



Judicial Council of California

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REPORT TO THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL

Item No.: 25-184

For business meeting on December 12, 2025

Title

Judicial Council: 2026 Legislative Priorities

Report Type

Action Required

Rules, Forms, Standards, or Statutes Affected

None

Effective Date

January 1, 2026

Recommended by

Legislation Committee
Hon. Stacy Boulware Eurie, Chair

Date of Report

November 13, 2025

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Executive Summary

Each year, the Judicial Council adopts legislative priorities to further key council objectives in the upcoming legislative year. The Legislation Committee recommends that the Judicial Council consider an approach similar to last year's for the 2026 legislative year to include continued stable and reliable funding to address increased costs; continued advancement of remote access to the courts while balancing due process; funding for judgeships statewide and judicial officers in counties with the greatest need; availability of verbatim records of court proceedings; operational efficiencies in the courts; and increased security resources to safeguard personnel, the public, and court systems from physical and cyber threats.

Recommendation

The Legislation Committee recommends that the Judicial Council, effective January 1, 2026, approve the following legislative priorities for 2026:

1. Continue to advocate for sufficient funding, including for:
 - a. Stable and reliable funding for courts to address annual cost increases in baseline operations and plan for the future; and

- b. Sufficient resources to improve physical access to the courts by keeping courts open; expanding access by increasing the ability of court users to conduct branch business online; increasing security to safeguard personnel, the public, and court systems from physical and cyber threats; strengthening programs and services; and continuing to implement innovations in programs and services;
2. Continue to seek funding for judgeships overall and particularly for judicial officers in counties with the greatest need;
3. Continue to sponsor or support legislation to improve judicial branch operational efficiencies, including cost-saving and cost-recovery measures as well as the ability to conduct proceedings, in whole or in part, using remote technology in order to expand safe and reliable access to justice;
4. Continue to promote the availability of verbatim records of court proceedings by working collaboratively to address court reporter shortages and exploring innovations in technology;
5. Seek legislative authorization, if needed and authorized by the Judicial Council in 2026, for the disposition of unused courthouses in fair market value transactions, with the proceeds to be directed to the State Court Facilities Construction Fund (the successor fund of the Immediate and Critical Needs Account) established by Senate Bill 1407 (Perata; Stats. 2008, ch. 311) or any other Judicial Council facilities fund authorized by the Legislature; and
6. Delegate to the Legislation Committee the authority to take positions or provide comments on behalf of the Judicial Council on proposed legislation (state and federal), administrative rules or regulations, and proposals by other bodies or agencies after evaluating input from council advisory bodies, council staff, and the courts, provided that the input is consistent with the council's established policies and precedents.

Relevant Previous Council Action

The council has taken a variety of actions over the past years related to the above recommendations. A summary of recent key actions in these areas follows.

Budget

In 2009 and 2010, the council adopted as a key legislative priority to advocate for sufficient funding for the judicial branch to allow the courts to meet their constitutional and statutory obligations and provide appropriate and necessary services to the public. In 2011, the council advocated against further budget reductions and for sufficient resources to allow trial courts to reopen closed courts and restore critical staffing, programs, and services that were reduced or eliminated in the preceding several years. Another priority for 2012 was to advocate for a combination of solutions to restore funding for a portion of the funding eliminated from the branch budget since 2008.

In 2013, the council adopted a priority of advocating to achieve budget stability for the judicial branch, including advocating against further budget reductions and for sufficient resources to allow courts to reopen closed courthouses; restore court facility construction and maintenance projects; and restore critical staff, programs, and services that were reduced or eliminated in the preceding four years.

Annually since 2014, the council has included similar priorities to achieve budget stability for the judicial branch, including advocating for:

- Sufficient fund balances to allow courts to manage cash flow challenges;
- Provision of stable and reliable funding for courts to address annual cost increases in baseline operations;
- Sufficient additional resources to allow courts to improve physical access to the courts by keeping courts open, and to expand access by increasing the ability of court users to conduct branch business online; and
- Restoration of programs and services that were reduced or eliminated in the preceding few years.

Following several years of steady increases in operational and facility funding, the Budget Act of 2024 was the first budget since the Great Recession that included cuts to the trial courts and the entire judicial branch. Overall, the trial courts took an initial \$97 million cut, which was subsequently reduced by \$42 million to an ongoing \$55 million, and additionally offered up over \$100 million in budget solutions by deferring spending or returning unspent funds.

Despite a challenging fiscal environment, in the current year (Budget Act of 2025), funding is provided for priorities set by Chief Justice Patricia Guerrero and the Judicial Council to maintain access to justice through critical programs and services provided by California's court system, including \$42 million ongoing for partial restoration of the initial \$97 million reduction for trial courts included in the Budget Act of 2024; \$40 million ongoing for increased trial court operational costs; \$20 million one time for the judicial branch to implement Proposition 36, which authorized felony charges and increased sentences for certain drug and crime thefts; and \$6.3 million ongoing for court-appointed counsel programs for the Supreme Court and Courts of Appeal.

For the upcoming year, the branch must advocate for protecting the resources needed to sustain the progress that has been made and help the judicial branch keep pace with increased operational costs and facilities needs, and mitigate reductions to core programs and services to serve the public and support access to justice.

The 2026 legislative priorities for overall branch operational and facilities needs are intended to be broad and high level. Specific funding requests in the form of budget change proposals for the Supreme Court, Courts of Appeal, superior courts, judicial branch facilities program, and

Judicial Council were previously approved at the July 18, 2025, council meeting¹ and have been submitted to the Department of Finance for consideration in the fiscal year (FY) 2026–27 Governor’s Proposed Budget.

