



Judicial Council of California

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REPORT TO THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL

Item No.: 25-034

For business meeting on July 18, 2025

Title

Judicial Branch Budget: Fiscal Year 2026–27
Budget Change Proposals for Supreme
Court, Courts of Appeal, Superior Courts,
Judicial Branch Facilities Program, and
Judicial Council

Report Type

Action Required

Effective Date

July 18, 2025

Date of Report

June 27, 2025

Rules, Forms, Standards, or Statutes Affected

None

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Recommended by

Judicial Branch Budget Committee
Hon. Ann C. Moorman, Chair

Executive Summary

To balance responsible investment in core programs and services provided by the judicial branch in the context of the state's multiyear projected deficit, the Judicial Branch Budget Committee recommends submitting 15 budget change proposals to the Department of Finance for consideration in the fiscal year 2026–27 Governor's Budget.

Recommendation

The Judicial Branch Budget Committee recommends that the Judicial Council, effective July 18, 2025, approve the following fiscal year 2026–27 budget change proposals (not in priority order) for submission to the Department of Finance in September 2025:

1. Inflationary Adjustment for Trial Courts (Consumer Price Index)—\$80 million General Fund;
2. Trial Court Equity Funding to Statewide Average—\$36.6 million General Fund;
3. Language Access in the California Courts—\$16.9 million General Fund;

4. Litigation Management Program—\$3 million General Fund;
5. Supreme Court and Courts of Appeal Court-Appointed Counsel Programs—\$27.7 million General Fund;
6. Courts of Appeal Security: Judicial Protection and Unarmed Guard Coverage—\$3.4 million General Fund;
7. Racial Justice Act Retroactivity for California Courts—\$19.8 million General Fund;
8. Continuation of Courts of Appeal Workload—\$6.1 million General Fund;
9. Capital Outlay Funding: Fiscal Years 2026–27 through 2030–31—\$668 million General Fund and Public Buildings Construction Fund;
10. Capital Outlay Projects Prioritization and Reassessment—\$4.5 million General Fund;
11. Orange Central Justice Center – Facility Modifications—\$40–\$60 million General Fund and \$4–\$6 million reimbursement authority;
12. Support for Judicial Branch Facility Modifications—\$38.5 million General Fund and reimbursement authority;
13. Support for Judicial Branch Facilities Maintenance and Utilities—\$74.8 million General Fund and reimbursement authority;
14. Trial Court Physical Security Assessment and Evaluation—\$2.8 million General Fund; and
15. Los Angeles Spring Street Courthouse – Courtrooms Relocation—\$42.4 million General Fund.

Relevant Previous Council Action

Under California Rules of Court, rule 10.101(b)(3), the Judicial Council must develop the budget of the judicial branch based on established priorities of the branch and the needs of the courts. As part of the state’s annual budget development process, the council submits budget change proposals (BCPs) on behalf of the Supreme Court, Courts of Appeal, superior courts, Habeas Corpus Resource Center, Judicial Branch Facilities Program, and Judicial Council to the Department of Finance for consideration. The recommendations in this report are consistent with the council’s past practice under this authority.

In July 2016, the Judicial Council established the Judicial Branch Budget Committee (Budget Committee) to assist the council in exercising its duties under rule 10.101 with respect to the judicial branch budget. The council assigned the committee the responsibility to review and recommend BCPs for the judicial branch and ensure that they are submitted to the council in a timely manner to align with the state’s budget process.

Analysis/Rationale

This recommendation is consistent with the charge of the Budget Committee to assist the Judicial Council in exercising its duties under rule 10.101 with respect to the judicial branch budget.

