



NEWS

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New Online Legal Services Launched Today for Low-Income Californians

Leaders of Bench, Bar, and Legal Services Groups Celebrate New Online Services at Statewide Stakeholders Meeting

San Francisco, August 27, 2004—Leaders of the bench, bar, and statewide legal services groups will gather here today to celebrate the launch of new Internet services for the millions of Californians who cannot afford an attorney and who need help navigating the state and federal court systems.

Chief Justice Ronald M. George and State Bar President Anthony Capozzi will be the key speakers at a special event to showcase these services at 12 noon at the Judicial Council Conference Center, Redwood Room, Third Floor, 455 Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco. Hakhamanesh Mortezaie, Executive Director of the Los Angeles Center for Law and Justice, will open and close the event.

A new Web site, www.LawHelpCA.org will be officially launched by the Public Interest Clearinghouse at that time. The new site, which has been tested with legal groups statewide for the past 10 months, features a comprehensive collection of substantive legal information on important civil issues and provides referrals to legal assistance in all 58 California counties. Unique in California, the site offers the public help in federal law, such as immigration, bankruptcy, disability, and civil rights and also has special features for seniors and Native Americans.

“The need for accurate, easy-to-use information about our legal system and the courts has never been greater,” Chief Justice George stated. “The Web sites that we celebrate today further public understanding of our system of justice and offer practical tools for obtaining low-cost or free legal counsel. They also provide a model for cooperation between the bench and bar to improve access to justice for all Californians.”

The meeting also will celebrate the third anniversary of the California Courts Self-Help Center, www.courtinfo.ca.gov/selfhelp, which now receives more than 3 million hits a month. Launched by the Judicial Council in 2001, this successful self-help site has added new consumer services. These include new software to help the public easily fill in small claims and other court forms, video tips how to serve papers and appear in court, and a program to help determine the proper county in which to file a lawsuit.

A recent study by the California Commission on Access to Justice found that more than 70 percent of low-income Californians are without legal help, and that figure is even greater in rural areas and immigrant communities.

Together, both Web sites will give Californians greater access to legal services and will help demystify the often complex federal and state court systems. The sites are designed to complement each other by providing a full range of online legal services in both federal and state law.

The event is part of a statewide stakeholders meeting of legal services groups called “Connecting the Dots,” to be held from 10 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. in the Milton M. Marks Conference Center at the Hiram W. Johnson State Office Building, Lower Level, 455 Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco.

Sponsors are the State Bar of California, the Administrative Office of the Courts, the Public Interest Clearinghouse, and other legal services groups.

The honorary planning committee includes a collaboration of government leaders and prominent members of the legal community, including State Controller Steve Westly; Senate President pro Tempore John L. Burton; Senator Minority Leader Dick Ackerman; Senator Martha Escutia, chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee; Senator Liz Figueroa; Assembly Member Wilma Chan; and San Francisco attorneys Howard F. Fine, Richard W. Odgers, and Thomas F. Smegal.

This news release is issued jointly by the Judicial Council of California, the policymaking body for the state courts, and the State Bar of California, the official state body responsible for licensing California lawyers and regulating attorney conduct.

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