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*“The core of democracy is the ability to have disputes civilly resolved in a court of law.”*  
– Paul Kiesel, co-chair, Open Courts Coalition

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### **Justice Delayed is Justice Denied**

The Superior Court system’s civil courts handle tens of thousands of cases a year. The vast, sprawling system includes breach of contract, personal injury, and property damage, as well as family and housing law.

Facing \$350 million in cuts from the Legislature’s budget, California’s court systems have dwindling options. A memo circulated among Los Angeles judicial officers and staff suggests layoffs of 600 employees within a year.

### **A functioning system requires the pressure of a speedy trial**

Wealthy defendants can afford to wait. The people can’t. “You have foreclosure scams with fraudulent loan modifications,” says Hernan Vera, CEO of Public Counsel. “A case is going so slow. You can’t get pressure or additional hearings. Defendants only take cases seriously when there’s pressure to settle. So you can’t get mediation, you can’t get the attention of the title insurer or the attention of the bank. And until you do, you’re out of money and living at a relative’s house.”

### **The most vulnerable feel the pain**

- **Children hurt first.** The guardianship system, which protects children whose parents cannot take care of them, has been backed up by weeks. A grandparent who needs to act on a child’s health care or educational issues can already face up to a six-week delay.
- **Bruised once by the economy, twice by the courts.** Unable to afford counsel, many try to represent themselves. Only strong court services can help them navigate this process, but these are the same services that are up against the chopping block. “We’ve been trying to provide services to tenants for the more than 75,000 evictions in Los Angeles County, 20,000 in Stanley Mosk courthouse,” says Vera. “People are under-represented against their landlords. Additional legal services are needed to meet that need to low-income tenants.”

### **The civil system guards the border between justice and violence**

- **Pay now or pay later.** If there’s no access to the courts, people will take matters into their own hands. “You face the possibility that people will resort to ‘self-help,’” says Paul Kiesel. “They will take their children and leave. Landlords will physically remove tenants.”
- **The effects are already being felt.** According to the Wall Street Journal, the system is already reeling. “In Los Angeles County Superior Court... it now takes eight months to fight a traffic ticket, up from three months a few years ago.... In San Diego, child-custody matters that once took about a month to finalize now take a full year. In Sacramento, lines for civil services are so long that people bring lawn chairs.” “California has already been cut to the bone,” said an analyst with the National Center for State Courts.