



SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA, COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
400 County Center
Redwood City, CA 94063

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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State Budget Plan Leaves State's Courts Underfunded

REDWOOD CITY, Calif. – The Superior Court of San Mateo County today announced that the Governor's plan to partially restore ongoing cuts in court funding will improve service but the overall damage caused by five years of budget cuts harms the public's access to justice.

Partial restoration of funding will reduce the layoffs and courtroom closures necessitated by current and prior state cuts but are not sufficient to avoid them entirely.

Based on the current budget cuts that remain, the Court will reduce four court commissioner positions and seven staff positions, close four courtrooms and suspend the majority of court services in the South San Francisco and San Mateo branches. Two Judges will remain at the South San Francisco branch to conduct preliminary hearings and the San Mateo branch will be utilized for trials, at the discretion of the Presiding Judge.

The state's courts face \$261 million in current cuts and a mounting deficit from prior year cuts as justice officials struggle to keep courthouses open, said Robert D Foiles, San Mateo County Superior Court Presiding Judge.

Court Executive Officer John Fitton stated, "Our workforce here in San Mateo County has been cut by 34 percent – from a high of 385 staff in 2008 to 254 projected this fall – due to the ongoing state budget cuts. While our dedicated court staff remains committed to serving the public to the best of their ability, there is no question that these cuts have resulted in shorter hours and longer lines."

"Our very democracy relies on a solid, working justice system and this system is threatened by these unacceptable cuts. Our communities are deeply concerned with the severe reductions in trial court services and we implore state leaders to continue to restore essential funding for our trial courts to protect public rights, freedom and safety," Judge Foiles said.

In his latest budget, signed today, Governor Brown restored approximately \$60 million to the state's trial courts. San Mateo County's expected restoration of approximately \$900,000, or 2.4 percent of the annual budget, will permit the Superior Court to:

- Restore one courtroom planned for closure
- Rescind the planned layoffs of seven court staff and one commissioner position

- Restore some public service hours, contingent upon restoration of additional, permanent court funding in January 2014

Mr. Fitton said, "This is good news and a significant first step. However, it should be clear that this partial restoration does not begin to erase the damage done by the ongoing cuts to the state trial courts. The courts – and therefore the public – have taken significant hits over the past five years." These include:

- Layoffs in the 2013-2014 budget year, beginning this July, of three Court commissioners (and one vacant commissioner position will be held open) and seven court staff
- Consolidation of the criminal clerk's office and calendars from the South San Francisco branch to the Redwood City Hall of Justice, effective July 15th
- Reduction of more than 130 court positions overall
- Reductions in public counter and phone hours
- Consolidated traffic and small claim's clerk's offices, traffic arraignments, family law hearings and complex litigation court to Redwood City

Judge Foiles said consolidating services in Redwood City makes fiscal sense but seriously impacts the ability of all residents to equal court services given the travel time and travel challenges some residents face on a daily basis. "We remain committed to providing the highest level of trial court services possible, given our available resources," Judge Foiles said.

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