Judgeships and subordinate judicial officer conversions

Government Code section 69614(c)(1) and (3) requires the Judicial Council to provide an update to the Legislature and Governor every even-numbered year on the factually determined need for new judgeships in the California superior courts and to report on the conversion of certain vacant subordinate judicial officer (SJO) positions to judgeships.

Based on the 2022 Judicial Needs Assessment, 17 courts needed new judgeships for a total need of 98 full-time equivalent judicial officers. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the planned judicial officer time study and workload caseweights update that was originally scheduled to commence in 2023 will not be conducted until 2025. As a result, the 2024 Judicial Needs Assessment has been delayed² until the time study results can be finalized.

¹ Judicial Council of Cal., Advisory Com. Rep., *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* (June 27, 2025), <https://jcc.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=14500158&GUID=61E77613-7EA9-4A71-B2D5-9D7A26A3233E>.

² Judicial Council of Cal., *Deferral of California Superior Courts Judicial Needs Assessment Report* (Oct. 31, 2024), courts.ca.gov/sites/default/files/courts/default/2024-12/20241031-governor-newsom_prottem-mcguire-speaker-rivas-delayed-judicial-needs-assessment-report.pdf.

2022 Judicial Needs Assessment

Court	Authorized and Funded Judicial Positions*	2022 Assessed Judicial Need	Number of Judgeships Needed[†] (B – A)	Percentage Judicial Need Over AJP (C / A)
Tehama	4.3	5.6	1	23%
Lake	4.7	5.5	1	21%
Humboldt	8.0	9.3	1	13%
Shasta	13.0	14.9	1	8%
Orange	144.0	145.3	1	1%
Madera	10.3	12.3	2	19%
Kings	10.6	13.0	2	19%
Placer	15.5	17.5	2	13%
Merced	13.0	15.1	2	15%
Stanislaus	26.0	28.1	2	8%
Tulare	25.0	28.6	3	12%
Sacramento	77.5	82.2	4	5%
San Joaquin	35.5	41.8	6	17%
Fresno	53.0	60.0	7	13%
Kern	47.0	58.8	11	23%
Riverside	89.0	111.7	22	25%
San Bernardino	100.0	130.5	30	30%
Total			98	

The Judicial Council has sponsored numerous bills to authorize and fund additional judgeships. In 2005, the council sponsored Senate Bill 56 (Dunn; Stats. 2006, ch. 390), which authorized the first 50 of the 150 critically needed judgeships. Full funding was provided in the Budget Act of 2007, and judges were appointed to each of the 50 judgeships created by SB 56.

In 2007, the council secured the second set of 50 new judgeships (Assem. Bill 159 (Jones); Stats. 2007, ch. 722), with funding for appointments to begin in June 2008. However, due to budget constraints, the funding was delayed until July 2009, allowing the state to move the fiscal impact from FY 2007–08 to FY 2009–10. The Governor included funding for the second set of judgeships in the proposed Budget Act of 2009, but the funding ultimately was made subject to what was labeled the “federal stimulus trigger.” This trigger was “pulled,” and the funding for the new judgeships and various other unrelated items made contingent on the trigger—a specified threshold of federal stimulus funding—was not provided.

Almost every year from 2005 to 2023, the Judicial Council has sponsored one or more bills to obtain funding for new judgeships (see the table below), including successful legislation in 2023 (Sen. Bill 75 (Roth); Stats. 2023, ch. 482) to authorize an additional 26 judgeships that were made subject to appropriation.

Judicial Council–Sponsored Legislation to Authorize or Fund Additional Judgeships

Year	Bill No.	Author	Purpose	Result
2008	SB 1150	Corbett	Authorize third set of new judgeships	Held in Senate Appropriations Committee
2009	SB 377	Corbett	Authorize third set of new judgeships	Held in Senate Appropriations Committee
2011, 2012	AB 1405	Committee on Judiciary	Authorize third set of new judgeships	Did not move forward
2014	SB 1190	Jackson	Authorize third set of new judgeships*	Held in Senate Appropriations Committee
2015	SB 229	Roth	Fund 12 of 50 previously authorized judgeships†	Vetoed by Governor Brown
2016	SB 1023	Committee on Judiciary	Fund 12 of 50 previously authorized judgeships†	Held in Senate Appropriations Committee
2016	AB 2341	Obernolte	Reallocate judgeships‡	Held in Senate Appropriations Committee
2017	SB 38	Roth	Authorize judgeships	Held in Assembly Appropriations Committee
2017	SB 39	Roth	Reallocate judgeships	Held in Senate Appropriations Committee
2017	AB 414	Medina	Reallocate judgeships	Did not move forward
2019	SB 16	Roth	Fund 25 of 50 previously authorized judgeships**	Held in Senate Appropriations Committee
2023	SB 75	Roth	Authorize 26 additional judgeships subject to appropriation	Signed by the Governor (Stats. 2023, ch. 482)

* SB 1190 also sought to secure funding for the second set of 50 new judgeships approved in 2007 but not yet funded.

† SB 229 sought to appropriate \$5 million for the funding.

‡ Specifically, AB 2341 sought to reallocate up to five vacant judgeships from courts with more authorized judgeships than their assessed judicial need to courts with fewer judgeships than their assessed judicial need. The allocation of the vacant judgeships would be based on a methodology approved by the Judicial Council and under criteria contained in Government Code section 69614(b).

** Although SB 16 was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee, that same year the Budget Act of 2019 (Assem. Bill 74; Stats. 2019, ch. 23) provided \$30.4 million in funding for 25 judgeships, leaving unfunded the remaining 23 of the 50 judgeships authorized in 2007 (Assem. Bill 159 (Jones); Stats. 2007, ch. 722).

