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Economy & Efficiency Commission Presentation

Editorial Note: Although every effort has been made to insure the accuracy of the material in this presentation, the scope of the material covered and the discussions undertaken lends itself to the possibility of minor transcription misinterpretations.

**PRESENTATIONS BY
The Honorable James Robert Brandlin
Superior Court
Los Angeles County**

June 6, 2013

Chairman Barcelona greeted the Honorable James Robert Brandlin and welcomed him while turning it over for Judge Brandlin to speak to the Economy and Efficiency Commission.

The Priorities of the 2nd Supervisorial District:

Court Overview

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Judge Brandlin stated that in 2002 when the “dot com” bubble bust occurred in which the courts lost \$57 million dollars in funding and as a result-29 courtrooms countywide closed down and it was the first layoff in the history of the County courts.

Judge Brandlin stated that the State reductions have meant cuts to the Los Angeles Superior Court system and from 2008 to today, the courts are underfunded by \$194 million dollars. He stated that as a result of the underfunding over the last several years the courts have tried to put a freeze on hiring, reduce positions upon retirements, and use some of the reserve funding that the department had accrued since 2002 and get through the recession. He stated that there was a change in the legislature last year which prevented the trail courts from maintaining more than 1% reserve of the budget. He stated that now the court has no reserves. He stated that in 2013-2014, the courts anticipate that they will be reducing up to 511 positions within the next two weeks.

Judge Brandlin stated that the courts have been able to save money through staff reductions along with other previous cuts that have been made. He stated that the courts anticipate the shortfall this year to be \$85 million dollars. He stated that the courts’ goal is to be able to maintain the constitutional requirements and statutory obligations. He stated that unlike many of the Courts throughout the State, they have made a

decision which is to not eliminate access to justice in any of the disciplines.

Judge Brandlin stated that small claims cases will be filed and heard on at these locations: Mosk, Alhambra, Downey, Van Nuys, and Inglewood. He stated that Lancaster/A.V will not be impacted due to its location.

Fewer Neighborhood Courts

Judge Brandlin stated that the County will be closing 10 courthouses to adjudicatory activities, with narrow exceptions: Huntington Park, Whittier, Pomona North, Malibu, West Los Angeles, and Beverly Hills with one traffic court remaining, San Pedro Court, Beacon Street, Catalina, and Kenyon Juvenile.

Judge Brandlin stated that there will be less Criminal and Traffic Courts at fewer locations; and the County will close 12 courtrooms and distribute cases among remaining criminal courtrooms by mid-June.

Judge Brandlin stated that there will be a redirection of more than 10,000 civil harassment hearings annually. He stated that the increased caseload will be handled differently depending on each district's caseload configuration. He also stated that conservatively, as a percentage of total workload, this additional responsibility will increase existing bench officer workloads by more than 15%.

Judge Brandlin stated that the courts will centralize probate matters in Mosk Courthouse-where filings will be accepted only at the Mosk Courthouse. He stated that bench officers may conduct some hearings in district courts for certain conservatorship and guardianship matters.

Questions/Comments:

Commissioner Murray asked if the number of Judicial Officers has changed? Judge Brandlin replied that the number of judicial officers has changed. He stated that in 2000 there were judges, commissioners, and there were referees. He stated that the referees were full-time judicial officers that were hired by the court for limited things such as: traffic, small claims, juvenile division, etc. He stated that by the end of the year there will be no referees. He stated that many of the Commissioner positions will no longer exist as well and the number of actual judges has not changed because they are elected officials.

Commissioner Kamenir-Reznik commented that she was particularly concerned about the elimination of the small claims court and taking the cases and shrink wrapping them and putting them away. Judge Brandlin replied that this is not just in LA County but in many other counties across the State.

Commissioners Kamenir-Reznik commented that so many of the small problems can be resolved in small claims court where there is no discovery and you get to the bottom line; and for years there have been advocates that have been saying that small claims court jurisdiction be reduced to \$20,000 instead of whatever the amount is currently. She further stated that eliminating small claims court seems counterproductive and hurtful to most vulnerable litigants. She wondered if she could see the plan on how they are making those decisions. Judge Brandlin replied that there is an implementation committee with members from each of the disciplines throughout the practice of law that have met and conferred. He stated that he is not on the implementation committee but has been on some of the trips to some of the courthouses and everything has been studied including: the number of parking spaces that would be available to the public once the workload was shifted; the amount of space that would be available in the clerk's office; and have taken great strides to minimize the impacts. He stated that this is not a plan that the courts wanted.

Chairman Barcelona expressed his appreciation to Judge Brandlin and invited him to come back to speak to the EEC in the near future and the Commissioners applauded.

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