

**PRESIDING JUDGE MARK R. FORCUM'S REPORT
TO
SAN MATEO COUNTY RESIDENTS**

October 19, 2003

Assistant Presiding Judge George A. Miram and I have worked hard this year to insure that the San Mateo County Superior Court provides the best possible level of service to the taxpayers of San Mateo County. Given massive budget cutbacks, we have had to be creative to do more with less and insure that critical court services are not jeopardized. To that end, I would like to summarize the programs we have implemented throughout the year.

I. JURORS

Without the participation of jurors who give their time to the court, we could not discharge our primary function, which is to provide fair and neutral adjudications of the wide variety of criminal and civil cases that come before us. Respecting your time and other personal and professional commitments, Judge Miram and I have made several significant changes in our jury system.

- Judge Miram or I meet with our staff every day to evaluate carefully how many jurors we will need for each pending trial. Because of this hands-on daily program, we estimate we have reduced the number of jurors we have summoned to the courthouse by forty percent, from the prior year.
- We have initiated a six-month juror continuance policy which also gives jurors the option of selecting the specific month they wish to serve. This change has been extremely well received by jurors given the many obligations you have.
- We have made a number of changes to reduce time jurors spend waiting in the jury assembly room and we have added phone lines so jurors can find out the information about juror standby status more quickly.
- We have provided wireless access to jurors in the jury assembly room so that laptop computers can be used. By adding this feature, prospective jurors can continue to work and access the Internet and their e-mail while waiting to be assigned to a courtroom.

II. PROVIDING SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC

Judge Miram and I believe that our chief administrative priority is to provide the best possible level of service to the taxpayers and citizens of San Mateo County. In this regard:

- We opened a Family Law Self Help Center at the Hall of Justice & Records in October 2003, to help litigants with the difficult issues they face in Family Law Court.
- We are currently planning to add a second self help center on the first floor of the Hall of Justice & Records, which will help litigants with family law, guardianship, eviction, temporary restraining order and name change issues.

- We reorganized our court Website at www.sanmateocourt.org to have services integrated onto an "Online Help Center" so citizens needing help with family law, evictions, small claims and traffic matters could more easily find material on our court Website.
- We have expanded our EZLegal form system to include landlord-tenant issues. In April 2004, guardianships will also be on our "Online Help Center".
- We initiated a new program so one can pay a traffic ticket, sign up for traffic school or request a continuance over the Internet, so you can avoid long lines and lengthy traffic court calendars.

III. CHANGES IN FAMILY LAW AND PROBATE

Effective January 1, 2004, Judge Miram and I have directed that Family Law calendars be reorganized so that cases remain with the same judge who will actively manage those cases. This in turn, reduces the possibility of inconsistent rulings and helps promote settlement at an earlier stage.

In Probate, Judge Miram and I believe our court should dedicate significantly more resources in this important area. As our population ages, we sadly see an increase in court cases involving conservatorships and elder abuse. To meet these needs, effective January 1, 2004, one judge will dedicate most of their judicial day to hearing probate cases.

IV. CALENDAR MANAGEMENT

Judge Miram and I have worked hard to rebalance the calendars. At the suggestion of Supervising Judge Robert D. Foiles, we have added a Thursday trial calendar in South San Francisco to reduce the backlog of misdemeanor criminal cases. Through hands-on, active daily management of the trial calendar, San Mateo County is now current on all criminal and civil cases. We have also significantly reduced the time litigants have previously had to wait for hearing family law cases.

V. COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Assistant Presiding Judge George A. Miram oversees our community outreach efforts. We are very proud of our unique COURT IN THE SCHOOL DAY, where judges go to our high schools and teach government classes about the court system. This year Judge Miram and I, Judge Foiles, Judge Runde and Judge Weiner went to five of the six San Mateo Union High School district campuses and taught about the judicial system using a case model developed with the input and assistance from high schools students. The program is based on an actual case that raises issues about sentencing, victim impact statements and evidentiary issues. I am happy to report that the program received a tremendous response from school administrators, teacher and students. Based on the success of the program we are now working to enhance the program by having high school students come to court to observe actual court cases and meet with judges in the courthouse to discuss the court system.

CONCLUSION

On behalf of all the judges of the San Mateo County Superior Court, I would like to sincerely thank you for your interest and participation in our court system. If you have any comments about how we can improve our service to you, please feel free to

click onto our Webmaster link, who will forward your suggestions to either Assistant Presiding Judge George A. Miram or myself. Thank you again for your help.

Presiding Judge **Mark R. Forcum.**