

# COUNTY OF EL DORADO

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# THE SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA

County of El Dorado  
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January 23, 2018

Honorable Edmund G. Brown, Jr.  
Governor of the State of California  
c/o State Capitol, Suite 1173  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: El Dorado County, New Placerville Courthouse Funding

Governor Brown,

We are writing to request that you reconsider restoration of funding for the construction of the El Dorado County, New Placerville Courthouse project in the Governor's Proposed Budget for 2018-19. In October 2008, the Judicial Council identified the New Placerville Courthouse as a "Critical Need" project.

The Superior Court of El Dorado County provides services in three facilities within the City of Placerville (along with a courthouse in South Lake Tahoe and civil division facility in Cameron Park). The Placerville Main Street Branch was originally built in 1913, renovated in 1971, and is severely overcrowded and lacking in public amenities such as parking and accessibility. The three-story historic building houses four courtrooms serving criminal, family law, and domestic violence caseloads, as well as the Court's "self-help" division and Child Custody Recommending Counselors' offices, located in the basement. The historic courthouse is not fully ADA compliant, and on several occasions the single elevator serving the building has malfunctioned, resulting in no access to upstairs courtrooms other than through a stairwell. The elevator itself is so antiquated that parts must be fabricated to make necessary repairs; this process can take quite some time, all the while, the building lacks the accessibility required by state and federal law.

The Court also occupies approximately 20 percent of "Building C" at the Placerville Branch of the El Dorado County government center, which is intended for county building and planning functions. This building contains one courtroom in the basement level, which hears all criminal cases from the western side of the County prior to trial, with arraignments, traffic, preliminary hearings, and other in-custody and out of custody defendant dockets. This facility also houses Court Administration and the Records Management Department.

Additionally, the Court has a small facility located underneath the County's juvenile hall on Fair Lane. Juvenile dependency, juvenile delinquency, juvenile traffic, guardianship and probate calendars are heard at this location.

Both the historic Main Street Courthouse and the Building C Court facilities are significantly lacking in operational features and security that meet current standards. In addition to health and safety issues (asbestos, lead water pipes, etc.), the historic Main Street Courthouse lacks a jury assembly area; causing prospective jurors to assemble and wait in hallways. Because the building has no holding cells for in-custody defendants, they are held in jury deliberation rooms on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, after co-mingling with victims and other Court patrons who may be in the building at the time, as there are no secure exclusive hallways in which to move them. Building C has no security screening for its courtroom, lacks separate hallways for in-custody defendants, and has only two single-occupant holding cells that are frequently over capacity, often resulting in inmates being secured in public areas waiting for their case to be called. Both buildings have other severe functional and physical deficiencies and pose significant public safety concerns when used for Court operations.

The new Placerville Courthouse would replace at least these three facilities (and possibly one more currently located in Cameron Park) and consolidate operations in a modern, secure facility to handle all case types. It would include space for administration, clerks, security operations and holding, jury assembly rooms, a self-help center, and building support space. The proposed project also includes secure parking for judges as well as 240 spaces for on-site parking for support staff, visitors, and jurors, something that is lacking at both the Main Street and Building C Court locations.


The project has undergone California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review. The Judicial Council, as lead agency, certified the project EIR in June 2015; shortly thereafter a petition for writ of mandate was filed challenging the EIR. In July 2016, the trial court issued its order denying the petition, which was subsequently appealed. In September 2017, the appellate court issued its order affirming the trial court's decision. At this time, the CEQA litigation is completed and there are no other legal actions pending that in any way impact the courthouse project. Unfortunately, while the project was on hold pending the outcome of the CEQA lawsuit, funding for the courthouse construction program was paused. At the time that the CEQA lawsuit was filed, the process for transferring ownership of the site from the County to State was already underway.

A significant amount of planning and fiscal resources have been invested in the project to date. In March 2011, the State Public Works Board approved the selection of a potential site for the new courthouse. The site is on undeveloped land adjacent to the main jail on Forni Road, is less than 2 miles from the city center of Placerville, and has since been acquired by the County of El Dorado; the County has fully budgeted funds to construct the

access road for the new Court and is prepared to transfer title of the property to the State in exchange for the State transferring its equity ownership of certain Court facilities back to the County, including 20 percent equity ownership of Building C. Other than transactional fees and costs required to effect a real property transfer, the major burden of site acquisition has been eliminated from the project due to the County's willingness to transfer the property; therefore, this courthouse project is ready to go in to design phase with the Judicial Council selected firm Dreyfuss & Blackford Architecture. The remaining piece is a commitment of funding from your office to complete the construction of this much needed facility.

We thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



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Suzanne N. Kingsbury, Presiding Judge  
Superior Court of California, County of El Dorado



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Michael Ranalli, Chair  
District IV Supervisor, County of El Dorado

- C:     Senator Ted Gaines, 1<sup>st</sup> Senate District  
       Assemblyman Frank Bigelow, 5<sup>th</sup> Assembly District  
       Assemblyman Kevin Kiley, 6<sup>th</sup> Assembly District  
       Michael Courtney, Facilities Services, Judicial Council of California  
       Justice Brad Hill, Chair, Court Facilities Advisory Committee  
       Diane Cummins, Chief Fiscal Policy Advisor, California State Senate  
       Tania Ugrin-Capobianco, Court Executive Officer  
       Don Ashton, EDC Chief Administrative Officer