Judicial Council *of* California

455 Golden Gate Avenue · San Francisco, California 94102-3688

Telephone 415-865-4200 · Fax 415-865-4205

M E M O R A N D U M

Date
October 28, 2026

To
Members of the Executive and Planning Committee

From
Judicial Council Staff
Leah Rose-Goodwin, Chief Data and Analytics Officer
Kristin Greenaway, Manager
Research, Analytics, and Data

Subject
Request for Continuation of an Exception to the Conversion of One Subordinate Judicial Officer Position in the Superior Court of Placer County

Action Requested
Approve Staff Recommendation

Deadline
October 30, 2026

Contact
Anna Stenkamp
415-865-7829 phone
anna.stenkamp@jud.ca.gov

Executive Summary

Research, Analytics, and Data staff recommend that the Judicial Council's Executive and Planning Committee (Executive Committee) confirm the request by the Superior Court of Placer County to continue to defer the conversion of a subordinate judicial officer (SJO) position to a judgeship. The Placer court has informed council staff that the impetus for this request is primarily for budgetary reasons. The court states that a full-time commissioner vacancy resulted from the appointment of Commissioner Shani Roark to superior court judge by Governor Gavin Newsom, effective April 2, 2026. The Placer court submitted and received an exemption of an SJO conversion on May 11, 2026. The position has recently become vacant again and the court wishes to extend the exemption. The court indicates that a commissioner position provides

greater flexibility for the court in the event extreme action is required to achieve a balanced budget. Although the court plans to fill these positions, it has historically used commissioner vacancies to navigate through economic downturns. The court seeks to retain the flexibility to employ this strategy again, if necessary.

Recommendation

Research, Analytics, and Data staff recommend that the Executive Committee confirm the request by the Superior Court of Placer County for the continued exception to the conversion of an SJO position to a judgeship.

Relevant Previous Council Action

The 2002 report of the Subordinate Judicial Officer Working Group led the Judicial Council to sponsor legislation to restore an appropriate balance between judges and SJOs in the trial courts. The 2002 report found that many courts had created SJO positions out of necessity in response to the dearth of new judgeships during the 1980s and 1990s. As a result, many SJOs were working as temporary judges. This imbalance between judges and SJOs was especially critical in the area of family and juvenile law.[1]

In 2007, the Judicial Council approved a methodology for evaluating the workload appropriate to SJOs relative to the number of SJOs working in the courts. In the same year, the Legislature passed Assembly Bill 159 (Stats. 2007, ch. 722), which adopted the Judicial Council's methodology. This action resulted in a list of 25 courts in which a total of 162 SJO positions would be converted. Government Code section 69615(C)(3)(A) allows for the annual conversion of up to 16 SJO vacancies upon authorization by the Legislature in courts identified by the Judicial Council as having SJOs in excess of the workload appropriate to SJOs.[2]

Subsequent council action established and refined guidelines for expediting the conversion of SJO vacancies. These guidelines included:

- The delegation of authority to the Executive Committee for confirming SJO conversions;
- The establishment of guidelines for courts to notify the council of SJO vacancies and timelines for the redistribution of SJO conversions across the allocation groups; and
- The establishment of criteria for the Executive Committee to use in evaluating and granting requests by courts to exempt SJO vacancies from conversion.

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[1] See Judicial Council of Cal., Advisory Com. Rep., *Subordinate Judicial Officers: Duties and Titles* (July 2002).

[2] See Judicial Council of Cal., Staff Rep., *Update of the Judicial Workload Assessment and New Methodology for Selecting Courts With Subordinate Judicial Officers for Conversion to Judgeships* (Feb. 14, 2007); and the update of this report and SJO allocation list, Judicial Council of Cal., Executive Com. Rep., *Subordinate Judicial Officers: Update of Conversions Using More Current Workload Data* (Aug. 11, 2015).

In addition to the above policies to expedite conversions, in 2015 the council refreshed the workload data used to determine the courts with eligible conversions. A list of eligible positions was established for the remaining conversions, and courts were notified of any changes in status based on the updated workload assessment.[3]

Analysis/Rationale

The Superior Court of Placer County is eligible for a total of 2 of the 162 conversions authorized by the Legislature under Government Code 69615(c)(1)(A). The court was granted an exception to the conversion of this position by the Executive Committee in fiscal years 2015–16, 2018–19, 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2026–2027 and requests the continued exception for the reasons described below.

The request for an exception to the conversion is primarily for budgetary reasons. The temporary retention of the SJO position may be seen as an important factor in the court's strategy for managing judicial resources wisely. Granting a temporary exception to the conversion of the vacant SJO position will enable the court to manage the allocation of its judicial workload in a way that allows it to be responsive to litigants seeking legal assistance and to the needs of the public more generally. (See Attachments A and B.)

