot bill" for the Judicial Council's proposal to place a bond initiative on the ballot in 2006. Details of the bond proposal are under development by AOC staff.

Status: Awaiting committee assignment

JC Position: Sponsor

CRIMINAL

AB 106 (Cohn), as amended March 8, 2005. Spousal battery: fines: amnesty.

Requires the courts of each county to establish a one-time amnesty program, based upon Judicial Council guidelines, for fines, bail, and other monetary obligations that are imposed for certain domestic violence offenses that have been delinquent for not less than six months as of January 1, 2006. Provides that the amount scheduled by the court shall be 70% of the total fines, fees, penalties or assessments imposed. The Judicial Council has taken an "oppose" position on this bill because it is inconsistent with the recommendations of the SB 940 Court County Working Group on Enhanced Collections. If you have information on the costs of operating an amnesty program please contact Tracy Kenny at Tracy.Kenny@jud.ca.gov or (916) 323-3121.

Status: Assembly Appropriations Committee. Not yet set for hearing.

JC Position: Oppose

♦AB 1551 (Runner), as introduced. Sexual predators.

Strengthens the sentencing scheme for sexual assault on children and, among other things, prohibits a court from striking an allegation, admission, or finding of a prior conviction pursuant to Penal Code section 1385 for defendants who are convicted of certain sex offenses.

Sponsor: California District Attorneys Association

Notes: The Criminal Law Advisory Committee has recommended that the Judicial Council oppose AB 1551 unless it is amended to strike the provision eliminating the court's authority under Penal Code section 1385 to dismiss an action in the furtherance of justice. The council has long advocated that, while the discretion is not absolute, dismissal of an action in the furtherance of justice is within the court's "exclusive discretion."

Status: Assembly Public Safety. Not yet set for hearing.

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LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

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JC position: On April 4, 2005, PCLC agenda.

◆**SB 330 (Cedillo), as introduced. Criminal proceedings: mental competency.**

Requires a criminal action to be dismissed if a defendant in a misdemeanor or infraction case is not brought to trial within 10 days after the date of the reinstatement of criminal proceedings pursuant to the provisions of law governing the mental competency of defendants.

Sponsor: Los Angeles City Attorney

Notes: SB 330 is going to be amended to provide 30 days rather than 10 to bring a defendant to trial after reinstatement of mental competency. With this amendment, the Criminal Law Advisory Committee has recommended that the Judicial Council support the bill because SB 330 would conform the misdemeanor/infraction incompetency provisions with the existing felony provisions, and allow courts to better manage their calendars.

Status: Senate Public Safety Committee. Set for hearing April 5, 2005.

JC position: On April 4, 2005, PCLC agenda.

◆**SB 864 (Poochigian), as introduced. Sexually violent predators: term of commitment**

Authorizes commitment as a sexually violent predator to the state Department of Mental Health for an indeterminate term rather than for a two-year term for treatment of the person's diagnosed mental disorder if the person is adjudicated to be likely to engage in sexually violent criminal behavior if discharged.

Sponsor: California District Attorneys Association

Notes: This bill reduces the frequency of trials to adjudicate the need for continued civil commitment as a sexually violent predator. If you have information on the typical duration of these trials, to assist with determination of fiscal impact (potential savings), please contact June Clark at june.clark@jud.ca.gov or (916) 323-3121.

Status: Senate Public Safety Committee and Senate Health Committee. Set for hearing April 12, 2005.

JC position: N/A

CIVIL PROCEDURE

AB 496 (Aghazarian), as introduced. Service of process: retention of original summons in court file.

Existing law provides that a plaintiff may have the clerk issue one or more summons for any defendant. Among

other things, this bill would require the clerk not to return the original summons, but to maintain it in the file.

Status: Assembly Judiciary Committee. Not yet set for hearing date.

AB 1459 (Canciamilla), as introduced. Small claims court.

Increases the jurisdictional amount in small claims court actions for the recovery of money from \$5,000 to \$15,000, with specified exceptions, and increases the jurisdictional amount in certain other actions from \$5,000 to \$10,000.

Status: Awaiting committee assignment

SB 312 (Ackerman), as introduced. Summary judgment.

Existing law requires that notice of a motion for summary judgment and supporting papers

shall be served on all other parties to the action at least 75 days before the time appointed for hearing.

This bill would make an exception to that requirement if the court for good cause orders otherwise or the parties stipulate otherwise. The bill would additionally authorize a party to move for summary adjudication of a legal issue or claim for damages, other than punitive damages, that does not completely dispose of a cause of action, an affirmative defense, or an issue of duty according to specified procedures.

Status: Senate Judiciary Committee. Not yet set for hearing.