Following are descriptions of each budget request listed above for fiscal year (FY) 2026–27:

- ***Inflationary Adjustment for Trial Courts (Consumer Price Index):*** \$80 million ongoing General Fund in FY 2026–27 to address general inflationary cost increases for trial courts based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) published by the Department of Finance. The FY 2026–27 CPI is currently estimated at 3.1 percent. This funding will help the trial courts address increased operational costs and mitigate reductions to core programs and services provided to court users and the public.
- ***Trial Court Equity Funding to Statewide Average:*** \$36.6 million ongoing General Fund in FY 2026–27 to fund all trial courts to at least the statewide average funding level as determined by the judicial branch’s Workload Formula methodology. Adequate, stable, and predictable funding is needed by the trial courts to provide core services and ensure equal access to justice for all Californians throughout the state.
- ***Language Access in the California Courts:*** \$16.9 million General Fund in FY 2026–27 and ongoing with incrementally increased annual amounts through FY 2029–30, to address rising court interpreter costs, support the ongoing efforts of the *Strategic Plan for Language Access in the California Courts*, and ensure trial courts have adequate funding for the provision of interpreter services in all case types.
- ***Litigation Management Program:*** \$3 million ongoing General Fund to address shortfalls and rising expenses to manage litigation and provide for the defense and indemnification of all judicial branch entities, bench officers, and employees. Litigation costs have steadily increased, and the current funding level is insufficient to meet the statutory obligations of the Litigation Management Program.
- ***Supreme Court and Courts of Appeal Court-Appointed Counsel Programs:*** \$27.7 million ongoing General Fund in FY 2026–27 to comply with California’s requirement to provide indigent defendants’ counsel in the Supreme Court and Courts of Appeal. This includes \$1.5 million for an hourly rate increase of \$55 per hour for capital appeals cases, \$17.6 million for an hourly rate increase of \$40 per hour for non-capital appeal appointments, and \$8.6 million for a 30 percent increase in the annual Supreme Court’s Capital Court-Appointed Counsel Project Office contract and the appellate projects’ annual contracts.
- ***Courts of Appeal Security—Judicial Protection and Unarmed Guard Coverage:*** \$3.4 million General Fund in FY 2026–27, increasing to \$3.6 million ongoing in FY 2029–30, for 7.0 California Highway Patrol Judicial Protection Section (CHP-JPS) officers and to expand existing unarmed security guard services for evenings and weekends for the state-

owned appellate courts. The 7.0 CHP-JPS officers will replace 4.0 limited-term CHP-JPS officers; these positions are currently funded by the Appellate Court Trust Fund. This proposal includes \$199,000 ongoing in FY 2029–30 for unarmed guards to support the Sixth Appellate District’s new courthouse scheduled to be completed by 2029.

- ***Racial Justice Act Retroactivity for California Courts:*** \$19.8 million ongoing General Fund in FY 2026–27 to support statewide appellate and trial court operations for adjudicating cases under the Racial Justice Act, which was enacted in 2020 (Assem. Bill 2542; Stats. 2020, ch. 317) and expanded in 2022 (Assem. Bill 256; Stats. 2022, ch. 739).
- ***Continuation of Courts of Appeal Workload:*** \$6.1 million General Fund in FY 2026–27 to continue to address the courts’ existing workload, reduce backlogs, and prevent case delays in appellate districts.
- ***Capital Outlay Funding: Fiscal Years 2026–27 through 2030–31:*** \$668 million (\$31 million one-time General Fund and \$637 million one-time Public Buildings Construction Fund) for nine capital outlay projects—four new and five continuing—as part of a broader \$4.3 billion five-year investment for 22 courthouse projects. This proposal addresses critical infrastructure needs, including seismic deficiencies, security, and accessibility improvements, to support equitable access to justice statewide. This request is based on projects in the Judicial Council’s latest plan for capital outlay and will be updated once the *Judicial Branch Five-Year Infrastructure Plan for Fiscal Year 2026–27* has been approved by the Judicial Council.
- ***Capital Outlay Projects Prioritization and Reassessment:*** \$4.5 million General Fund each year for two years (\$9 million total) to complete a comprehensive reassessment of trial court capital outlay projects, with completion estimated by 2029. This proposal will develop facility condition assessments to determine capital reserves needed for infrastructure repairs and replacements over a ten-year period.
- ***Orange Central Justice Center—Facility Modifications:*** \$40–\$60 million one-time General Fund and \$4–\$6 million one-time reimbursement authority to address cost increases to complete the fire and life safety system upgrades at the Central Justice Center in Orange County. This project resulted from noncompliance notices from the Office of the State Fire Marshal and was originally funded in FYs 2021–22 and 2022–23. Because the project has encountered delays and cost increases due to unforeseen conditions, including asbestos contamination, deteriorated infrastructure, and hidden construction issues, additional funding is needed.
- ***Support for Judicial Branch Facility Modifications:*** \$38.5 million General Fund in FY 2026–27, increasing to \$29.9 million ongoing General Fund in FY 2029–30, and \$6.5 million ongoing reimbursement authority in FY 2026–27 for essential facility repairs and improvements in trial and appellate court facilities. The funding will address critical building repairs and ensure safe, secure courthouses for the public, court staff, and