Council policies concerning SJO conversions grant the Executive Committee the authority to confirm conversions and to evaluate and grant requests by courts to exempt vacancies from conversion. Because this request falls within the scope of the current policy on exceptions and yet is consistent with the spirit of the statute governing SJO conversions, Judicial Council staff recommend that the request be granted.

Policy Implications

Confirming this continued request for an exception to conversion is consistent with well-established tenets of council policy on SJO conversions.

Comments

This proposal, which is consistent with council policy on SJO conversions, did not circulate for comment.

Alternatives considered

The proposed exception to a SJO conversion is consistent with council policy. On that basis, no alternatives were considered.

[3] See Judicial Council of Cal., Executive Com. meeting agenda, item 2, p. 2 (Aug. 28, 2018).

Fiscal and Operational Impacts

If this temporary exception is granted by the Executive Committee, the court would incur no new costs, and the requirement for eventual conversion of the aforementioned positions would continue to be in effect. Hence, the operational impact is projected to be minimal.

Attachments and Links

1. Attachment A: Letter from Presiding Judge Jeffrey S. Penney, Superior Court of Placer County, to Administrative Presiding Justice Brad R. Hill, Executive and Planning Committee Chair (Oct. 19, 2026)
2. Attachment B: Letter from Presiding Judge Jeffrey S. Penney, Superior Court of Placer County, to Administrative Presiding Justice Brad R. Hill, Executive and Planning Committee Chair (Apr. 15, 2026)
3. Attachment C: Memorandum from Judicial Council Staff, Research, Analytics, and Data to the Executive and Planning Committee (May 1, 2026)

Superior Court of California
County of Placer

IN THE CHAMBERS OF
HON. JEFFREY S. PENNEY
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
[redacted]

October 19, 2026

Hon. Brad R. Hill, Chair
Executive and Planning Committee of the
Judicial Council of California
Transmitted via email to: executiveandplanning@jud.ca.gov

Re: Commissioner Vacancy and Judgeship Conversion – Fall 2026

Justice Hill and Members of the Executive and Planning Committee:

The Superior Court of Placer County hereby notifies the Executive and Planning Committee (E&P Committee) of a full-time commissioner vacancy, effective November 13, 2026, occasioned by the resignation of Mariam Baxley.

The Superior Court of Placer County was allocated two commissioner to judgeship conversions as part of the process authorized by Government Code section 69615. Neither of these positions have converted. The court previously requested deferral of conversions on five occasions, which were approved by the E&P Committee. The most recent request was submitted in April of this year, and approved by your Committee in May 2026. Commissioner Baxley filled the Commissioner position that was retained by the Court based on that deferral.

The court requests further deferral of this conversion. The circumstances facing the court are unchanged from six months ago. The court continues to seek the greater budget flexibility a Commissioner presents for the court in the event extreme action is needed to achieve a balanced budget. While it is our intention to fill these positions at the current time, this court has had to turn to Commissioner vacancies in the past to manage through economic downturns and desires the flexibility to do so again if needed. As an example, the court currently holds a 0.5 Commissioner position vacant, as it has done for the majority of the time since the Great Recession.

The court is also requesting expedited action by the E&P Committee. The court is facing significant workload pressure due to significant increases in filings over the past several years and would prefer to avoid further impacts due to a long term vacancy. Minimizing a

delay in filling the position vacated by Commissioner Baxley would be helpful to avoid further impacts on court hearing and trial dates.

Thank you for your consideration and your prior support of the court's preference regarding conversion of this position. If it would be helpful to discuss this request, please contact me or Jake Chatters, Court Executive Officer.

Sincerely,

Hon. Jeffrey S. Penney
Presiding Judge

cc: Leah Rose-Goodwin, Chief Data Officer, Judicial Council of California

Superior Court of the State of California
In and For the County of Placer
Roseville, California

In Chambers of
HONORABLE JEFFREY S. PENNEY
PRESIDING JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT
[redacted]

April 15, 2026

Hon. Brad R. Hill, Chair
Executive and Planning Committee of the
Judicial Council of California
Transmitted via email to: executiveandplanning@jud.ca.gov

Re: Commissioner Vacancy and Judgeship Conversion

Justice Hill and Members of the Executive and Planning Committee:

The Superior Court of Placer County hereby notifies the Executive and Planning Committee (E&P Committee) of a full-time commissioner vacancy, effective April 2, 2026, occasioned by the appointment of the Hon. Shani Roark to Superior Court Judge by Governor Gavin Newsom.

The Superior Court of Placer County was allocated two commissioner to judgeship conversions as part of the process authorized by Government Code section 69615. Neither of these positions have converted. The court previously requested deferral of conversions on four occasions, which were approved by the E&P Committee.