SB 422 (Simitian), as introduced. Small claims court.

Increases the jurisdictional amount in small claims court actions from \$5,000 to \$10,000, with specified exceptions.

Status: Senate Judiciary Committee. Not yet set for hearing.

FAMILY

AB 104 (Cohn), as amended March 1, 2005. Protective orders: dismissal.

Provides that a domestic violence protective order may be dismissed by the issuing judge, to the extent feasible, upon written stipulation filed with the court or on the motion of a party to terminate the order prior to its expiration date.

Status: Passed Assembly.

JC Position: Oppose

AB 112 (Cohn), as introduced. Protective orders: modification.

Requires the court to confirm the identity of the petitioner when considering a petition to modify or terminate a domestic violence protective order. The intent of this bill is to require the court, considering a motion to modify (typically to terminate) a DVPA order, to verify that if someone is in court purporting to be the protected person, that that person is in fact the protected person and not someone impersonat-

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LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

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ing the protected person.

Status: Assembly Judiciary Committee. Not yet set for hearing.

AB 118 (Cohn), as amended March 9, 2005. Protective orders: minor children.

Requires that child custody orders must reference a criminal protective order issued in cases where a criminal protective order protects the custodial parent and provides that contact between a restrained parent and a protected parent shall be for safe exchange only.

Status: Assembly Judiciary Committee. Set for hearing April 5, 2005.

AB 1102 (Hancock), as introduced. Marriage

Revises provisions concerning marriage licenses. Requires the clerk of the court to collect an \$11 fee for the filing of an adoption petition, and to remit those fees to the State Registrar of Vital Statistics. Requires the court to send notice to the Bureau of Vital Statistics regarding dissolution of marriage. This proposal reorganizes the responsibility for marriage related activities by county and court clerks. If you have information on how this proposal would affect the way your county/court currently manages these responsibilities please contact Tracy.Kenny@jud.ca.gov or (916) 323-3121.

Status: Assembly Judiciary Committee. Not yet set for hearing.

JUDICIAL OFFICERS

◆**AB 1595 (Evans), as introduced. Public safety officials: confidentiality**

Prohibits a person, business, or association from selling or trading for value on the Internet the home address or telephone number of any elected or appointed official if that official has made a written demand of that person, business, or association to not disclose his or her home address or telephone number.

Sponsor: Author

Notes: Product of 2004 Final Report of the Public Safety Officials' Home Protection Act Advisory Task Force. Council to seek amendment allowing public safety official to submit opt-out request to Secretary of State for inclusion in "opt-out registry."

Status: Assembly Public Safety Committee. Not yet set for hearing.

JC position: Support

◆**SB 506 (Poochigian), as introduced. Voter records: confidentiality**

Extends existing voter registration confidentiality programs for "Victims of Domestic Violence and Stalking" and "Reproductive Health Care Services Providers, Employees, Volunteers, and Patients" to include public safety officials if his or her employer certifies that he or she is a public safety official.

Sponsor: Author

Notes: Product of 2004 Final Report of the Public Safety Officials' Home Protection Act Advisory Task Force.

Status: Senate Elections, Reapportionment and Constitutional Amendments Committee. Set for hearing April 6, 2005.

JC position: Support

JUVENILE DEPENDENCY

SB 218 (Scott), as introduced. Termination of parental rights: prospective adoptive.

Authorizes the court to designate specified caretakers as prospective adoptive parents in cases where a dependent child's parents have had their rights terminated, and the child has resided with the caretaker for at least six months, and the caretaker has expressed an interest in adopting the child. Where the court makes this designation, a child could not be removed from the home of that caretaker until a noticed hearing had been conducted to determine that such removal was in the child's best interests.

Status: Senate Judiciary Committee. Set for hearing April 12, 2005.

PROBATE

SB 390 (Bowen), as introduced. Probate agreements: cash advances: court review

Existing law provides for the regulation of viatical settlements and the transfer of structured settlement payment rights. This bill would similarly regulate probate agreements, which would be defined as an agreement whereby a beneficiary transfers his or her interest, or future interest, in an estate or trust in exchange for compensation. The bill would provide for certain disclosure and notice requirements with regard to the price paid for, and the actual value of, the interest or future interest, and would require court approval of those agreements. The bill would further authorize the Attorney General to review any probate agreement, and would require a buyer thereof to provide certain disclosures to the Attorney General.

Status: Senate Judiciary Committee. Set for hearing April 12, 2005. ■

BENCH-BAR COALITION

(Continued from page 2)

posals, schedules of assigned visits, and biographies on the legislators, which included Assembly members and senators that hear judiciary-related policy and budget issues.



