

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN

Superior Court, San Joaquin County

April 30, 2007

MISSION STATEMENT

The San Joaquin County Superior Court shall resolve disputes and address problems applying the rule of law in a fair, equal, consistent, efficient, timely, and understandable manner with integrity and professionalism. The court shall promote public confidence and provide user-friendly, customer oriented services and treat all people with respect and dignity in a safe and secure environment.

GOAL 1: ACCESS, FAIRNESS & DIVERSITY

Issue Description (the challenges): The court serves an increasingly diverse community. Based on 2000 Census figures, over 30% of county residents are Hispanic, nearly 12% are Asian or Pacific Islander, and 6.5% are African-American. These populations will continue to grow with the migration of people from the Bay Area. Census figures project that by 2010 nearly 40% of the county's residents will be Hispanic and 8.5% will be African-American. Additionally, Southeast Asian communities are expected to grow due to secondary immigration stemming from the reunification of families and the desire to live in a warmer climate.

Language and cultural barriers continue to present challenges for our ethnic communities. In 2006 the court provided interpreters in 34 languages in criminal cases. Members of community have expressed concerns about the availability of interpreters in other case types. Because the law does not require the court to provide interpreters for most civil hearings, funds are not made available to the court for that purpose. Members of community have also expressed concerns about their confidence in court interpreters and the quality of the services they perform.

Because of cultural and historical experiences in their home countries, members of the immigrant communities have expressed concerns about the relatively low level of understanding some people in their communities have about the American justice system. Some first generation immigrants also have sense of fear or distrust of government based on their experience in the home country. Community based organizations representing the immigrant constituencies have expressed a desire to help the people they serve learn more about the courts.

The population is also aging. Consequently, it is expected that the number of seniors who use the courts or who will be involved in matters before the court will continue to increase.

More people with disabilities will use the courts as the population of seniors grows and as more people with disabilities become independent. People with disabilities expect the court to utilize adaptive technologies and other strategies to be responsive to their needs. As we move forward with the construction of new court facilities we must strive to address the needs of people with disabilities.

While the court has received high marks from the public on issues related to fairness, some community members expressed concerns about fairness in their courts. Measures should be taken to enhance the confidence of all communities on issues related to fairness.

Judicial officers and staff should be aware of the cultural issues that might affect how members of ethnic and immigrant communities interface with the court. Additionally, the public expects that the makeup of the bench and court personnel reflect the rich diversity of our county.

Goal Statement (the goal for addressing the challenges): The court will treat everyone fairly and with respect and dignity. The court will work to eliminate all barriers to justice, enhance access for all, and ensure that the court is free from bias and the appearance of bias. The court and its staff will understand and be responsive to the needs of all constituencies and all court users. The court will strive to have its staff reflect the diversity of our county.

GOAL 2: ADVOCACY, INDEPENDENCE, & ACCOUNTABILITY

Issue Description (the challenges): Our court has been historically underfunded and underresourced compared to other courts in the state. Resources provided to the court have not kept pace with the county's significant population growth, increased filings, added police officers on the street and new case types enacted by the legislature. The court's judicial officers and administrative staff must be advocates for the resources the court needs to adequately serve the public.

The court is part of the state's judicial branch, an independent, separate and co-equal branch of the state government. The court resolves disputes based on the rule of law set forth in the United States Constitution, the California Constitution, and the laws of this state enacted by the state legislature and the electorate. The Judicial Council is the policy making body for California's courts, and the

Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) provides administrative support to the Judicial Council.

In order to carry out its constitutional mission, the court must work with the Judicial Council, the Administrative Office of the Courts, the other two branches of government, and local government entities. Also, the court must account for its use of public funds to the appropriate government entities and to the public.

Our judicial officers and court personnel can assist in addressing issues related to the administration of justice statewide, and by doing so, better serve San Joaquin County.

