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## NEWS RELEASE

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### For Immediate Release

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### **BUDGET CUTS CONTINUE TO HURT COURTS' SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC**

The State budget is on time and restores some funding to many agencies that suffered huge cuts, but there is no relief in sight for California's beleaguered court system. "The budget provides some additional monies for courts statewide, and court users and the judges applaud the legislature and governor for that," said Steven M. Basha, Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in Yolo County. "But for the courts, it's like your big brother taking a dollar from your lunch money, and then he gives you back a quarter five years later. You appreciate the money, but it's too little, too late."

The courts statewide have seen budgets slashed. Yolo has seen staff levels reduced over 23%, early closures of filing windows and long waits at the courthouse for people who need help with their paperwork. "We have been very frugal historically. Our great administrative and staff support have helped us avoid the courtroom closures that other counties are suffering – at least for the time being," said Basha, "but without substantial restoration of the funding cut by the state since 2008, we cannot provide the access to justice that the constitution guarantees." Although courts are often called "county" courts for historic reasons, they are state entities funded by the state, not the counties.

The state budget for 2014-2015 did increase a few court programs statewide, especially for programs that address the needs of the criminal offenders who have the greatest impact on public safety (mentally ill or drug addicted offenders). These monies will be put to good use by courts throughout the State but they barely scratch the surface of the Judicial Branch's acute financial needs. According to Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye, the California Judicial Branch has seen its budget resources cut by one billion dollars since 2008. This latest budget provides an increase of \$129 million for the trial courts in the 58 counties, including the Yolo Superior Court.

Even more alarming, the state has limited the courts' ability to keep reserves to cover extraordinary expenses. "Other agencies in the legislative and executive branches can maintain reserves to promote frugal money management – to have an emergency fund. The courts are now the only entities specifically restricted from doing so," said Judge Basha. "This budget is contrary to Governor Brown's message that all sectors of government must be fiscally responsible and budget for a 'rainy day.' "

What is the impact of the 2014-15 Budget on the operations of the Yolo Superior Court? According to Judge Basha, "we will hold on to the status quo – long lines, early closures of windows, insufficient staff to process cases timely, longer waits for restraining orders, and frustration for our staff and the people who use and need the courts. And that's everyone. Those who have been frustrated about the service reductions will continue to be frustrated. Everything takes longer: adoptions, custody orders, evictions, case filings and traffic and fine payments. We will still be severely limited in our ability to provide the necessary level of access to justice that our community needs and deserves."

Paradoxically, the Yolo Court will soon be moving to a new courthouse. The new Yolo courthouse was planned years ago when the state determined that Yolo's existing courthouse, built in 1917, did not meet minimum space and safety standards for courts. The construction is being funded by court user fees collected statewide over many years, not from the State's General Fund. The 2014-2015 State Budget does not in any way impact the construction of our new courthouse. "These construction funds cannot be used for our operations by state law," noted Judge Basha. "The irony is that the state is building us a new courthouse that we desperately need, but will not provide us the funding to operate fully within that courthouse," mused Judge Basha. "We can only hope that the Legislature and the Governor will soon realize the terrible omission in this budget, and how the public continues to suffer as a result."

Despite all the budgetary hurdles placed on trial courts by the Governor and the Legislature, the Court tries to be positive. Said Judge Basha, "this Court has outstanding judges, executives and staff, and together we remain committed to the effective administration of justice under all circumstances. We will fulfill our judicial responsibilities to the best of our abilities even with these crippling financial limitations."

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