Additional Judgeships Authorized and Funded in the Budget Act

Year	Bill No.	Author	Purpose	Result
2017	AB 103	Committee on Budget	Reallocate vacant judgeships (2 each from Alameda and Santa Clara Counties) to Riverside and San Bernardino Counties	Signed by the Governor (Stats. 2017, ch. 17)
2018	SB 847	Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review	Budget trailer bill: Added 2 new judgeships to the Superior Court of Riverside County; added 1 new justice to the Fourth Appellate District, Div. 2 (Riverside/San Bernardino)	Signed by the Governor (Stats. 2018, ch. 45)
2018	SB 840	Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review	Budget Act of 2018, appropriated \$2.9 million for 2 new judgeships in the Superior Court of Riverside County; appropriated \$1.2 million for the new justice and staff in the Fourth Appellate District as authorized in the budget trailer bill (Sen. Bill 847)	Signed by the Governor (Stats. 2018, ch. 29)
2019	AB 74	Ting	Budget Act of 2019, appropriated \$30.4 million for 25 previously unfunded judgeships	Signed by the Governor (Stats. 2019, ch. 23)
2022	SB 154	Skinner	Budget Act of 2022, appropriated \$39.1 million for the remaining 23 previously unfunded judgeships*	Signed by the Governor (Stats. 2022, ch. 43)

* This action fully funds the last remaining unfunded judgeships from the second set of 50 new judgeships (Assem. Bill 159 (Jones); Stats. 2007, ch. 722).

Regarding subordinate judicial officer conversions, existing law allows the Judicial Council to convert a total of 162 SJO positions, upon vacancy, to judgeships. The statute caps the number that may be converted each year at 16 and requires the council to seek legislative ratification to exercise its authority to convert positions in any given year. For the past several years, that legislative ratification took the form of language included in the annual Budget Act. The council converted the maximum 16 positions in each fiscal year from 2006–07 through 2010–2011, 20 in FY 2011–12,³ 13 in FY 2012–13, 11 in FY 2013–14, 9 in FY 2014–15, 11 in FY 2015–16, 6 in both FY 2016–17 and FY 2017–18, 15 in FY 2018–19, and 1 in both FY 2019–20 and FY 2020–21. There were no conversions in FY 2021–22, FY 2022–23, and FY 2023–23, and there have not been any conversions in FY 2024–25 as of September 1, 2025.

Additionally, legislation enacted in 2010 (Assem. Bill 2763; Stats. 2010, ch. 690) expedites conversions by authorizing up to 10 additional conversions per year if the conversion results in a judge being assigned to a family or juvenile law assignment previously presided over by an SJO. This legislation requires that the ratification for these additional 10 positions be secured through

³ The total number of conversions in FY 2011–12 exceeded 16 because of the enactment of Senate Bill 405 (Stats. 2011, ch. 705), which increased the number of allowable conversions in specific circumstances for that fiscal year.

legislation separate from the annual Budget Act. Since 2011, the Judicial Council has sponsored the following legislation to secure ratification of these additional SJO conversions:

- Senate Bill 405 (Stats. 2011, ch. 705)
- Assembly Bill 1403 (Stats. 2013, ch. 510)
- Assembly Bill 2745 (Stats. 2014, ch. 311)
- Assembly Bill 1519 (Stats. 2015, ch. 416)
- Assembly Bill 2882 (Stats. 2016, ch. 474)
- Assembly Bill 1692 (Stats. 2017, ch. 330)

In total, 157 of the 162 authorized SJO positions have been converted; only 5 remain.

Court reporter shortage

Courts across California are experiencing a persistent shortage of court reporters to capture verbatim records. This is especially problematic in court proceedings where electronic recording (ER) is not authorized by current California law.⁴ This statutory restriction limiting the use of ER when a court reporter is unavailable has been in effect since 1975.

Between April 1, 2023, and March 31, 2025, more than 2 million family, probate, and unlimited civil hearings were held in California courts with *no* verbatim record. The absence of a verbatim record makes it nearly impossible for individuals to appeal their case. The California Supreme Court, in a 2018 opinion, stated the lack of a verbatim record will “frequently be fatal” to a litigant’s ability to have an appeal decided on the merits.⁵

Despite ongoing funding provided by the Legislature and widespread use of incentives to recruit and retain court reporters, many courts continue to lose court reporters faster than they can hire them and faster than the state can license them. To meet minimum requirements,⁶ it is estimated that California courts need up to an additional 428 full-time court reporters.⁷ However, the number of court reporters licensed by the California Court Reporters Board is not keeping pace with the need.

⁴ Electronic recording is not authorized except in limited civil, misdemeanor, and infraction proceedings when a court reporter is unavailable (Gov. Code, § 69957(a)).

⁵ *Jameson v. Desta* (2018) 5 Cal.5th 594, 622.

