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FACT SHEET

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Judicial Council of California

The 27-member Judicial Council is the policymaking body of the California courts, the largest court system in the nation. Under the leadership of the Chief Justice and in accordance with the California Constitution, the council is responsible for ensuring the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice. The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) serves as the council's staff agency.

History

On November 2, 1926, California voters approved a constitutional amendment establishing the Judicial Council as the policymaker for the third co-equal branch of state government and granted the new body responsibility for overseeing the state-wide administration of justice. This amendment has played a crucial role in maintaining the strength and independence of the judiciary in California.

Mandated Responsibilities

The Judicial Council is responsible for:

- Establishing direction and setting priorities for the continual improvement of the court system;
- Promulgating rules of court administration, practice, and procedure;
- Sponsoring and taking positions on legislation that affects the California judicial system;
- Allocating the California judicial branch budget; and
- Responding to mandates from the Legislature.

Major Reforms

The current stage in the council's history is marked by a focus on productivity, accountability, and innovation. Beginning in the late 1980s, the council has undergone a series of fundamental reorganizations aimed at incorporating more input not only from within the judicial branch but from other interested entities and individuals. This broad participation assists the council in effectively meeting current needs. Council-initiated reforms affect every area of court operations, from jury service and

court interpreters to court technology and assistance for self-represented litigants and troubled families. At the same time, the council has promoted unity and cooperation both within the judicial branch and between it and its sister branches.

Three laudable and long-sought reforms have allowed the judicial branch to successfully address ongoing court management challenges in this new millennium.

Trial Court Funding Act of 1997

Effective January 1, 1998, the Trial Court Funding Act of 1997 provided courts with their first stable, secure, and highly accountable statewide funding system. No other reform in California court history has done more to free courts from day-to-day financial uncertainty or has been more important in allowing the courts to focus their resources and attention on improving access and service to the public.

Trial court unification

The unification of the municipal and superior courts, which began in 1998 and is now effective in all 58 counties, gave California a one-tier trial court system that has produced efficiencies far exceeding early expectations.

Trial Court Facilities Act of 2002

The transfer of ownership and management of all trial court facilities from individual counties to the state is designed to improve the condition of California's court facilities. These transfers will enable the Judicial Council to ensure that justice is administered effectively and accessibly throughout the state.

Other Highlights

Reorganization of Rules of Court

Effective January 1, 2007, the Judicial Council of California approved a major reorganization of the California Rules of Court, a group of more than 1,000 rules and 38 Standards of Judicial Administration that govern court administration, practice, and procedure.

The reorganization involved a major restructuring, reordering, and renumbering of the rules and standards to make them better organized and easier to understand. The changes to the California Rules of Court are part of a larger, historic effort to make the law clearer, more accessible, and user-friendly.

Reforming the jury system

The council's Jury Improvement Program was created in December 1995, to review and make recommendations on all aspects of the jury system. The Trial Court Presiding Judges Advisory Committee/Court Executives Advisory Committee Joint Working Group on Jury Administration continues to make innovative recommendations to the council. In May 1999, the Judicial Council adopted the one-day or one-trial jury system, codified in rule 2.1002 of the California Rules of Court, that permits prospective jurors to appear for only one day of jury service unless they are selected for a trial. Other improvements include new rules of court that allow jurors to take notes, ask questions of witnesses, and receive mini-opening statements, and the production of a model juror summons that courts may use to redesign local summonses to better assist jurors in understanding how to complete their jury service.

Increasing access and fairness in state courts

The council has developed numerous education and outreach programs to improve access and fairness for all persons using the court system, including those with disabilities. In 2001, the council launched the California Courts Online Self-Help Center to improve court access for litigants without attorneys; in 2003 a Spanish-language version of the Online Self-Help Center was launched. The Legislature approved the creation of 50 new judgeships both in 2006 and in 2007 in courts with the greatest need for new judges. The Governor has appointed 46 of the first 50 judgeships authorized by statute. The Governor can begin appointing the second set of 50 judges as of July 2009, when the funding will be available. The Judicial Council continues to seek authorization for a third set of 50 judgeships.

Expanding court interpreting services

The council has launched several initiatives to expand the availability and ensure the quality of court interpreting services for persons with limited or no English proficiency. The council's advisory committee on this topic, the Court Interpreters Advisory Panel, makes policy recommendations on initiatives aiming to advance language access in the courts, resulting in innovative programs.

Helping children and families

Many far-reaching efforts are under way to expedite court processes, services, and support for the growing number of families in crisis. The AOC Center for Families, Children & the Courts works to (1) ensure that the well-being of children, youth, families, and self-represented litigants is a high priority in the California judicial system; (2) encourage positive change at both the trial and appellate court levels on

their behalf; and (3) provide leadership, outreach, and collaboration to ensure that court and community resources are available to these groups.

Modernizing court technology

California Court Case Management System. The California Court Case Management System (CCMS) is a statewide technology initiative to implement a unified case management system for all case types. CCMS supports the fair, timely, and efficient processing of all cases and makes court procedures easier to understand. CCMS is a collaborative effort between the AOC, courts, and justice partners. The project is being managed by the AOC Southern Regional Office and Information Services Division. There are five California courts who serve as lead courts in the CCMS project. They include the Superior Courts of Sacramento, San Diego, Orange, Los Angeles, and Ventura Counties. A consortium of several small courts also provides input and resources to the CCMS project. In February 2003, the Judicial Council approved the implementation of CCMS for all courts in California.