BBC members and court leaders pack a Capitol hearing room before departing for the State of the Judiciary Address. BBC Past Chair Jim Fisher is in the foreground at left.

For the first time, the BBC held its Day in Sacramento activities in conjunction with the Chief Justice’s annual speech and the Judicial-Legislative-Executive Forum. Against this backdrop, the judicial branch priorities shared during visits in legislative offices were reiterated that evening in the Chief’s

remarks and again in one-on-one conversations at the reception and forum held in the Rotunda under the Capitol’s dome.

Following the forum, BBC members met for dinner to continue discussions on the visits, address and forum. Then on Wednesday, March 16, over half of the BBC members returned to the Capitol for a morning debriefing and strategic planning session on the group’s goals and priorities. During the meeting led by BBC co-chair Miriam Krinsky, members brainstormed ways to build on the momentum generated by the legislative visits and the Chief’s remarks, to maintain and strengthen relationships with new and incumbent legis-



Ron Overholt, Jessica Lee, Tony Vittal, and Miriam Krinsky (l-r) wind down at dinner following the Address and Forum.

lators, and to further engage local, specialty and minority bar associations in BBC activities.

As with previous advocacy day events, BBC members provided feedback on their meetings with legislators. Comments on the March visits provided OGA staff with valuable insights on where legislators stand on the issues:

“The legislator feels that the [facilities] bond is doable. He personally felt impacted viewing prisoners [while performing] jury duty and is very sympathetic to the courts.”

In their program evaluations, attendees also reported that the overall event was well orchestrated and worth the commitment of time and resources to travel to Sacramento:

“Meetings were very productive. Group was effective, organized, and well received. [I] feel we made an impact.”

As a result of the interest generated from the BBC contacts, the Office of Governmental Affairs will follow up with legislative offices requesting additional information about the Day in Sacramento.

The next BBC quarterly conference call is scheduled for **Monday, April 18, 2005, 4:00 – 5:00 p.m.** For more information about the BBC or the Day in Sacramento, please contact Dia Poole at (916) 323-3121 phone, (916) 323-4347 fax, or email at dia.poole@jud.ca.gov. ■



Will Schneider (l), Alice Salvo (second from right), and Tamila Jensen (right) were among those attending the Strategic Planning Session.

LEGISLATOR PROFILE

(Continued from page 1)

ary for members of part-time boards and commissions, saving California over \$5 million per year. Tran’s agenda includes balancing the budget through spending restraint, eliminating waste in the bureaucracy, and improving our infrastructure, particularly transportation.

Tran’s family first came to America in 1975, evacuated by the U.S. Army a week before the fall of Saigon. Originally settling in Michigan, the family moved to Orange County, California, while he was in high school. Long politically active, Assemblyman Tran started as an intern for Congressman Robert Dornan and later for then State Senator (now Congressman) Ed Royce.

Assembly Member Tran’s community involvement has been extensive, including as Vice Chairman of the Orange County based El Capitan District of the Boy Scouts of America. In 2004, OC Metro Magazine recognized Tran as one of the “Hottest 25 People in Orange County.” The Orange County Register recognized him in 2001 as a “Person to Watch.”

Tran completed his bachelor’s degree in political science at the University of California, Irvine, and went on to earn both a master’s degree in public administration and a juris doctorate from Hamline University School of Law in Saint Paul, Minnesota. In 2004, he married Cindy Nguyen of Elk Grove. ■

JUDICIAL COUNCIL SPONSORED LEGISLATION

(Continued from page 2)

ommendations on a statewide uniform civil fee structure. In the ensuing months, extensive negotiations have gone on with interested and affected groups, including counties, law libraries, civil attorneys, local dispute resolution programs, and others. The Uniform Civil Fee (UCF) proposal will streamline and vastly simplify the civil fee structure, provide for uniformity across the state, and address the funding shortfall under the current fee structure.

The UCF proposal will be submitted as a budget trailer bill so that the new fee structure will be approved upon passage of the state budget, but will likely take effect at a later date specified in the bill. The delayed effective date will give courts sufficient time to implement the new structure.

For more information about the UCF, contact Kate Howard at kathleen.howard@jud.ca.gov

Court Facilities Bond

The Task Force on Court Facilities identified 90 percent of existing buildings in need of significant maintenance, repair, or renovation. Of the 451 facilities catalogued by the task force; 23 facilities were in trailers, over 80 percent were constructed prior to the 1988 seismic codes, 30 percent are 40 years or older, 25 percent do not provide a space for assembled jurors. If funded over twelve years, the average annual need in 2005 dollars is \$313 million.