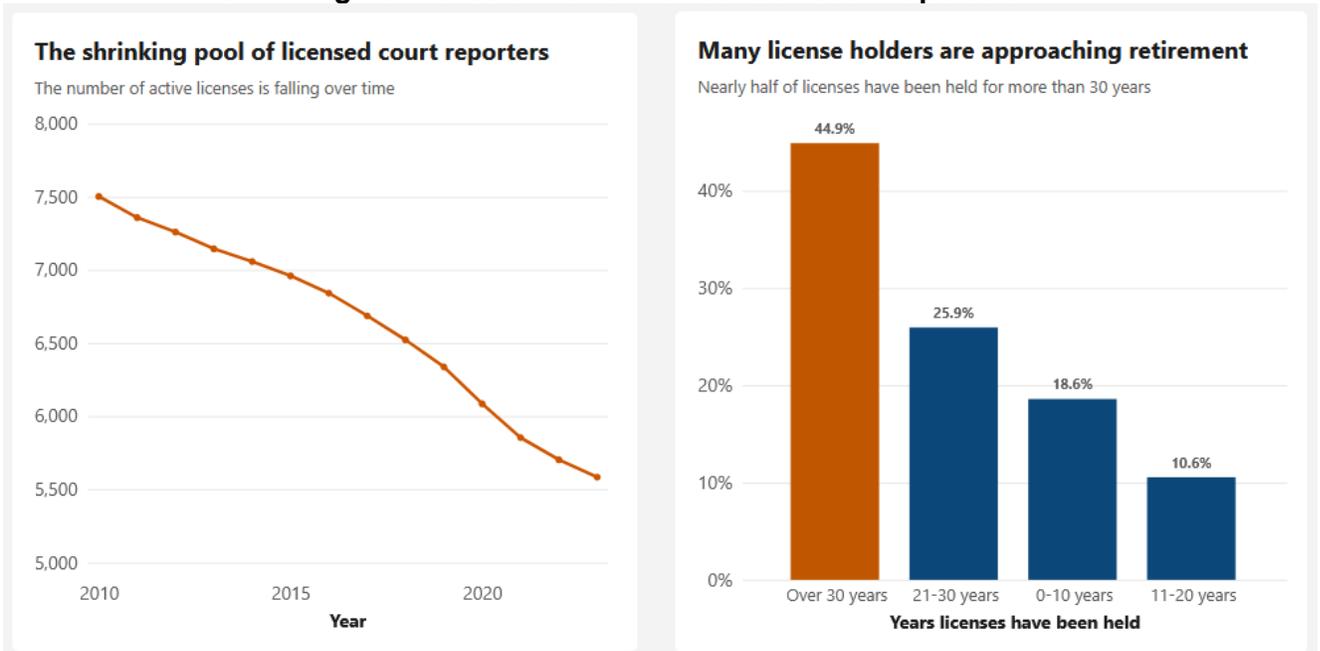
⁶ Covering all case types where a court reporter is required or electronic recording is not authorized.

⁷ “Need” is calculated by applying the Resource Assessment Study estimate of court reporter need by multiplying the assessed judicial need for each included case type by a factor of 1.25, except for civil unlimited and estates and trusts, which are multiplied by a factor of 0.625.

Year	New Licenses Issued
FY 2015–16	72
FY 2016–17	75
FY 2017–18	86
FY 2018–19	32
FY 2019–20	66
FY 2020–21	39
FY 2021–22	35
FY 2022–23	68
FY 2023–24	123

While last year’s number of licensees increased over prior years—likely due to the 2022 statutory authorization for voice writers to be licensed—there is still a 20 percent decline in the total number of licensees since 2013 (a loss of over 1,300 reporters) and, according to 2022–2023 data from the Court Reporters Board, nearly half of licensees received their initial license more than 30 years ago and could be approaching retirement—suggesting the pool of licensed court reporters available to fill vacant positions will continue to shrink.

Shrinking workforce of California licensed court reporters⁸



The shortage of court reporters threatens access to justice for court users, especially Californians who cannot afford to pay for their own court reporter.

⁸ Department of Consumer Affairs Data Portal, www.dca.ca.gov/data/annual_license_stats.shtml.

In the 2023–24 legislative session, the Judicial Council supported Senate Bill 662 (Rubio), which sought to remove statutory restrictions and authorize ER in all civil cases when a court reporter was unavailable. The bill received unanimous approval in both the Senate Judiciary Committee and the Senate Business, Professions, and Economic Development Committee but was ultimately held under submission without a vote in the Senate Appropriations Committee and failed to advance. SB 662 was supported by a broad coalition of legal aid and attorney groups but opposed by labor.

In the 2025–26 legislative session, the Judicial Council currently has an oppose-unless-amended position on Assembly Bill 882 (Papan) that expands ER authority but only to a limited number of litigants for a very limited amount of time—until January 1, 2028—while at the same time placing overly burdensome restrictions on the courts’ ability to utilize that authority and on the public’s ability to access a record of their proceedings. The bill was approved by the Assembly and is currently pending as a two-year bill in the Senate Judiciary Committee. AB 882 is sponsored by labor but opposed by a broad coalition of legal aid and attorney groups.

Other recent court reporter-related legislation

Assembly Bill 1520 (Low; Stats. 2019, ch. 463) prohibited the Court Reporters Board from issuing a certificate for the practice of shorthand reporting by means of voice writing or voice recognition technology, and stated the intent of the Legislature to address the issue of appropriate regulation of shorthand reporting by means of voice writing or voice recognition technology. (The Judicial Council did not take a position on the bill but was in contact with the Court Reporters Board during the trajectory of the bill when it actually *required* voice writing technology. The language *prohibiting* voice writing was a very late gut and amend on the Senate floor.)

The Budget Act of 2021 (Stats. 2021, ch. 240) appropriated \$30 million (ongoing) to be allocated by the Judicial Council in a manner that ensures all courts receive funds to increase the number of court reporters in family law and civil law cases without supplanting existing expenditures in these areas and appropriated \$7 million for the Judicial Council to establish a methodology to allocate a share of resources to all courts to cover the costs associated with increased transcript rates.