Phoenix Program. The Phoenix Program includes the Phoenix Financial System (formerly called Court Accounting and Reporting System, CARS) and Phoenix Human Resources System (formerly called Courts Human Resources Information System, CHRIS). The Phoenix Financial System, standardizing accounting functions in the judicial branch and providing timely and comprehensive financial information, allows the branch to adhere to the highest standards of accountability and transparency for its use of public resources and to comply with its statutory and constitutional mandates. Statewide, there are 57 courts currently using the Phoenix Financial System. The remaining court, Los Angeles, is implementing a partial solution in July 2008. Project completion is projected for fiscal year end 2008–2009.

The Phoenix Human Resources System demonstrates the commitment to branchwide modernization of management and administration by leveraging technology for human resources administration and payroll processing; developing a customer service call center; standardizing processes and procedures; collecting data at the source and providing central processing; and providing manager self-service (MSS) and employee self-service (ESS) functions to the courts. In 2006, Sacramento was the first court to implement the Phoenix HR System, and five courts went live on the system in January 2007. Projected completion is anticipated in fiscal year 2011–2012.

Strategic and Operational Planning

The Long-Range Strategic Plan for the California judicial branch, *Justice in Focus: The Strategic Plan for California's Judicial Branch, 2006–2012*, contains a detailed action

plan for the council's advisory committees and its staff agency, the Administrative Office of the Courts. Developed under the direction of the Judicial Council, and informed by a wide variety of stakeholders, the plan provides a vision and direction for California's courts. The plan establishes mechanisms for the responsible management and the fair administration of justice across the state while encouraging local management and discretion in court operations. The Judicial Council's six goals are to improve:

1. Access, fairness, and diversity;
2. Independence and accountability;
3. Modernization of management and administration;
4. Quality of justice and service to the public;
5. Education for branchwide professional excellence; and
6. Branchwide infrastructure for service excellence.

The branchwide *operational plan* is developed by the council in collaboration with justice system partners every three years (current plan covers fiscal years 2008–2011). Features of the current operational plan are:

- 29 Objectives: Shorter-term, specific ends/projections of what is to be accomplished for each strategic goal.
- 84 Desired Outcomes: Specific, measurable outcomes for each objective—with a timeline for accomplishing.

Selection of Members

Members of the council are selected by a nominating procedure intended to attract applicants from across the legal system and to result in a membership that is diverse in experience, gender, background, and geography.

The 21 voting members of the Judicial Council consist of the Chief Justice, 14 judges appointed by the Chief Justice, 4 attorney members appointed by the State Bar Board of Governors, and 1 member from each house of the Legislature.

The council also has 6 advisory members who include court executives or administrators and the president of the California Judges Association. Staggered terms, with one-third of the council's membership changing each year, ensure continuity while creating opportunities for new participation and input.

Roster of the Judicial Council of California

Chair

Hon. Ronald M. George
Chief Justice of California

Hon. Thomas M. Maddock
*Judge of the Superior Court of California,
County of Contra Costa*

Supreme Court

Hon. Marvin R. Baxter
Associate Justice of the Supreme Court

Hon. Dennis E. Murray
*Presiding Judge of the Superior Court of
California, County of Tehama*

Courts of Appeal

Hon. Tani Gorre Cantil-Sakauye
*Associate Justice of the Court of Appeal
Third Appellate District*

Hon. Winifred Younge Smith
*Judge of the Superior Court of California,
County of Alameda*

Hon. Brad R. Hill
*Associate Justice of the Court of Appeal
Fifth Appellate District*

Hon. James Michael Welch
*Judge of the Superior Court of California,
County of San Bernardino*

Hon. Richard D. Huffman
*Associate Justice of the Court of Appeal
Fourth Appellate District, Division One*

Legislature

Hon. Ellen M. Corbett
Member of the Senate

Hon. Dave Jones
Member of the Assembly

Superior Courts

Hon. George J. Abdallah, Jr.
*Judge of the Superior Court of California,
County of San Joaquin*

Hon. Lee Smalley Edmon
*Judge of the Superior Court of California,
County of Los Angeles*

Hon. Peter Paul Espinoza
*Assistant Supervising Judge of the Superior
Court of California, County of Los Angeles*

Hon. Terry B. Friedman
*Judge of the Superior Court of California,
County of Los Angeles*

Hon. Jamie A. Jacobs-May
*Assistant Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
of California, County of Santa Clara*

Hon. Carolyn B. Kuhl
*Judge of the Superior Court of California,
County of Los Angeles*

State Bar

Mr. Raymond G. Aragon
Attorney at Law

Mr. Anthony P. Capozzi
Attorney at Law

Mr. Joel S. Miliband
Attorney at Law

James N. Penrod
Attorney at Law

Advisory Members

Hon. Lon F. Hurwitz

*Commissioner of the Superior Court of California,
County of Orange*

Mr. John Mendes

*Executive Officer, Superior Court of California,
County of Placer*

Mr. Michael D. Planet

*Executive Officer, Superior Court of California,
County of Ventura*

Mr. Michael M. Roddy

*Executive Officer, Superior Court of California,
County of San Diego*

Hon. Kenneth K. So

*Presiding Judge of the Superior Court of
California, County of San Diego*

Hon. Mary E. Wiss

*Judge of the Superior Court of California, County
of San Francisco*

Secretary

Mr. William C. Vickrey

Administrative Director of the Courts

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Additional resources:

Publications, www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/4_22jc.htm