



# *Superior Court of California County of Fresno*

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**NEWS RELEASE**

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The Fresno Superior Court announced late in May that it will close the branch courts in Coalinga, Firebaugh, Reedley, Sanger, and Selma on July 30, 2012. Those in Clovis and Kingsburg will close on August 6. After this, felony and misdemeanor cases will be heard at the main courthouse. Traffic matters will be in the M Street Courthouse while probate and other civil hearings will be held in the B. F. Sisk Courthouse. All three are located in downtown Fresno.

Presiding Judge Gary Hoff voiced frustration that the state's financial crisis is forcing the Fresno Superior Court to reduce services it has spent 30 years expanding. He also regretted that consolidating the caseloads from seven facilities into three busy courthouses will create delays and inconvenience for everyone, particularly residents from outside the City of Fresno. But he pointed out that there are ways to reduce trips to the court. Persons may pay traffic tickets on line and contest traffic citations via a written Trial by Declaration. This process is outlined on the court's website, [www.fresnosuperiorcourt.org](http://www.fresnosuperiorcourt.org), which also provides access to court forms and time-saving information in English and Spanish. A calendaring process usually allows court users to schedule court appearances when they plan to be in Fresno. If they cannot, the Court Call service provides the opportunity to attend hearings by phone. Hoff added that technology offers other promising prospects to enhance services in the future. "The court pledges to continue exploring ways to use technology to bridge distances and help court users resolve their cases as conveniently and quickly as possible," he said.

The branch courts are casualties of the latest round of state budget cuts to the judicial branch announced mid-May. The Fresno Superior Court, which is part of a statewide judicial system and not funded by the County of Fresno, must absorb \$26.6 million in

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direct cuts and unfunded costs in the 2012-13 fiscal year that starts on July 1. Consolidating operations from the branch courts into downtown Fresno will save the court more than \$479,000 annually in facility, equipment, supplies, mileage, and other costs. It will also save more than \$400,000 in state facility funding and allow for the redistribution of \$1 million in security funds.

Despite these consolidations and other cost-cutting measures, the court will still face a \$5.4 million shortfall in the new fiscal year. Court Executive Officer Tamara Beard attributed much of this deficit to the state's decision to take reserve funds from all courts in California on June 30 and to prohibit them from carrying over fund balances from one year to the next. Anticipating budget reductions several years ago, the Fresno Superior Court purposely built a \$12 million reserve by cutting supplies, contracted services, and personnel costs. The court also generated additional revenue by using new technology to expand fine-collection efforts. The court planned to use these savings to maintain operations in light of the previous and anticipated state budget cuts. The state's intent to take the financial reserves and prohibit courts from carrying fund balances between years derailed those plans.

"As we have communicated to state officials, this is a poor business practice that discourages stewardship of public funds, saving for a rainy day, and long-term project planning," Beard said. She added that the reserves the Fresno Superior Court worked hard to build should be used to minimize the impact of California's financial crisis on Fresno County residents.

Assistant Presiding Judge Gary Orozco also concentrated on the impact of court consolidations on people noting that with so much focus on money, it is easy to lose sight that the justice system affects lives. From abuse victims of all ages seeking protection to businesses involved in large and small lawsuits, the court offers them a fair, impartial and peaceful way to resolve their problems. He added, "Despite the state's budget meltdown, the Fresno Superior Court pledges to continue finding and communicating the best ways of serving all Fresno County residents."

For more information on the branch court consolidations and submitting public comments to the Fresno Superior Court or state officials, visit [www.fresnosuperiorcourt.org](http://www.fresnosuperiorcourt.org).

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