

June 9, 2017

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RE: Bailiff Budget for Santa Barbara County Superior Court, Civil Departments

Dear Supervisors Hartman, Williams, Wolf, Adam, Lavagnino, Sheriff Brown, and Undersheriff Melekian:

We are writing this letter in anticipation of the County budget hearings scheduled to commence Monday, June 12, 2017. The purpose of this letter is to urge the Supervisors and Sheriff to restore the funds to the proposed 5% budget cut that would have reduced the presence of bailiffs in the civil courtrooms.

Civil courtrooms hear cases that are emotionally charged, with people under tremendous stress. In family law and probate/ trust litigation in particular, the cases bring together people who are angry, emotionally wounded, prone to lash out, and can even become violent. The high profile cases of attorneys killed or assaulted in courtrooms or court parking lots are not always criminal law attorneys – but instead family law or probate attorneys. One of the most notable incidents involved Jerry Curry, a Van Nuys attorney, who was shot multiple times on live TV at point blank range over a dispute in a probate case.

Closer to home, family law cases make up about 80% of the civil court calendar. Many of the litigants in family law cases represent themselves, which means they do not have an attorney by their sides keeping them calm or insisting on proper behavior. Without bailiffs, this would subject the judges, court staff, and members of the community to angry and potentially volatile litigants.

The undersigned have personally witnessed bailiffs restore peace and safety to the courtroom when litigants became angry and combative. More to the point, the mere presence of bailiffs also keep litigants on better behavior. Sometimes a stern look and admonishment are enough to encourage a litigant to control themselves and calm the situation.


As you all know, the County, its Board of Supervisors, and its Sheriff are morally and legally responsible for the safety of court staff, judges, and community members utilizing the court system. They cannot be left unprotected.

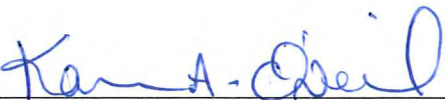
In summary, the safety of the community, judges, and all the justice partners are in your hands. We respectfully request restoration of the funds for this fiscal year to ensure bailiffs are in all courtrooms, including the civil courtrooms. Likewise, we request that the Board of Supervisors appoints a task force with the Sheriff, civil practitioners, court administration and other justice partners to better address the situation regarding court security rather than cut bailiffs from courtrooms.

Sincerely,

Northern Santa Barbara County Bar Association

Santa Barbara County Bench and Bar Committee

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