

### TRIAL COURT BUDGET WOES

In the wake of current-year budget reductions, and with even deeper cuts on the horizon, trial courts around the state are taking steps to reign in expenditures and modify services.

The Los Angeles Superior Court has announced plans to close its courthouses for a total of eight days between now and the end of the current fiscal year, June 30. The plan would include unpaid furloughs for court employees.

In San Francisco, the Superior Court has an ongoing hiring freeze and is hoping to avoid what may well be unavoidable – shortened business hours on certain days.

Scenarios similar to those in Los Angeles and San Francisco are beginning to come into view all around the state as court administrators struggle with budget reductions that were not anticipated just a few short months ago. Most administrators had made adequate adjustments to address cutbacks that came last July with passage of the 2002-03 state budget, but neither contemplated nor prepared for the significant mid-year reductions that were proposed by Governor Davis and approved by the Legislature.

The provision of court services could take a dramatic step backwards during the remainder of the current fiscal year and throughout the upcoming budget year. The extent of service cutbacks and hours of operation likely will vary from county to county, and maybe even court to court. However, it is all but inevitable that various operational restraints will be put into place to address the budget shortfall.

### AROUND THE CAPITOL

- News stories in the [L.A. Times](#) and other papers have focused on Assembly Speaker [Herb Wesson](#) (D-Los Angeles) placing several former legislators and “political allies” on the Assembly’s payroll to give the Speaker advice on various issues including education, the state budget, the agricultural industry, and horse racing. The contracts range from \$5,000 to \$8,470 per month. The contracts have elicited numerous questions and comments from members of both parties in the Assembly and the Senate, legislative staff, lobbyists, and the media.

- Governor Davis has ordered agency and department heads to “prepare a reduction plan and associated layoff plan that would reduce their personal services budgets by at least 10 percent....” The plans are supposed to be completed by April 22, and submitted to the Governor’s Department of Finance and Department of Personnel Administration.

### MORE §17200 DEVELOPMENTS

This week saw several developments, legislative and otherwise, relating to the state’s Unfair Competition Law (B&P Code §17200 *et seq.*).

Last Friday (March 31), Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Carl West threw out (without prejudice) a lawsuit brought by one of those firms, the Trevor Law Group, against thousands of Southern California automotive-repair shops. The judge also ordered the Beverly Hills firm, which is under investigation by the State Bar and has been sued by the Attorney General for its activities, to pay \$500,000 in attorney fees and costs to their opponents (Consumer Enforcement Watch Corp. v. Porter Automotive, BC281693).

On Wednesday (April 2), State Bar Court Judge Richard Honn postponed from April 7 until April 17 the hearing on the Bar’s [petition](#) to immediately suspend the attorneys of the Trevor Law Group from the practice of law. The delay was to give the Trevor Law Group attorneys time to respond to roughly 1,500 pages of rebuttal declarations and documents filed by the Bar’s Office of Chief Trial Counsel.

And on Thursday (April 3), Assm. [Lou Correa](#) (D-Santa Ana) substantially amended his [AB 69](#), one of the 11 bills introduced this year in response to the flood of alleged abusive lawsuits filed under the UCL. Most of the changes contained in the former “spot” bill came out of the 1996 study and [recommendation](#) by the California Law Revision Commission that were included in the initial version of [SB 143](#) (Kopp) of 1997, and were defeated due to opposition by both consumer and business interests.

Other key bills to watch are [AB 95](#) by the Assembly Judiciary Committee, chaired by Assm. [Ellen Corbett](#) (D-San Leandro) and [SB 122](#) by Senate Judiciary Committee Chair [Martha Escutia](#) (D-Montebello). Both bills are currently vehicles for more substantive provisions to be added.