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Santa Clara's New Courthouse Approved in State's Last Minute Budget Negotiations

Local coalition credited for project's resuscitation; ground breaking expected in 2013

SAN JOSE, Calif. (July 16, 2012): after more than ten years of planning and development, the Superior Court of California, County of Santa Clara (Court) has passed a major milestone in its pursuit of creating a new, state-of-the-art courthouse that has been designed to support a collaborative justice approach for Santa Clara County residents.

"This is truly a win for all Santa Clara County residents," said Presiding Judge Richard J. Loftus, Jr. "Beyond considerable cost savings, improving services and increasing operational efficiencies, we firmly believe that this new center will create an environment that will better support and substantially increase access for our court users."

A critical milestone for the project was inclusion in the state budget, allowing the project to proceed to construction in 2013. Despite the ultimate cost savings and benefit to the community, the Family Justice Center's (FJC) fate was grim in mid-May as legislators in Sacramento wrestled with the state's budgetary shortfall. Without inclusion in the FY2012-13 budget, a delay would have occurred, putting the project into serious doubt because of the state's continuing fiscal crisis.

Spearheaded by Presiding Judge Richard J. Loftus, Jr. and Assemblymember Jim Beall, a coalition of elected officials and community leaders convinced lawmakers of the overwhelming benefit in both economic and social terms for the Court, State and Santa Clara County residents.

The coalition was comprised of members of the Santa Clara Family Justice Center Project Advisory Group and other local leaders, including Senators Elaine Alquist, Ellen Corbett and Joe Simitian; Assemblymembers Luis Alejo, Jim Beall, Nora Campos, Paul Fong, Richard Gordon, Jerry Hill, Bill Monning and Bob Wieckowski; Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors David Cortese, Liz Kniss, George Shirakawa, Mike Wasserman and Ken Yeager, as well as County Executive Jeffrey Smith; San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed; San Jose District 3 City Councilmember Sam Liccardo; Santa Clara County Bar Association's Chris Burdick and Mindy Morton; San Jose Chamber of Commerce's Erik Schoennauer; Santa

Clara & San Benito Counties Building & Construction Trades Council's Neil Struthers; and the project contractor Hensel Phelps Construction Co.'s Jon Ball.

"If it wasn't for the incredible leadership and quick action of our Project Advisory Group being led by Assemblymember Beall and support from the Administrative Office of the Courts, the Family Justice Center might very well have been put on the shelf for a very long time," said Presiding Judge Loftus. "This is a great day where we can celebrate a smart fiscal decision that will bring jobs to our community, improve downtown and ultimately better serve our residents – specifically, the most vulnerable and deserving, our children."

ABOUT THE FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER

Santa Clara's new FJC will replace six leased facilities in the San Jose area and is expected to save taxpayers an estimated \$2-3 million each year by eliminating duplicative services and lease expenses. The new facility will consolidate family law functions into a single, 234,000 square foot building, with 20 new courtrooms that will facilitate child support, family, juvenile dependency and drug and mental health courts, as well as the Court's administrative services. Totalling approximately \$208 million to construct, the FJC is expected to provide 1,500 craft jobs and several thousand construction-related positions. Downtown San Jose will also see a significant economic boost that will accompany this construction project.

The cases the new Family Justice Center will service are highly emotional and often directly impact the lives of children and families. The FJC has been designed to help mitigate the tremendous and unavoidable stress put on children and their families by consolidating many services within the same building and creating a welcoming, family-friendly environment. The center separates types of cases by floor, has room for collaborative justice services and provides safety for judges, staff and law enforcement through separated circulation, which does not exist in any of the multiple facilities being consolidated.

Housed within one building, justice partners will be better able to collaborate and offer more efficient and effective services to the clients of the FJC. New features, such as an expanded self-help center and children's waiting area, and continuation of the Court's already unique collaborative efforts and specialty courts, such as family drug treatment court, veteran's treatment court and integrated services for child support hearings, will make FJC the preeminent justice facility of its kind nationally.

The site for the new facility is located in downtown San Jose and is currently the surface parking lot located across the street from existing downtown courthouses. The site, which was donated by the County, is bordered by North Market Street, North 1st Street, Devine Street and St. James Street. Groundbreaking for construction is planned to begin in July 2013, with construction to be completed in July 2015. A 50 year agreement with the City of San Jose has been negotiated to offset the loss of parking from the current site by leveraging an underutilized, city-owned parking structure. For more information about the Family Justice Center, visit: <http://www.courts.ca.gov/facilities-santaclara.htm>

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