

## Newsom's Proposed Courts Budget Includes Millions for New Judges, Courthouses

The proposal includes \$100 million in "equity funding" aimed at equalizing how revenues are divided among California's 58 trial courts.

The governor's court funding proposal is part of his overall \$286.4 million budget proposal.

- The budget includes money for 23 new trial court judgeships but no appellate court justice positions.
- Litigators want to see more money for moving civil cases to trial.

As tax revenues flood state coffers, Gov. Gavin Newsom has proposed a record-high \$5.2 billion budget for California's judicial branch, with plans for hundreds of millions of additional dollars for new judgeships and courthouses.

Newsom's 2022-23 [spending proposal](#), unveiled at a press event Monday in Sacramento, includes almost \$891 million in new funding for the judiciary, much of it directed toward the state's 58 trial courts. The increased spending includes:

- Nearly \$43 million for 23 new trial court judgeships. The 23 bench officer positions are what's left of the 50 judgeships originally created but not fully funded by the Legislature in 2007. The judicial positions will be allocated by a needs study, with many of the posts going to courts in the Inland Empire and Central Valley.
- \$100 million to promote "fiscal equity" among superior courts. The Judicial Council will decide how the money is divided up. The issue of how to equalize funding among courts is a divisive one, with judges arguing over whether case filings, case types, population growth and other factors are the proper measures to consider. Ongoing differences in funding stems, in some cases, from the years when counties set spending levels for courts.
- \$263 million for early work on five new courthouses as well as additional funding for previously approved projects. The new court buildings are located in Santa Clarita, Fairfield, Fresno, San Luis Obispo and Quincy in Plumas County. Money for courthouses already in the works will go to projects in Ukiah, Butte County and San Bernardino County.
- More than \$33 million in the next fiscal year to support remote proceedings in courtrooms. The money "will be used to provide a publicly accessible audio stream for every courthouse in the state," the governor's budget proposal said. The California Supreme Court in December declined to force the Los Angeles County Superior Court to [restore a program](#) that allowed the public to listen to proceedings via a remote connection.

Newsom's proposal also includes new funding for court technology projects, appellate appointed counsel, higher salary and benefit costs for judges, court and branch employees and court data collection.

"I welcome the governor's continuing commitment to sustainable funding in his budget proposal for the judicial branch," Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye said in a prepared statement. "He clearly recognizes how important equal access to justice is for all Californians."

The issue of remote proceedings is expected to be another legislative fight this year after Newsom last fall signed into law authority for courts to allow video appearances in some civil matters through June 2023. Labor groups have been unhappy with some of the legislative provisions and will likely make remote proceedings an issue during budget hearings this summer.

Litigators are also seeking assurances that courts, some of which recently proposed jury trials due to a spike in COVID-19 cases, will continue processing civil cases.

“We’re encouraged by the necessary investment in essential remote technology that will bring our court system into the 21st century,” Craig Peters, president of the Consumer Attorneys of California, said in a prepared statement.

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