The Trial Court Facilities Act of 2002 established new filing fees and penalty assessments for deposit in the State Courthouse Construction Fund. The annual reve-

nue to the Fund is estimated to be \$82 million in 2005 and while this revenue will address some of the need for capital investment in court facilities, a substantial commitment of funds is necessary to fully address the needs identified by the task force. The use of bond financing allows the judicial branch to secure the necessary funds to construct and renovate court facilities, is consistent with the recommendations of the Task Force on Court Facilities and will further the goals of the Trial Court Facilities Act of 2002.

Senator Martha Escutia (D-Whittier) has introduced SB 395 as a "spot bill" to address the need for bond financing.

For more information about AB 395, contact Eraina Ortega at eraina.ortega@jud.ca.gov

Judges' Retirement

SB 528 (Ackerman and Dunn), as introduced on February 18, 2005, declares the Legislature's intent to evaluate the impact of trial court unification on the judges' retirement systems and the resulting increase in judges' ages at the start of their judicial service. This bill will serve as the vehicle for proposed changes to the judges' retirement systems during the 2005-2006 Legislative Session. The Judicial Council and the California Judges Association are co-sponsors of the effort to modify the defined benefit structure of JRS II as follows:

- Decrease the minimum retirement age from 65 to 63.
- Allow judges to receive a defined benefit retirement at age 63 and older, calculated based on a formula of 3.75 percent of salary for each year of service, subject to a minimum of at least 10 years of service.

For more information about SB 528, contact June Clark at june.clark@jud.ca.gov. ■

CHIEF JUSTICE VOICES JUDICIAL BRANCH PRIORITIES

(Continued from page 1)

Another judicial branch priority is the creation of additional judicial positions. Chief Justice George stated, "In the last 20 years, California has experienced a 50 percent increase in population, yet only 41 new judgeships have been created..." Senator Joseph Dunn has introduced Senate Bill 56 for this purpose. The Chief Justice also spoke of converting subordinate judicial officer (SJO) positions into judgeships. With nearly one quarter of superior court judicial positions held by SJOs, the Chief Justice described their conversions as "an inexpensive way to invest one of our most valuable resources more wisely."

Chief Justice George also spoke of the value of a state-

wide uniform fee structure in reducing "confusion and inequities" for court users. Thus far, a collaboration of trial and defense attorneys, bar leaders, and other court users have worked to recommend a uniform fee structure. The Chief Justice anticipates that the proposal will be placed in a budget trailer bill.

After the Chief Justice delivered his address, the Judicial-Executive-Legislative Forum was held on the second-floor rotunda in the State Capitol. The event was well attended by legislators, judicial branch leaders, and Bench-Bar Coalition members.

For the full text of the "State of the Judiciary" address, see <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/soj031505.htm>. ■



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JUDICIAL COUNCIL TO HOLD HEARING ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE

The Judicial Council of California will hold a special hearing in April to focus on access to justice issues facing the judicial branch. The 27-member body will hear testimony on topics that are expected to include the consequences of too few judicial resources, and the need for safe, secure and adequate court facilities.



The Office of Governmental Affairs (OGA) is coordinating the witnesses for the hearing, with emphasis placed on testimony from members of the public who are faced with access issues when using court programs and services. Other invited witnesses will include judges, court administrators and employees, representatives from business and legal services organizations, and law enforcement administrators.

In his March 15 State of the Judiciary address to a joint session of the Legislature (see "*Chief Justice Voices Judicial Branch Priorities to the Legislature*" in this issue), Chief Justice Ronald M. George emphasized the priority the judicial branch has placed on ensuring equal access to the court system for all Californians. The recent tragic events in courtrooms in Atlanta, Georgia, and Southern California, also served to highlight the judicial branch's critical need for adequate court facilities and security measures that minimize the risk to public safety.

The hearing has been set for 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 14, 2005, in the Judicial Council Conference Center in San Francisco. Due to limited seating in the council chambers, the hearing will be audiocast live via the Internet on the California Court's Web site: www.courtinfo.ca.gov. To access the link from the Home Page, click on "Court Admin," "Judicial Council," and scroll down to "2005 Judicial Council Minutes, Agendas, and Audiocasts." Click on "Audiocast" next to the April 14, 2005, agenda item. The hearing is also being taped and will be shown throughout the state on the California Channel; check your local listings for dates and times or visit the California Channel Web site at: www.calchannel.com.

For more information on the hearing, contact Dia Poole in the OGA at (916) 323-3121 or via email at dia.poole@jud.ca.gov. ■

News From the AOC

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CFCC Update: Reports on developments in juvenile and family law, including innovative programs, case law summaries from the AOC's Center for Families, Children and the Courts; grants and resources, and updates on legislation and rules and forms. Published three times a year. See www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/resources/publications/newsletter.htm.