judicial officers. This proposal also includes funding for the installation of water leak detection equipment and software at 160 courthouses across three fiscal years.

- ***Support for Judicial Branch Facilities Maintenance and Utilities:*** \$61.7 million ongoing General Fund and \$13.1 million ongoing reimbursement authority in FY 2026–27 to maintain trial and appellate court facilities at industry-standard levels and address increases in utility costs.
- ***Trial Court Physical Security Assessment and Evaluation:*** \$2.8 million General Fund in FY 2026–27, including \$2 million one-time General Fund to assess and identify physical security deficiencies in trial court facilities statewide and \$800,000 ongoing General Fund. This funding will support security evaluations of 200 courthouses and address risks such as inadequate barriers, outdated security features, and insufficient protection measures.
- ***Los Angeles Spring Street Courthouse—Courtrooms Relocation:*** \$42.4 million one-time General Fund to relocate 23 courtrooms and operations from the Spring Street Courthouse in Los Angeles County to existing courtroom space throughout Los Angeles County due to the federal government’s planned sale of the building. The superior court must vacate the building by the end of its lease on December 31, 2028.

The Budget Committee opted not to prioritize the BCPs because the committee pared down the list to the highest-priority requests given the state’s fiscal condition. This strategy provides greater flexibility to the Chief Justice and the Administrative Director in their budget advocacy efforts to support core programs and services provided by the judicial branch.

Policy implications

An essential part of the BCP process involves the identification of funding needs within the judicial branch. Consistent with that process, the following advisory bodies and branch entities submitted proposals to the Budget Committee: Supreme Court, Administrative Presiding Justices Advisory Committee, Court Facilities Advisory Committee, Court Security Advisory Committee, Data Analytics Advisory Committee, Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee, Habeas Corpus Resource Center, Technology Committee, Litigation Management Committee, Trial Court Budget Advisory Committee, and Trial Court Facility Modification Advisory Committee.

During the FY 2026–27 BCP review process, other funding needs within the judicial branch were identified but not recommended for submission given the state’s projected budget deficit. As these proposals have merit, the Budget Committee deferred consideration of them to a future budget cycle.

Comments

This proposal was not circulated for public comment. However, these budget change proposals were considered at meetings that were open to the public, and public comment was not received.

Alternatives considered

The Budget Committee was presented with a list of 31 budget change concepts, which represented funding requests from various judicial branch advisory committees and other requesting entities. The Budget Committee had the option to recommend any number of these requests—in any priority order—to develop into BCPs for submission based on the priorities of the judicial branch.

The recommended list of 15 BCPs represents the action of the Budget Committee following a review of the proposals and information from Judicial Council staff, including updated FY 2025–26 budget information and the estimated General Fund budget deficit. This list represents a budget package that includes the highest priority proposals for the judicial branch while acknowledging limited resources due to the state’s budget shortfall.

Fiscal and Operational Impacts

The fiscal and operational impacts of approving the BCPs for submission to the Department of Finance for consideration in the FY 2026–27 Governor’s Budget are minimal. To the extent any of the proposals are approved in the final enacted FY 2026–27 budget, this may result in additional resources and corresponding workload to the branch.

Attachments and Links

None.