

Trial Court Programs Division

The Trial Court Programs Division provides support services to the trial courts in a variety of areas and plays an important role in the development and implementation of Judicial Council policy. The division develops policy, proposes legislative changes, and focuses on the “big-picture” in administering programs. Current program emphases include collaborative justice courts, traffic, implementation of trial court performance standards within California, management of the statewide Court Interpreters Program, and state wide jury reform.

The division also provides a variety of direct operational services to the trial courts. Programs include the Assigned Judges Program, case coordination, the Ralph N. Kleps Awards, court innovation grant awards, and the Local Court Assistance Program. Division staff are responsible for staffing the Judicial Council’s Trial Court Presiding Judges Advisory Committee and Court Executives Advisory Committee.

COURT INTERPRETERS PROGRAM

From 1973 through 1990, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) acted as a statewide clearinghouse for information about court interpreters, thereby assisting the courts, interpreter organizations, and individual interpreters as well as numerous government agencies and others who had questions and problems. With the enactment of Senate Bill 1304, effective January 1, 1993, the Judicial Council of California became directly responsible for the California Court Interpreters Program, which had been created to improve court interpreter services and admini-

stration. The council formed the Court Interpreters Advisory Panel to assist it in implementing this comprehensive program. The guiding principle for the advisory panel has been to improve access to the courts for non-English-speaking people by improving the quality of interpreting and increasing the number of qualified interpreters in the trial courts.

STATEWIDE JURY REFORM

Reform of California’s jury system is one of the Judicial Council’s top priorities. Chief Justice Ronald M. George is dedicated to improving conditions for jurors and increasing citizen participation in the jury system. The Blue Ribbon Commission on Jury System Improvement, appointed in 1995, represented the Judicial Council’s first major effort in recent history to undertake a comprehensive review of the jury system. On the recommendation of the Blue Ribbon Commission, Chief Justice George appointed two task forces to oversee jury reform efforts in California: the Task Force on Jury System Improvements and the Task Force on Jury Instructions. The Jury System Improvement Project works to improve many facets of the jury system, including juror education and outreach, juror facilities and security, education of judges and court staff, juror summonses, length of juror service, juror per diem fees, and juror source lists.

COLLABORATIVE JUSTICE COURTS PROGRAM

The Chief Justice appointed the Collaborative Justice Courts Advisory Committee in January 2000. Their work is an expansion of the work of the previous task force, the Oversight Committee on the California Drug Court Project. The committee is charged with the following directives:

- Make recommendations to the Judicial Council on criteria for identifying and evaluating collaborative justice courts and for improving the processing of cases in these courts, which include drug courts, domestic violence courts, youth courts, and other collaborative justice courts. Those recommendations shall include “best practices” guidelines and methods for collecting data to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of collaborative justice courts.
- Assess and measure the success and effectiveness of local collaborative justice courts;
- Identify and disseminate to trial courts locally generated best practices;
- Recommend minimum judicial education standards and educational activities to support those standards to the Governing Committee of the Center for Judicial Education and Research;
- Advise the council of potential funding sources;
- Make recommendations regarding grant funding programs that are administered by the Administrative Office of the Courts for drug courts and other treatment courts; and
- Recommend appropriate outreach activities needed to support collaborative justice courts.

The primary goal of the project is to encourage the development of collaborative courts in California by providing funding and professional support. The project seeks to encourage innova-

tive programs and to provide funding for programs that provide services (including treatment) to unique target populations. The project works to develop and promote consistent and professional standards for collaborative courts.

TRAFFIC PROGRAM

In the 1960s a staff attorney at the AOC prepared the bail schedules. As the schedules grew and traffic law became more complex, the AOC added staff to handle the increased workload. The Traffic Program was created with the goals of (1) simplifying, standardizing, and automating traffic-related forms and procedures by working with courts, the law enforcement community, state agencies, and special interest groups and (2) providing traffic adjudication workshops to judicial officers and court personnel to promote consistent application of traffic laws. The adjudication workshop provides the only statewide forum for members of the judiciary to discuss common problems and exchange ideas on traffic matters.

ASSIGNED JUDGES

Article VI, section 6 of the California Constitution provides that the Chief Justice shall seek to expedite judicial business and to equalize the work of the judges. The Judicial Assignments Unit assists the Chief Justice in executing this plenary power to assign active and retired judges to the statewide courts. The need for judicial assistance results primarily from vacancies, illnesses, disqualifications, and the need to replace new judges while they attend orientation classes.

LOCAL COURT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Local Court Assistance Program, created in October 1995, is based on a service-oriented model borrowed from the private sector. The program focuses on (1) modernizing judicial ad-

ministration practices in the areas of court and case management and (2) improving access, fairness, and diversity in the judicial branch by addressing the effects of criminal caseloads on the trial courts. It also addresses the courts' need for technical and procedural assistance and policy development.

TRIAL COURT PRESIDING JUDGES AND COURT EXECUTIVES ADVISORY COMMITTEES

The Trial Court Presiding Judges Advisory Committee and the Court Executives Advisory Committee, formed in 1992 at the request of the Judicial Council's Executive and Planning Committee, play a crucial role in improving judges' and court executives' access to and participation in the Judicial Council's decision-making process.

The committees' activities include reviewing rules, forms, and standards; identifying issues of concern to the courts, such as legislative issues that might be considered by the council; and increasing communication between the council and the trial courts.

RALPH N. KLEPS AWARD

The award created in honor of Ralph N. Kleps, the first administrative director of the California courts, is presented annually in recognition of the contributions made by individual courts to the administration of justice. Innovation and transferability are among the criteria for the award.

COORDINATION OF MULTI-COURT CIVIL ACTIONS

Coordination is a procedural device in which complex civil actions that are pending in more than one court with similar law and facts are combined for all purposes. As required by rule, all administrative functions in coordination proceedings are performed at the direction of the Chief Justice.

The 27-member Judicial Council is the policymaking body of the California courts, the largest and busiest 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 serves as the staff agency to the council.