Budget Control Language: ([SB 170, Stats. 2021, ch. 240](#)) effective immediately on Sept. 23, 2021:

0250-101-0932—For local assistance, Judicial Branch, payable from the Trial Court Trust Fund	2,937,770,000
Schedule:	
(1) 0150010-Support for Operation of Trial Courts	2,317,300,000

Provisions:

- 30 Of the funds appropriated in Schedule (1), \$30,000,000 shall be allocated by the Judicial Council in a manner that ensures all courts are allocated **funds to be utilized exclusively to increase the number of court reporters in family law and civil law cases**. This funding shall not supplant existing trial court expenditures on court reporters in family law and civil law cases.

- 31 Of the funds appropriated in Schedule (1), \$7,000,000 shall be available for the Judicial Council to establish a methodology to allocate a share of resources to all courts to cover the costs associated with the increased transcript rates.

Assembly Bill 177 (Committee of Budget) required the Judicial Council to convene a working group for the purpose of recommending a statewide framework for remote civil court proceedings due to the Legislature on or before January 1, 2023, that addresses equal and fair access to justice and considers and makes recommendations on court reporter availability and future workforce. It increased the statutory transcript rates (to go along with the \$7 million augmentation in the Budget Act). Also, it required the Judicial Council, on or before January 1, 2024, to report to the Legislature recommendations to increase uniformity in transcription rate expenditures in California and required the council to work in collaboration with key stakeholder groups, including the California Court Reporters Association, exclusively recognized employee organizations representing court reporters, and the Court Reporters Board of California. (The Judicial Council did not take a formal position on AB 177 but was supportive of and participated in negotiations on the language that resulted in the two allocations and the working group.)

Senate Bill 241 (Umberg) expanded authority of the Court Reporters Board to permit and regulate out-of-state deposition reporters and required, if the court conducts a trial, in whole or in part, through the use of remote technology, the official reporter or official reporter pro tempore to be physically present in the courtroom.

Senate Bill 154 (Committee of Budget) maintained the \$30 million ongoing appropriation but altered the budget control language, effective immediately on June 27, 2022:

0250-101-0932—For local assistance, Judicial Branch, payable from the Trial Court Trust Fund	3,236,930,000
Schedule:	
(1) 0150010-Support for Operation of Trial Courts	2,555,989,000

Provisions:

- 30 Of the amount appropriated in Schedule (1), \$30,000,000 shall be allocated by the Judicial Council in a manner that ensures all courts are allocated funds to be utilized to **exclusively** increase the number of official court reporters in family and civil law cases.

This funding may be used for recruitment and retention purposes, filling existing vacancies, converting part-time positions to full-time positions, increasing salary schedules, and providing signing and retention bonuses to enable trial courts to compete with private employers in the labor market. This funding shall not supplant existing trial court expenditures on court reports in family law and civil law cases. **Any unspent funds shall revert to the General Fund.**

Assembly Bill 156 (Committee on Budget), among other things, repealed the voice writing prohibition imposed by AB 1520 that prohibited the Court Reporters Board of California from issuing certificates for the practice of shorthand reporting by means of voice writing or voice recognition technology, defined voice writing and expanded the definition of the practice of shorthand reporting to include the making, by means of written symbols or abbreviations by voice writing of a verbatim record and the accurate transcription thereof, as specified, and made conforming changes to related provisions. It required the board to treat certificate holders equally regardless of the method of qualification and prohibits public employers from differentiating among certificate holders based upon the method of qualification. Further, it required the board to indicate on each certificate whether the certificate holder met the examination requirements through the use of stenography, voice writing, or both, as specified.

Senate Bill 189 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), among other things, authorized electronic reporting in administrative law proceedings if a stenographic reporter is unavailable and upon finding of good cause by the administrative law judge.

Assembly Bill 3252 (Berman) extended the operation of the Court Reporters Board of California from January 1, 2025, to January 1, 2029; included the phrase “voice writer” in the list of terms indicating shorthand reporter certification; requires applicants for licensure and renewal to provide a valid email address; and authorized the licensure of applicants who pass the national dictation exam in lieu of the California dictation exam, as specified. It also requires a shorthand reporter to state their full name and certificate number on the record prior to commencing a proceeding.

Disposition of vacant courthouses

In December 2015, the Judicial Council approved sponsorship of a proposal to authorize the disposition of the San Pedro Courthouse, with proceeds of its sale to be placed in the Immediate and Critical Needs Account (ICNA) of the State Court Facilities Construction Fund.

In February 2016, the Judicial Council authorized and approved the sale of the Corning Courthouse to Tehama County and the Chico Courthouse to Butte County in fair market value transactions, with proceeds from those sales treated in the same manner as in the final form of legislative authorization for disposition of the San Pedro Courthouse. The Judicial Council sponsored the legislation authorizing disposition of the San Pedro Courthouse (Assem. Bill 1900 (Jones-Sawyer); Stats. 2016, ch. 510, codified at Gov. Code, § 70395).

In December 2016, the Judicial Council authorized and approved the sale of the Clovis, Firebaugh, and Reedley courthouses in Fresno County and the Avenal and Corcoran courthouses in Kings County, with proceeds from those sales directed to ICNA. The Judicial Council sponsored Senate Bill 403 (Canella; Stats. 2017, ch. 358) authorizing the sale of the Avenal, Chico, Clovis, Corcoran, Corning, Firebaugh, and Reedley courthouses.

In September 2017 and May 2018, respectively, the Judicial Council authorized the sale of the West Los Angeles Courthouse and the Mental Health Courthouse in Los Angeles, with proceeds from those sales directed to ICNA. The authorizing legislation, Assembly Bill 2309 (Bloom; Stats. 2018, ch. 536), was signed by the Governor on September 19, 2018.

