

STATE BAR FEE BILL APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY BY COMMITTEE

[SB 1490](#), the State Bar's Fee Bill, was approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee Tuesday, May 4, on a unanimous vote of 5-0, with two members absent. The bill now goes to the Senate floor.

The measure, which would continue the Bar's authority to assess fees of the state's attorney's for 2005, is authored by the five Democratic members of the Judiciary Committee, and was presented by committee chair Sen. [Martha Escutia](#) (D-Whittier). Among the 'Aye' votes was committee Vice-Chair Sen. [Bill Morrow](#) (R-Oceanside), a long-time Bar critic.

GOVERNOR ANNOUNCES HIGHER SPENDING FOR COURTS

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger announced Friday that state support for trial courts in 2004-05 will increase \$150 million over the amount contained in his original budget, as part of the May budgetary revision. The May revision changes are based on funding agreements reached between executive and judicial branch leaders.

News accounts of the event say that in exchange for the extra money, judges have agreed to support legislation that would give the state authority over future labor contracts of court workers, though the exact nature of such an agreement is uncertain.

Chief Justice Ronald George issued a press release praising the Governor for exercising "strong leadership and sensitivity in protecting the judiciary's constitutional role as a co-equal branch of government." George further thanked the Governor for "the personal actions he has taken to protect the public's right to have necessary access to their courts to ensure public safety, to provide for the protection of children, to promote social stability in our communities, and to ensure a stable business environment for growth."

The Chief Justice also noted that the Governor had proposed structural reforms to promote the goals of fiscal accountability and cost efficiency— "goals that the judicial branch supports" — and pledged on behalf of the Judicial Council to "carefully consider and cooperates fully with the Governor, the Legislature, and other interested parties in moving forward with solutions that achieve savings and promote fiscal stability in the future. "

The proposed funding agreement must be approved by the Legislature as part of the budget process, and any increase in administration oversight over court contracts would require separate, additional legislation.

COUNTY LAW LIBRARIES

The Task Force on County Law Libraries last Friday held its second scheduled meeting via a telephone conference call. The task force was created last year with the passage of [AB 1095](#) ([Corbett](#)) and is charged with developing a plan to address funding problems associated with the libraries' facilities and operations.

The task force is comprised of nine members, three each appointed by the Judicial Council of California, the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), and the Council of California County Law Librarians (CCCLL). The body is chaired by Sacramento Superior Court Judge Michael Garcia.

Although Friday's meeting had numerous items on the agenda, the entire meeting was dedicated to a discussion of the proposed implementation of a statewide uniform civil filing fee. The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) is in the process of developing a model and rationale for such fee.

The issue of a uniform filing fee is of concern to counties and county law libraries because the libraries have no uniform fee under current law. Law library fees are an "add on" to civil filing fees. Law libraries may increase their fees if the county's board of supervisors adopts a resolution to that effect. Under the proposed uniform filing fee the boards of supervisors would lose their authority to alter law library fees.

The uniform filing fee proposal is on a fast track due to budgetary considerations regarding the state's trial courts. Specifically, the uniform filing fee is intended to enhance court revenues as well as establish equity amongst the courts related to the cost of doing business in the court. Complaints about the differences in filing fees between and among the courts are commonplace.

The AOC anticipates Judicial Council adoption of a uniform filing fee plan within the next few months. The plan will then be drafted into a bill (or bills) for consideration by the Legislature. If enacted, the new filing fee would go into effect on January 1, 2005.