



Judicial Council of California

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January 26, 2006

Hon. Joseph L. Dunn, Chair
Senate Judiciary Committee
State Capitol, Room 2080
Sacramento, California 95814

Subject: SB 1163 (Ackerman), as introduced - Support
Hearing: Senate Judiciary Committee – January 30, 2006

Dear Senator Dunn:

The Judicial Council is pleased to write in support of SB 1163, the California Critical Infrastructure Facilities Bond Acts of 2006 and 2010.

California's courthouses are in a state of serious disrepair. Of the state's 450 court facilities, 90 percent require significant maintenance, repair, or renovation. Over 80 percent were constructed prior to the 1988 seismic codes, 30 percent are 40 years or older, 23 facilities are in temporary buildings or trailers, and 25 percent do not provide a room to assemble jurors.

Conditions in many of California's courts jeopardize public safety and security, undermine court efficiency, and limit equal access. Examples include:

- **Security**
Out-of-date building designs contribute to inadequate security at 68 percent of California's courts and increased security costs statewide. In 41 percent of California's courts, in-custody defendants are brought to courtrooms by public hallways and pass by witnesses, jurors, victims, and other court users. As a result, children and victims cannot be separated from perpetrators, jurors come into contact with defendants and witnesses, and defendants may intimidate witnesses.

- **Safety**

Sixty-eight percent of California's courts lack up-to-date fire and life safety systems. Over half of California's courts pose a substantial seismic risk to court staff and the public. These deficiencies pose an unacceptable risk to court users, employees, and law enforcement.

- **Efficiency**

Twenty-five percent of courtrooms lack the space for a jury box. Many courts lack juror assembly rooms, forcing jurors to wait in public hallways. Existing court facilities are not equipped for current volumes of caseload administration, record archiving, and secure criminal evidence storage. To accommodate population growth over the next 20 years, California will need 5.8 million square feet of additional court space.

- **Access**

More than 75 percent of California's courts do not have adequate access for people with disabilities. Many of California's court facilities lack safe children's waiting rooms. More than 300,000 children come to court each year.

In 2005 the Judicial Council approved the Trial Court Five-Year Capital Outlay Plan, which used a systematic methodology to rank necessary court facility improvements statewide. The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) worked in close consultation with court and county personnel to develop the plan, which includes at least one project for every county and will correct all existing facility problems. Significant financing is necessary to implement this plan.

The courts are an integral part of our democracy – they are the infrastructure for critical services and protections for every Californian – and years of neglect have brought the system to a crisis state. The courts are insufficient in providing even basic life safety and accessibility, and inadequate security places victims including children, jurors, witnesses, litigants, and employees at risk. Without necessary improvements, the courts will be unable to function.

For these reasons, the Judicial Council urges your "aye" vote on SB 1163.

Sincerely,



Eraina Ortega
Manager

EO/TK/lb

cc: Members, Senate Judiciary Committee
Hon. Dick Ackerman, Member of the Senate
Karen Pank, Deputy Legislative Secretary, Office of the Governor
Sue Blake, Assistant Director of Legislation, Office of Planning and Research