In 2023, the Judicial Council sponsored Assembly Bill 959 (McCarty), which authorized the sale of the Plumas/Sierra Regional, Gordon D. Schaber (Sacramento), Modesto Main, and Ceres courthouses. That legislation was held on the suspense file in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

In 2024, the Judicial Council sponsored Assembly Bill 2988 (McCarty) authorizing the sale of the Gordon D. Schaber Courthouse (Sacramento) and Assembly Bill 3282 (Committee on Judiciary) authorizing the sale of the Plumas/Sierra Regional, Modesto Main, and Ceres courthouses. AB 2988 was signed by the Governor (Stats. 2024, ch. 973), and AB 3282 was vetoed.

In 2025, the budget trailer bill for the courts, Assembly Bill 136 (Committee on Budget), was amended to include section 5, which authorizes the sale of the Plumas/Sierra Regional, Modesto Main, and Ceres courthouses. AB 136 was signed by the Governor (Stats. 2025, ch. 11).

Efficiencies

In April 2012, to address the budget crisis faced by the branch, the Judicial Council approved for sponsorship 17 legislative proposals for trial court operational efficiencies, cost recovery, and new revenue. An additional six efficiency proposals were approved for sponsorship in April 2013. Several noncontroversial and relatively minor measures were successfully enacted into law, while several remaining efficiencies were rejected by the Legislature,⁹ including one seeking to eliminate the requirement that courts destroy infraction records relating to possession or transport of marijuana.¹⁰ The Budget Act of 2019 included \$13.901 million in FY 2019–20 and \$2.929 million in FY 2020–21 to support the increased workload for the trial courts as a result of the enactment of AB 1793 (Stats. 2018, ch. 993), which requires sentence modification of past cannabis conviction cases under the Control, Regulate, and Tax Adult Use of Marijuana Act of 2016, also known as Proposition 64.

In 2025, the council worked with the Department of Finance and the Legislature to eliminate obsolete and duplicative statutory reporting requirements, consolidate reporting timelines to

⁹ See Attachment A for a list of efficiency and cost-recovery measures approved and rejected by the Legislature.

¹⁰ Health & Saf. Code, § 11361.5.

align with when information is available, and clarify that reports on cash flow loans to the trial courts are only required when such a loan is made. These changes were included in Assembly Bill 136 (Stats. 2025, ch. 11, the courts trailer bill) and ensure that courts and the council are not required to compile duplicative information and that reports that are submitted to the Legislature provide relevant information on current topics of legislative concern.

For 2026, the council is considering three sponsored legislation proposals, each of which would promote efficiencies in trial court operations by (1) clarifying reporting requirements on collection of court-ordered debt to align with court practices; (2) modernizing the requirements to provide notice of child custody mediation to allow for less costly and more effective means of providing notice; and (3) updating the statute on appointment of American Sign Language interpreters to ensure that courts can address a shortage of certified interpreters. Each of these proposals will assist the trial courts in implementing their statutory duties in a more efficient manner.

Remote proceedings

Since the April 2020 adoption of Emergency Rule 5 during the COVID pandemic, the Judicial Council has been advocating for courts to have broad authority to allow for remote appearances in civil and criminal matters as an option for court users. The current statutory authority for remote appearances in civil and criminal proceedings will expire on January 1, 2027, making it critical to seek legislation in 2026 to extend the sunset date on that authority.

The council is required to submit its annual report on remote technology use in civil and criminal matters to the Legislature by December 31, covering the period from September 1, 2024, through August 31, 2025. During this timeframe, superior courts reported over 1 million civil and 475,000 criminal remote proceedings. User experience surveys from more than 44,000 participants revealed that technical difficulties were rare, with only 1.7 percent reporting audio issues and 0.9 percent experiencing visual problems. These findings align with previous surveys showing that users report positive experiences with remote proceedings more than 95 percent of the time.

The remote option helps preserve access to justice for many Californians and vulnerable court users. It reduces time and expense for court users when they would otherwise lose time from school or work and would incur travel, childcare, and parking costs for routine hearings and appearances. For example, participants in collaborative justice court programs and diversion programs—which meet on a more frequent basis—especially benefit from the ability to appear remotely. Participants are not in custody, and remote appearances allow them to participate in court proceedings while not interrupting programming, schooling, or work obligations. Remote proceedings are also helpful to the many justice partners (behavioral health experts, probation, etc.) that help participants successfully graduate.

It is important to note that participating remotely in proceedings is always optional, and courts cannot require a person to appear remotely.

Courts and the Legislature are investing in the technology to make this happen, and it is critical that the judicial branch and the public have confidence in the permanence of this authority to safeguard those investments and ensure that courts are using technology to improve access to justice for all Californians.

Judicial security

The Judicial Council has consistently supported legislation aimed at protecting the privacy of judges and the protection of their home address information because it promotes judicial independence and integrity. Judges must feel that they and their families are secure from threats of violence or other harm in order to fairly adjudicate the many contentious and high-conflict cases that come before them. The Judicial Council has supported numerous bills to protect the safety of judicial officers. These bills include the following:

- Assembly Bill 2322 (Daly; Stats. 2018, ch. 914), which required the Department of Motor Vehicles, upon request, to make a retired judge or court commissioner’s home address confidential for the rest of his or her life and for any surviving spouse or child for three years following the death of the judge or court commissioner.
- Assembly Bill 2299 (Feuer), proposed in 2012, which would have authorized county assessors to redact the names of judges from property records. (This bill died in the Senate in the face of opposition from the press and real estate interests.)
- Assembly Bill 32 (Lieu; Stats. 2009, ch. 403), which requires the removal of personal information of judges and other officials from the internet within 48 hours of a written demand and permits employers or professional organizations to assert the rights of the official in removing the personal information from the internet.
- Senate Bill 506 (Poochigian; Stats. 2005, ch. 466), which provided confidentiality of voter registration information to public safety officials, state and federal judges, and court commissioners.
- Assembly Bill 2905 (Spitzer; Stats. 2004, ch. 248), which added judges and court commissioners to the types of employees for whom a governmental employer must pay the moving and relocation expenses when it is necessary to move because of an employment-related credible threat against his or her life, or the life of an immediate family member.