Goal Statement (the goal for addressing the challenges): The court shall advocate for the resources it needs to serve the public. It shall develop and maintain mechanisms to liaison with other governmental entities and their representatives. The court shall also assist the judicial branch in maintaining its status as an independent, separate, and co-equal branch of government. Court representatives shall lend assistance in the statewide administration of justice and will join in the statewide judicial branch advocacy efforts for resources and policies that ensure the fair, impartial, and efficient delivery of justice. The court will maintain the highest standards of accountability for its use of public resources and strive to comply with Judicial Council and Administrative Office of the Court policies in this regard.

GOAL 3: MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

Issue Description (the challenges): The court continues to struggle with limited financial resources. Although our budget allocation has increased over the last two fiscal years, it has not been enough to sustain our growing need for additional staff to support our increased workload, increased filings and increased number of complex cases. Nonetheless, our staff continues to do the best job possible and under extremely difficult working conditions such as overcrowding. The court must be deliberate in its efforts to improve working conditions so as to attract, recruit, employ and retain a highly qualified workforce and better serve the public.

Critical to retaining a highly qualified workforce is the fostering of a work environment that recognizes employees' value and promotes communication, professional growth, development and employee well-being while continuing to work towards providing better, safer and a more secure working environment for all court employees and court users.

Implementation of innovative ideas that come from both inside and outside the court family will also result in better service to the public.

Goal Statement (the goal for addressing the challenges): The court will seek to use the best management practices of administration to support our judicial officers and provide the highest quality service to the public.

GOAL 4: QUALITY OF JUSTICE AND SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC

Issue Description (the challenges): The court will provide quality justice to all who use it. The public expects the court to resolve disputes in a fair, timely, and understandable manner. They also expect modern courts to provide problem solving programming, such as therapeutic justice courts, to address the underlying problems that bring people to the court system.

Justice system professionals and the public desire a court system that fulfills its mission in a way that is both responsive to their needs and efficient. The court is committed to re-evaluating its current case and calendar management practices with a view to making appropriate changes in collaboration with other justice system partners.

Some members of the public have expectations and misconceptions about the courts that are based on a lack of information. Conversely, community members have expressed a desire to learn more about the courts. There is particular interest in receiving information on the court's website and through other electronic technologies. The more informed people are about the courts, the higher their level of confidence in the courts. Community outreach and the provision of information to the public will be a priority for our court.

The number of self-represented litigants continues to grow. By being responsive to the needs of these litigants, the court enhances the quality of justice and the efficiency of its operations.

The public expects the courts to be customer service oriented and user friendly. Procedures must not only be fair, they must be understandable and provide the public with an opportunity to be heard. The public also expects the court to utilize service oriented technological advances.

Jury service continues to be the reason most people come to court. Their experience is one that will be regularly evaluated. Outreach in this area should continue to be a priority.

Goal Statement (the goal for addressing the challenges): The Court will provide the highest quality of justice and service to the public. The court will do so in a way that is both responsive to the needs of all court users and efficient. The court will collaborate with its constituencies in an effort to address their needs. Court users will have an opportunity to be heard and the court will strive to make its procedures and processes understandable. The court will engage in community outreach to provide information to the public about their court and to enhance and maintain their confidence in the court.

GOAL 5: EDUCATION FOR PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE

Issue Description (the challenges): In fiscal year 2003-2004, the court was once again required to make budget cuts. This time, one casualty of the budget reductions was continuing training and education. Until recently there has been insufficient funding to allow judicial officers and court personnel to participate in education and training activities other than those that were mandatory due to a judicial assignment change or other critical need that could not be done in-house. With additional funding our court received from the Judicial Council in the last fiscal year and in the current budget year as a result of being an underfunded court, we have been able to slightly replenish our training and education budget for judicial officers and court personnel.

The Judicial Council enacted a California Rule of Court effective January 1, 2007, outlining continuing education expectations for judges and mandatory continuing education for subordinate judicial officers and administrative staff. The court will need to provide opportunities for our judicial officers and court personnel to meet the expectations and requirements of the new rule.

