



SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA, COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
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Severe State Cuts Threaten Access to Justice

Closure of courtrooms and branch reductions if unprecedented State court cuts continue

REDWOOD CITY, Calif. – The Superior Court of San Mateo County announced today a proposal to reduce court services and close up to six courtrooms by July 1, 2013 due to unprecedented State budget cuts. The proposal also includes suspending court services in the South San Francisco and San Mateo branches. “Unless the State acts to restore funds to the court, drastic reductions in court services are unavoidable”, Presiding Judge Beth Labson Freeman announced today.

Trial Courts throughout California have suffered unprecedented State budget cuts of more than \$1 billion over the past five years. The San Mateo Superior Court has seen a dramatic reduction in its budget as a result of these State cuts to the judicial branch and unfunded cost increases. Going forward, the court must absorb additional budget cuts that will have a significant impact for years to come.

“Trial Courts should not be dismantled, justice should not be rationed and communities should not be denied a rational, accessible and credible means to resolve disputes” said Judge Freeman. She added, “None of these additional reductions are actions that our court wants to take. In fact we’ve worked successfully to delay them as long as possible. We remain committed to serving the people of San Mateo County and prioritizing their safety through essential court services.” Judge Robert Foiles, the newly elected Presiding Judge for 2013 and 2014, said “Our Court has been and remains committed to preserving services we provide to the public and to our litigants while also living within our means.”

Judge Foiles added that he and Judge Freeman are “purposefully sharing this information well in advance so that the court can work with its justice partners and community leaders to restore funding and minimize these actions, if at all possible.” Judge Freeman, Judge Foiles and Court Executive Officer John Fitton shared this information personally with their court employees Monday and have invited justice partners and government officials to meetings later this week to share and discuss their proposals.

Cuts to the trial courts by the Legislature and Governor have already resulted in significant court service reductions. To date, the San Mateo Superior Court has reduced its workforce by over 30%, reduced clerk’s office and phone hours, consolidated traffic and small claims clerk’s offices and traffic arraignments to Redwood City.

If current cuts are not eliminated, Judge Freeman and Judge Foiles say they will be forced to further reduce the Court's workforce, including commissioners, close up to six courtrooms and suspend court services in the South San Francisco and San Mateo branches, consolidating the majority of operations in Redwood City. Further reduction in public service hours may occur earlier. Court officials say they will continue to prioritize public safety matters, consolidating all remaining judiciary, staff and court resources to respond to essential court services.

"Unfortunately, we have seen many other courts already forced to close courtrooms and branches, severely limit their services and implement additional drastic layoffs" said Mr. Fitton. "Based on our efforts to-date, we've earned added time – but we will not be able to avoid severe actions if the current cuts are not eliminated by July 2013." Mr. Fitton added, "We're committed to do all in our power to restore essential funding to the trial courts, avoid closing courtrooms, protect public rights, safety and freedom – and avoid further layoffs."

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