In the 2024 legislative session, the Judicial Council supported¹¹ Assembly Bill 1785 (Pacheco), which was sponsored by the California Judges Association and signed by the Governor. AB 1785 closes an existing loophole in the law and helps to ensure that judges’ home address information is kept confidential by amending Government Code section 7928.205 to prohibit the public posting of the home address, telephone number, or both the name and assessor parcel

¹¹ Judicial Council of Cal., Assembly Bill 1785 (Pacheco), as amended May 29, 2024—Request for Signature (Sept. 5, 2024), courts.ca.gov/sites/default/files/courts/default/2024-10/ga-position-letter-23-24-assembly-ab1785-pacheco.pdf.

number associated with the home address of any elected or appointed official on the internet without first obtaining the written permission of that individual.

The Judicial Council also supported¹² Assembly Bill 2281 (Soria) to make it a crime for a person to assault a judge or former judge of a tribal court in retaliation for or to prevent the performance of their official duties, as specified. AB 2281 was approved by the Assembly but ultimately held under submission in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

In the 2025 legislative session, the Judicial Council supported¹³ Assembly Bill 343 (Pacheco; Stats. 2025, ch. 142), which adds retired judges and children’s counsel in family or dependency proceedings to the existing disclosure exemptions under the California Public Records Act to protect personal information, such as residence addresses and personal telephone numbers. The Judicial Council again supported¹⁴ Assembly Bill 32 (Soria) to make it a crime for a person to assault a judge or former judge of a tribal court in retaliation for or to prevent the performance of their official duties, as specified. The bill also clarified that a tribal judge of a federally recognized California Indian tribe can request to make their records confidential. AB 32 was held under submission in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

Legislation Committee authority

Rule 10.12(a) of the California Rules of Court authorizes the Legislation Committee to act for the council by:

- (1) Taking a position on behalf of the council on pending legislative bills, after evaluating input from the council advisory bodies and Judicial Council staff, and any other input received from the courts, provided that the position is consistent with the council’s established policies and precedents;
- (2) Making recommendations to the council on all proposals for council-sponsored legislation and on an annual legislative agenda after evaluating input from council advisory bodies and Judicial Council staff, and any other input received from the courts; and
- (3) Representing the council’s position before the Legislature and other bodies or agencies and acting as liaison with other governmental entities, the bar, the media, the judiciary, and the public regarding council-sponsored legislation, pending legislative bills, and the council’s legislative positions and agendas.

¹² Judicial Council of Cal., Assembly Bill 2281 (Soria), as introduced—Support (June 3, 2024), courts.ca.gov/sites/default/files/courts/default/2024-10/ga-position-letter-23-24-assembly-ab2281-soria.pdf.

¹³ Judicial Council of Cal., Assembly Bill 343 (Pacheco), as introduced—Support (Mar. 27, 2025), courts.ca.gov/system/files/file/ga-position-letter-25-26-assembly-ab343-pacheco.pdf.

¹⁴ Judicial Council of Cal., Assembly Bill 32 (Soria), as introduced—Support (Mar. 13, 2025), courts.ca.gov/system/files/file/ga-position-letter-25-26-assembly-ab32-soria.pdf.

Policy implications

The mission of the Judicial Council includes providing leadership for improving the quality of justice and advancing the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice. Among the guiding principles underlying this mission is a commitment to meeting the needs of the public. This includes reinvestment in our justice system to preserve and improve access to justice, which Californians expect and deserve.

Further, Chief Justice Patricia Guerrero has emphasized the need for access, fairness, and equal justice in the courts, including the effective use of technology, as well as a stable judicial branch budget that can continue to make public access to justice a reality in all 58 counties. The proposed 2026 legislative priorities are consistent with these goals.

Comments

Public comments were not solicited for this proposal because the recommendations are within the Judicial Council's purview to approve without circulation.

Alternatives considered

No alternatives were considered.

Fiscal and Operational Impacts

The public expects and deserves access to California's courts. Providing timely access to high-quality justice is the primary objective of the council's strategic plan. The key to the success of this plan is a robust investment in the courts. Adoption of the proposed legislative priorities will allow Judicial Council staff to support the overarching goals of the strategic plan.

The recommendations support many of the judicial branch's other strategic plan goals, including Goal I, Access, Fairness, Diversity, and Inclusion, by seeking to secure funding to provide access to the courts for all Californians and being responsive to the state's cultural and ethnic diversity; Goal II, Independence and Accountability, by seeking to secure sufficient judicial branch resources to ensure accessible, safe, efficient, and effective services to the public; and Goal IV, Quality of Justice and Service to the Public, by seeking funding to continue critical programs to meet the needs of court users.

