



NEWS RELEASE

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SUPERIOR COURT OF
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San Bernardino Superior Court Announces the Second Phase of Cost Reduction Measures

With over \$22 million less in state funding this year, the San Bernardino Superior Court has implemented a series of cost reduction measures intended to close an operating shortfall by the end of this fiscal year. The first phase of these operational changes was announced in July of 2012; those actions included the closure of Chino Courthouse, effective January 1, 2013, reductions of court clerk's office hours countywide, reductions of administrative staff, as well as other related actions. Three experienced assigned judges are being released this month. Even with those and other related changes, the court is still projecting a deficit next year that could exceed \$13 million next year.

Today the Court announces the second phase of measures intended to address this financial challenge.

The following plan has been vetted through the San Bernardino Superior Court Judicial Executive Committee and will become effective May 6, 2013:

- Barstow courthouse will close, shutting all four courtrooms. This will result in the loss of 22 positions.
- Needles and Big Bear courthouses will close. These courthouses had recently been reduced to three days per month, but will now be closed.
- Civil and juvenile delinquency cases and dependency drug court will no longer be heard in the Victorville District. Those cases will be heard in other courthouses to provide room for other cases from Barstow that will now be heard in Victorville.
- Based upon a review of overall staffing, Juvenile court will reduce staff by four positions overall. Likewise, restructuring of court administration will result in three additional layoffs.
- Court reporters will no longer be assigned to specific departments but will be assigned from a pool as needed. The court plans to continue to provide court reporters for civil law and motion and trials, to the extent sufficient resources are available.
- Unlawful detainers and small claims currently heard in San Bernardino will now be heard in the Fontana Courthouse. Unlawful detainers currently heard in Rancho Cucamonga will be heard in the Fontana Courthouse.

The following changes are also being implemented and will take place prior to May 6, 2013:

- The juvenile court will no longer accept direct filings of informal juvenile matters; these filings will be addressed directly through probation.

- Night court services will no longer be provided in the county.

In total, it is planned that these and related actions will result in a reduction of approximately 44 staff, and will save a projected \$5.3 million per year. “The severe funding cuts made to our budget result in the need to take these painful steps. We are cognizant of the impact that these actions will have upon the bar and citizens of this county who have business in the court, especially for people who live some distance from the remaining courthouses. The simple fact is that we can no longer afford to support as many court locations, or support as many services as in the past.” said Marsha Slough, the Presiding Judge of San Bernardino County.

The closure of Barstow, Needles, and Big Bear courthouses will mean that people living in a large swathe of San Bernardino County will no longer have a courthouse within a reasonable distance from their homes, leaving many facing hardships to get to court, given very limited public transportation and distances that can exceed three hours in driving time, each way.

San Bernardino is one of the most under-resourced courts in the state, and has been outspoken at the state level regarding the impact of cuts upon the state’s poorest courts and their communities. “Our court has been operating on a shoestring budget for many years. Now the state is taking away the shoe strings.” said Judge Larry Allen, the court’s Assistant Presiding Judge.

In addition to the court’s funding problems, the court faces the largest shortfall of judges of any county in the state. Based on the state Judicial Council’s statewide judicial needs study, which was released on October 25, 2012, the court should have approximately 156 judicial officers (judges and commissioners) but currently has 91, a shortfall of almost 65 judges, or 42%. This means that judges in San Bernardino face caseloads that are substantially larger than in most other jurisdictions in California. This severe problem, for the court, also represents a hope for the future. “We continue to encourage the Legislature and the Governor to approve funding for needed judges and staffing. If and when the court receives adequate funding, it will be a court priority to reopen the Barstow Courthouse, in order to reestablish needed court access in that part of the county.” said Judge Slough.

For now, though, the outlook for the court is for further reductions of operations and services. “All of the actions that the court has announced up to now are not enough to balance our budget next year. We will need to identify additional cuts to operations before next fiscal year begins. Unfortunately, there is more bad news to come.” said Stephen Nash.

RELATED INFORMATION

San Bernardino Superior Court currently has 954.5 staff. The court has a current year budget of \$105.2 million.