

The Recorder

California Chief Justice Says Judiciary Will ‘Never Give Up’ Remote Access to Justice

Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye said the backlog in state courts is not as bad as expected and, in some cases, remote technology has helped courts catch up with pre-pandemic backlogs.

California’s chief justice admitted Thursday that keeping the state’s courts open during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic was not always “kumbaya,” but she said the judiciary discovered a new source of equity and efficiency through remote proceedings and is not going to give it up.

During a virtual event hosted by the Public Policy Institute of California, California Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye said throughout the pandemic she found herself in the middle with the state’s Judicial Council—the policymaking body of the judiciary—and stakeholders to find out which counties needed more support and what needed to be prioritized. Across California’s 58 state courts, the judiciary issued 600 emergency orders to keep court operations moving.

“Was it always perfect?” Cantil-Sakauye asked. “Were people always happy? Was it kumbaya? No.”

The California Supreme Court justice, who also chairs the Judicial Council, said the process involved “a lot of meetings, a lot of rules, a lot of trying to keep everyone calm and knowing we’re going to get to this in order and and no one is going to be forgotten.”

At this point, Cantil-Sakauye said the courts are still in some form of a hybrid process between in-person and remote proceedings. She said some courts are short-staffed as a result of personnel contracting the virus. A few courts are still asking for emergency orders “just in case,” because they are in counties with lower vaccination rates or deal with a large prison population.

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