Attachments and Links

1. Attachment A: Efficiencies and Cost-Recovery Proposals Approved or Rejected by the Legislature

Efficiencies and Cost-Recovery Proposals Approved or Rejected by the Legislature

Approved by the Legislature

Senate Bill 75 (Stats. 2013, ch. 31), a trailer bill of the Budget Act of 2013, includes the following efficiency/cost-recovery proposals:

- Increase the statutory fee from \$10 to \$15 for a clerk to mail service of a claim and order on a defendant in small claims actions.
- Prohibit the Franchise Tax Board and the State Controller from conditioning submission of court-ordered debt to the Tax Intercept Program on the court or county providing the defendant's social security number, while still allowing the social security number to be released if the Franchise Tax Board believes it would be necessary to provide accurate information.
- Increase the fee from \$20 to \$50 for exemplification of a record or other paper on file with the court.
- Modify the process for evaluating the ability of a parent or guardian to reimburse the court for the cost of court-appointed counsel in dependency matters.

Assembly Bill 619 (Stats. 2013, ch. 452) revised the formula for assessing interest and penalties for delinquent payments to the State Court Facilities Construction Fund to conform to the existing statute governing interest and penalties for late payments to the Trial Court Trust Fund by using the Local Agency Investment Fund rate.

Assembly Bill 648 (Stats. 2013, ch. 454) clarified language from the prior year that created a new \$30 fee for court reporters in civil proceedings lasting one hour or less.

Assembly Bill 1004 (Stats. 2013, ch. 460) allowed magistrates' signatures on arrest warrants to be in the form of digital signatures.

Assembly Bill 1293 (Stats. 2013, ch. 382) established a new \$40 probate fee for filing a request for special notice in certain proceedings.

Assembly Bill 1352 (Stats. 2013, ch. 274) streamlined court records retention provisions.

Senate Bill 378 (Stats. 2013, ch. 150) provided that an electronically digitized copy of an official record of conviction is admissible to prove a prior criminal act.

Senate Bill 843 (Stats. 2016, ch. 33), commencing January 1, 2017, and until January 1, 2021, granted a defendant six peremptory challenges in a criminal case if the offense charged is punishable with a maximum term of imprisonment of one year or less, and reduced the number

of peremptory challenges that may be exercised separately by a defendant who is jointly tried from four to two in cases in which the maximum term of imprisonment is one year or less. Required the Judicial Council to conduct a study and, on or before January 1, 2020, submit a report to the Legislature on the reduction in the number of peremptory challenges.

Assembly Bill 2232 (Stats. 2016, ch. 74) corrected drafting errors in the rules governing retention of court files regarding certain misdemeanor traffic offenses.

Rejected by the Legislature

- ***Administrative assessment for maintaining records of convictions under the Vehicle Code.*** Clarify that courts are required to impose the \$10 administrative assessment for *each conviction* of a violation of the Vehicle Code, not just upon a “subsequent” violation.
- ***Audits.*** Defer required audits until trial courts and the Judicial Council receive specified funding to cover the cost of the audits.
- ***Bail bond reinstatement.*** Authorize courts to charge a \$65 administrative fee to reinstate a bail bond after it has been revoked.
- ***Collections.*** Allow courts to retain and distribute collections rather than transferring collected funds to county treasuries with distribution instructions.
- ***Court costs for deferred entry of judgment.*** Clarify that the court can recoup its costs in processing a request or application for diversion or deferred entry of judgment.
- ***Court reporter requirement in nonmandated case types (Sen. Bill 1313; 2014 (Nielsen)).*** Repeal Government Code sections 70045.1, 70045.2, 70045.4, 70045.75, 70045.77, 70045.8, 70045.10, 70046.4, 70050.6, 70056.7, 70059.8, 70059.9, and 70063 to eliminate the unfunded mandate that the enumerated courts (Superior Courts of Butte, El Dorado, Lake, Mendocino, Merced, Modoc, Mono, Monterey, Nevada, San Luis Obispo, Solano, Tehama, Trinity, and Tuolumne Counties) use court reporters in specified nonmandated case types.
- ***Destruction of records relating to possession or transportation of marijuana.*** Eliminate the requirement that courts destroy infraction records relating to possession or transport of marijuana.
- ***File search fee for commercial purposes.*** Allow courts to charge a \$10 fee to commercial enterprises, except media outlets that use the information for media purposes, for any file, name, or information search request.
- ***Marijuana possession infractions.*** Amend Penal Code section 1000(a) to exclude marijuana possession, per Health and Safety Code section 11357(b), from eligibility for deferred entry of judgment.

- ***Notice of mediation.*** Amend Family Code section 3176 to eliminate the requirement for service by certified, return receipt requested, postage-prepaid mail for notice of mediation, and clarify that the court is responsible for sending the notice.
- ***Notice of subsequent DUI.*** Repeal Vehicle Code section 23622(c) to eliminate the court's responsibility to provide notification of a subsequent DUI to courts that previously convicted the defendant of a DUI.
- ***Penalty assessments.*** Revise and redirect the \$7 penalty assessment from court construction funds to the State Court Facilities Construction Fund.
- ***Preliminary hearing transcripts.*** Clarify that preliminary hearing transcripts must be produced only when a defendant is held to answer the charge of homicide.
- ***Sentencing report deadlines (Assem. Bill 1214; 2015 (Achadjian)/Assem. Bill 2129; 2016 (Lackey)).*** Amend Penal Code section 1203 to require courts to find good cause before continuing a sentencing hearing for failure by the probation department to provide a sentencing report by the required deadlines.
- ***Trial by written declaration (Assem. Bill 2871; 2016 (Oberholte)).*** Eliminate the trial de novo option when the defendant in a Vehicle Code violation has not prevailed on his or her trial by written declaration.
- ***Monetary sanctions against jurors (Assem. Bill 2101; 2016 (Gordon)).*** Amend Code of Civil Procedure section 177.6 to add jurors to the list of persons subject to sanctions.