Equally important to training judicial officers and court personnel so we may better serve our public is the need for us to better educate ourselves on the services our court provides as well as services provided by other organizations through court referrals. While baby boomers are steadily leaving the workforce, we find that new judicial officers and court personnel are not always familiar with all of these programs and services.

Goal Statement (the goal for addressing the challenges): The court will accommodate the training, education and professional development of all judicial officers and court personnel in order to comply with the California Rules of Court. Not only will the court send its judicial officers and staff to programs sponsored by such providers as the Center for Judicial Education and Research (CJER) and the California Judges Association, but the court will also take advantage of the experience and teaching expertise of its own judicial officers and staff to provide

quality continuing education and training. Further, the court will provide training in topics such as ethics, cultural awareness and sensitivity that will not only assist the court in meeting the needs of the diverse population we serve, but will also enhance trust and confidence in our court.

GOAL 6: FACILITIES

Issue Description (the challenges): The public deserves facilities that enhance their respect for and confidence in the system. Some community members have suggested our facilities have the opposite effect.

Our current facilities are outdated, overcrowded, lack accessibility for people with disabilities, and do not accommodate for secure prisoner inmate movement free from contact with witnesses, jurors, judges, court personnel and other court users. The Trial Court Facilities Task Force has rated 11 of our 30 courtrooms as “deficient,” the lowest possible rating. Our in-custody holding cells in each branch are also overcrowded and have other inadequacies that present significant security problems.

In Stockton, the jury assembly area is too small and has other inadequacies. There are no juror assembly areas in our Lodi, Manteca, and Tracy branches. When the small lobby in those branches overflows, jurors must wait outside - sometimes in inclement weather. Jurors who have been selected to serve in Stockton have expressed concerns about having to congregate outside of their courtrooms along with witnesses, the litigants and their supporters.

There are no attorney-client interview rooms where attorneys may discuss cases with their clients. Instead these conversations are done in hallways or outside. This impedes the court’s ability to resolve cases.

The public continues to complain about the overall condition and cleanliness of our facilities. At times, the restrooms are not as clean as they should be and bathroom supplies become depleted during business hours.

Our Manteca and Tracy branches each have a courtroom and administrative offices housed in “temporary” trailers that are now over 20-years-old. These facilities are operationally inadequate and present security challenges. They are run down and inefficient. As a short-term measure, they must be replaced.

The Judicial Council has ranked our proposed projects for Stockton and South County in their “Immediate Needs” category for statewide facilities rankings, the highest priority category. The Council has requested funding for our Stockton

project. If funded, it is scheduled for completion by August 2012. Our other project will be a full service facility combining our current Manteca and Tracy branches to support the tremendous population growth in South County. Funding for the South County project may not become available unless a statewide bond measure is passed. Both projects must be built in order to accommodate necessary future judgeship positions, our county's population growth, and increased case filings. The court simply will not be able to adequately serve the public otherwise. Our court will work with the Judicial Council, the Legislature, the governor's Department of Finance, and local government entities to ensure that both projects are funded and constructed. The court will also keep the public informed on facilities related issues.

Goal Statement (the goal for addressing the challenges): The Court will work with the appropriate government entities to ensure that current and future facilities meet the needs of the court, our justice system, community partners, and the public.

GOAL 7: TECHNOLOGY

Issue Description (the challenges): The court needs technology infrastructures that will better and more efficiently support judicial officers and the public. Integrated case management, document management, video conferencing, financial reporting, human resources, records management and business continuity systems are critical needs for the court to function in today's technological society and to be able to provide the highest quality of service to the public.

Because of the court's historical underfunding, it has not been able to implement many of the technological advances currently available. However, the court is actively pursuing additional funding to implement some of the statewide technology infrastructure projects that will become available for all trial courts in the state of California.

Goal Statement (the goal for addressing the challenges): The court will work with the appropriate entities to ensure that current and future technology infrastructures meet the needs of the court, the public, and our justice system and community partners.