

Internet article analysis

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The economic downturn has resulted in budget cuts to the criminal Justice system across the nation. As a result, state legislators looked for ways to reduce budgets. One area of focus has been the court system. This paper will present an evaluation of the budgeting crisis and potential recommendations to the court system. A current budgeting issue within the California criminal Justice system is the continuing financial cuts to the courts.

Robert (2013) states " the court system's budget was cut by more than \$1 billion" within the last five years (Para 3), and approximately 65 percent of the financial aid from the state's General Fund was lost. A hiring freeze and staff layoffs was implemented keep the court system operating, but at a high cost. The Judicial Council of California (2015) reported that 52 courthouses have closed since 2008, with many others operate with reduced operating hours.

This has deprived two million Californians have been deprived of access to the Judicial process (Judicial Council of California, 2015). Budget cuts have led to longer and further drives to locate a courthouse, long lines, and even longer waits for dispute settlement. It is crucial to identify funding solutions for the criminal justice system to provide necessary legal services in a timely and efficient manner. In order to identifying a reasonable solution for the California courts, it makes sense to look at the experience of another state faced with similar budget issues.

The Washington state court system faced (and continues to face) funding crises, ranking last in the country for trial court funding, defense of indigent offenders, and the resection (Board for Judicial Administration Court Funding

Task Force, 2004). Budget cuts led to limited staffing and reduced program funding. Legislators understood that this meant creation of inventive Judicial programs to manage resources and deliver services efficiently, within the confines of available funds.

The Washington Board for Judicial Administration Court Funding Task Force researched and developed recommendations to regarding court funding. The Task Force (2004) presented the recommendation that " state and local government should share equitably in the cost of trial courts" (page 77), with contribution by users of the court. Shared costs meant that local and state governments must collaborate to define state budget responsibilities, as increased participation by the state would encourage equal funding.

State participation would create more equitable funding amongst many Jurisdictions. With the shift of fiscal responsibilities to the state, local government would need to ensure that a share of their savings be reserved for court activities. Such a funding process could assure sufficient, steady, and lasting funding or the courts. The Task Force (2004) also proposed developing a Court Funding Implementation Committee, to assist the Board for Judicial Administration in identifying long-term, lasting funding for the court system.

The Task Force also presented other recommendations, including rationalizing limited Jurisdiction courts, allowing collaborative court services for municipalities, and election of Judges at all levels to encourage accountability. Additionally, reassignment of case types by courts was presented, such as domestic violence orders at limited Jurisdiction courts, or

costing of schedules for specific court services. The Task Force (2004) noted that the state should fund newly rationalized courts with Jurisdiction over laws of the state and municipal ordinances.

These courts were to be located in locations accessible to the community, law enforcement, attorneys, and court staff. Consolidation of staffing resources and administrative needs would result in financial savings for all areas participating, reducing duplication of administration costs and improving overall service quality. Reduction of funding to court systems is an issue facing many states. In California, Robert (2013) suggested that the California Legislature has begun addressing the budget crisis with a new funding package that including allocation of \$60 million to the trial courts (Para 22).

However, identifying solutions that will offer consistent, adequate, and long-term funding will take more than just creating increased budgets. The mounting cost of running a court system means developing efficient operation methods. To accomplish this, a program similar to Washington State's reassignment of smaller courts into rationalized courts could be beneficial. Consolidation of court staff, administrators, and schedules could result in higher quality service, reduced duplication of costs, and faster, more efficient processing of court cases.

Coordination and communication of state and local governments could potentially relieve some of the court cost burden on local government. Utilizing state funds, with some assistance from court user fees, could lead to more evenly funded court Jurisdictions within the state. Another useful

recommendation from the state of Washington Task Force (2004) was the development of a committee to explore long-ERM solutions to the court funding crisis.

In collaboration with state and local legislators each year, this committee would look for private and public funding sources, develop and present recommendations for additional funding to the state. It is therefore important to take note of discussions by Rowe (2013) regarding the importance of developing of nurturing respectful interactions with state policymakers. If good relationships exist, it will be easier to discuss how important and vital the courts are to public safety, to Justice administration, to crime victims, ND the state overall.