



NEWS RELEASE

Release Date: February 2, 2023

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*SUPERIOR COURT OF
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COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE
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Riverside County continues to experience a chronic and generational lack of sufficient judicial resources to serve our ever-growing population. Over the past 15 years, the population of Riverside County has grown by more than 30%. We are now the 10th most populous county in the country serving the judicial needs of 2,506,351 people. The 2022 Judicial Needs Assessment Study published by the Judicial Council of California shows that the Riverside Superior Court needs 111.7 judicial officers. The Riverside County Superior Court currently has 90 authorized and funded judicial positions, leaving us 22 judicial officers short of the number necessary to handle the court's workload.

The continuance of a case beyond its last day for trial is based upon a finding of "good cause." A determination of "good cause" to continue a matter is based on the totality of the facts and circumstances for each case, but prior rulings by the California Supreme Court have made clear that chronic neglect by the state in providing adequate judicial resources does not constitute good cause to continue a case, i.e. suspending an individual's Constitutional right to a speedy trial, within the meaning of Penal Code Section 1382. The court is ethically prohibited from commenting on its rulings in any individual case.

Following the onset of the Coronavirus Pandemic in 2020, the Chief Justice of the State of California began issuing Emergency Orders in response to the pandemic's disruptions to the operations of the court. These disruptions included issues such as staff, judges, attorneys, witnesses, and jurors becoming ill, state and local stay at home orders, and social distancing orders. These orders were only issued on a month by month basis in order to ensure that the actual conditions being experienced by the court warranted the suspension of a person's Constitutional Right to a speedy trial. By late September 2022, the Riverside Superior Court was no longer experiencing the requisite impact on operations from the pandemic and the last Emergency Order expired on October 7, 2022.

Since October 2022 when the final Emergency Order expired, the Riverside Superior Court has experienced a dramatic increase in the number of criminal cases being set for trial. In anticipation of the increased trial caseload, the Superior Court took a number of steps to help minimize the number of cases that might be dismissed once emergency extensions of the last day for trial under Penal Code Section 1382 expired. The court has continued to adjust its operations in response to the case backlog and as additional judges have joined the bench. Some of the actions taken by the court include:

- Re-designated additional departments to hear criminal trials.
- Opened four additional criminal trial departments as new judicial officers were appointed. Two additional criminal departments will open based upon the appointment of two new judges on January 31, 2023.
- Moved court-reporters from non-mandated court assignments to facilitate opening additional criminal trial departments.

- Designated all unlimited civil judges as possible criminal trial departments. Since October these judges have handled 41 criminal cases in addition to their full civil caseloads.
- Continue to operate mandatory settlement conference calendars regionally to facilitate disposition.
- Calling criminal trials multiple times per day in the event a trial courtroom becomes available.
- Assigning criminal trials to a courtroom immediately after it becomes available, such as when the jury in its previous case commences deliberations.
- Utilizing every available retired judge through the Temporary Assigned Judges Program administered by the Chief Justice's office.

The Riverside County Superior Court has received appointments of four new judges since October 2022 and four additional new judges took the bench in January 2023 following their election. Training is required for new judicial officers as set forth in the California Rules of Court and is an essential part of new judicial officers transitioning to the bench. The court has staggered having judges attend training to minimize the impact on the availability of trial courtrooms.

Riverside County continues to have one additional allocated and funded open judicial position and we are optimistic that the Governor's office will fill that position soon. Additionally, Senator Richard Roth has introduced Senate Bill (SB)75 which would authorize 26 new judicial positions, of which Riverside would receive five. Hopefully this legislation will be passed and these positions will be authorized and funded, providing us with further judicial resources to address the legal needs of this community.

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