

TIME IS RUNNING OUT FOR THE BAR TO RESPOND!

1. Court System Facing Major Cuts to Service and Security.

After receiving a serious and carefully considered budget proposal that found 11% in savings for 2009 from the court system, County Executive Ron Sims unveiled a 2009 County Budget on October 13 that contained significantly deeper cuts to the court system than expected. These cuts could result in (1) the elimination of family court services critical to the judges' ability to fairly consider complex dissolution and custody plans, (2) the end of our county's nationally applauded Drug Court which was recently reviewed on the front page of the New York Times, and (3) the removal of our mental health court that humanely addresses the needs of mentally ill defendants.

In addition to these service cuts, significant security concerns may result from the budget proposal. The county courthouse would have only one entrance open for weapons screening. Difficult choices would be made whether to keep an entrance staffed with an officer or have an officer available in a courtroom where perhaps a gang trial is underway. And the sheriff would be forced to remove deputies entirely from providing security at our local district courts.

2. KCBA Advocacy Underway.

The bar has been monitoring this situation for the past few months and all members were contacted the weekend before Ron Sims' budget address with a request for contacts to individual county councilmembers. In addition, over the next 3 weeks KCBA is scheduling in-person meetings with each councilmember and a delegation of bar leaders from the councilmember's home district. We have organized other bar groups in the county, including specialty and minority bars, to alert their members and sign on to a county-wide letter in support of our justice system's budget needs. And our November 11 Bench-Bar Conference at Seattle University includes several plenary sessions that will call attention to the critical importance of court funding and the bar's responsibility to speak out in support of our judiciary.

3. County Council Needs to Hear from You!

While our overall association efforts are designed to have an important impact on the deliberations by the county council over the next four weeks, the court system is not the only area facing serious cutbacks. Advocates for domestic violence shelters, animal protection, senior centers, and so many more important causes have been speaking out loudly and in great numbers to their councilmembers. They are generating emails, phone calls, and most importantly in-person pleas to the county council at a series of council hearings being held throughout the county. At these sessions, constituents sign up for a two minute slot to tell the council why their issue is important. Unfortunately, other than remarks by some judges at these forums, we are told that no attorneys have attended these sessions to defend the court system. The result is that councilmembers are left wondering how deep the support is for funding our judiciary.

Conclusion

We need to keep generating emails, letters, phone calls, and in-person attendance at the council forums. Please take a moment if you haven't already and visit www.kcba.org/2009countybudget. From there you can send a quick email to your councilmember; there's even a sample message you can insert without having to draft any text.

In addition, please consider attending one of the two remaining council in-person forums. The next one is Thursday, October 23, 7:00pm at the Shoreline Conference Center, 18560 1st Avenue NE, Shoreline. The final open forum is Tuesday, October 28, 7:00pm in the County Council chambers on the 10th floor of the downtown Courthouse, 516 Third Avenue, Seattle. All you need to do is show up, sign-in at the door, and wait your turn at the microphone for up to two minutes (even a minute is good!) to express your view that county courts must be adequately funded and that all proposed additional cuts by the County Executive must be stricken from the budget.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me by email (andrewp@kcba.org) or phone (206-267-7061).

Regards,
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