



“When you talk about cutting criminal courts, you’re talking about cutting bone. Not trimming fat. Cutting bone.”
– Hyatt Seligman, President, Association of Deputy District Attorneys

No More Harmful Cuts

The Superior Court system’s criminal courts handle tens of thousands of cases a year. Criminal cases range from misdemeanors to felonies such as financial fraud to violent crimes such as domestic violence, rape and murder.

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.

Court layoffs mean unsafe communities

- **Backed-up courts make life easier for criminals.** “About 93-94% of all cases settle,” says ADDA president Seligman. “When you reduce the ability to have a trial, settlements are less likely, because there isn’t the pressure of a trial there to protect the public.”
- **Inadequate staffing leads to lethal errors.** Early release of inmates, which already has accelerated due to state budget cuts, will increase even more as criminal court cases and trials are delayed. To preview a slashed court system, look at the Department of Corrections and Parole, where the need to review far more cases than staff capacity allowed resulted in the early release of 450 prisoners who “carry a high risk of violence.” Similar errors resulted in the parole of a San Diego County child molester who went on to rape and kill two teenage girls.
- **Realignment will compound the problem.** Cuts to a steady system would be bad enough. But these cuts are coming as realignment transfers responsibility for parolees into the Superior Court system, taxing the local system with more than 86,000 additional hearings a year. Look forward to more early releases of more dangerous prisoners.

There’s no safe way to cut

- **Justice for some?** Even concentrating on violent felonies leaves many at risk. “Every felony is a major crime where someone has deliberately and substantially done harm to someone else,” argues Seligman. “Non-violent crimes can be devastating. Someone’s ruined someone financially, like Bernie Madoff, how many families are destroyed?”
- **Constitutional guarantees may provoke dismissals.** To guarantee the right to a speedy trial, minor violators may be dismissed despite strong cases. As one judge put it, “even what are considered minor charges can be very serious in terms of public safety. Drunk driving, for example.”

“These budget cuts are the most dangerous thing I’ve ever heard of.”
– LaWanda Hawkins, President, Justice for Murdered Children