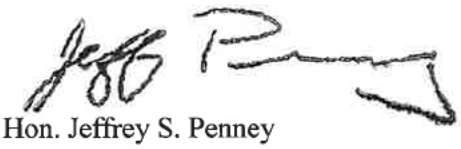
The court requests further deferral of this conversion. This deferral is being requested primarily for budget reasons. With the budget uncertainty facing the State of California for what may be several years, a Commissioner position provides greater budget flexibility for the court in the event extreme action is needed to achieve a balanced budget. While it is our intention to fill these positions at the current time, this court has had to turn to Commissioner vacancies in the past to manage through economic downturns and desires the flexibility to do so again if needed. As an example, the court currently holds a 0.5 Commissioner position vacant, as it has done for the majority of the time since the Great Recession.

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The court is also requesting expedited action by the E&P Committee. The court is facing significant workload pressure due to significant increases in filings over the past several years and would prefer to avoid further impacts due to a long term vacancy. Minimizing a delay in filling the position vacated by the Hon. Shani Roark would be helpful to avoid further impacts on court calendars and trial dates.

Thank you for your consideration. If it would be helpful to discuss this request, please contact me or Jake Chatters, Court Executive Officer.

Sincerely,



Hon. Jeffrey S. Penney
Presiding Judge

cc: Leah Rose-Goodwin, Business Management Services Division, Judicial Council of California

Judicial Council *of* California

455 Golden Gate Avenue · San Francisco, California 94102-3688

Telephone 415-865-4200 · Fax 415-865-4205

M E M O R A N D U M

Date
May 1, 2026

To
Members of the Executive and Planning Committee

From
Judicial Council Staff
Leah Rose-Goodwin, Chief Data and Analytics Officer
Kristin Greenaway, Manager
Research, Analytics, and Data

Subject
Request for an Exception to the Conversion of One Subordinate Judicial Officer Position in the Superior Court of Placer County

Action Requested
Approve Staff Recommendation

Deadline
May 11, 2026

Contact
Anna Stenkamp, Senior Research Analyst
415-865-7829 phone
Anna.Stenkamp@jud.ca.gov

Executive Summary

Research, Analytics, and Data staff recommend that the Judicial Council's Executive and Planning Committee (Executive Committee) confirm the request by the Superior Court of Placer County to defer the conversion of a subordinate judicial officer (SJO) position to a judgeship. The Placer County Superior Court has informed council staff that the impetus for this request is primarily for budgetary reasons. The court states that a full-time commissioner vacancy resulted from the appointment of Commissioner Shani Roark to superior court judge by Governor Gavin Newsom, effective April 2, 2026. The court indicates that a commissioner position provides greater flexibility for the court in the event extreme action is required to achieve a balanced budget. Although the court plans to fill these positions, it has historically used commissioner

vacancies to navigate through economic downturns. The court seeks to retain the flexibility to employ this strategy again, if necessary.

Recommendation

Research, Analytics, and Data staff recommend that the Executive Committee confirm the request by the Superior Court of Placer County for an exception to the conversion of an SJO position to a judgeship.

Relevant Previous Council Action

The 2002 report of the Subordinate Judicial Officer Working Group led the Judicial Council to sponsor legislation to restore an appropriate balance between judges and SJOs in the trial courts. The 2002 report found that many courts had created SJO positions out of necessity in response to the dearth of new judgeships during the 1980s and 1990s. As a result, many SJOs were working as temporary judges. This imbalance between judges and SJOs was especially critical in the area of family and juvenile law.[1]

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[3] See Judicial Council of Cal., Executive Com. meeting agenda, item 2, p. 2 (Aug. 28, 2018).

Attachments and Links

1. Attachment A: Letter from Presiding Judge Jeffrey S. Penney, Superior Court of Placer County, to Administrative Presiding Justice Brad R. Hill, Executive and Planning Committee Chair (Apr. 15, 2026)

Superior Court of the State of California
In and For the County of Placer
Roseville, California

In Chambers of
HONORABLE JEFFREY S. PENNEY
PRESIDING JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT
[redacted]

April 15, 2026

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Judicial Council of California
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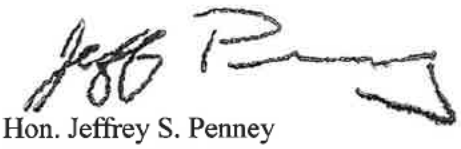
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Thank you for your consideration. If it would be helpful to discuss this request, please contact me or Jake Chatters, Court Executive Officer.

Sincerely,



Hon. Jeffrey S. Penney
Presiding Judge

cc: Leah Rose-Goodwin, Business Management Services Division, Judicial Council of California