



SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA  
COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**December 18, 2023**

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## **Court Restructures the Probate Division to Improve Services to the Public**

Sacramento, CA – Sacramento Superior Court has reduced pandemic-related case backlogs following a comprehensive restructuring of its Probate Division.

“The changes implemented took into consideration valuable feedback from our judicial partners,” said Presiding Judge Michael G. Bowman. “The goal was to address the need for efficiency and improve service to the public.”

At issue: delays in the setting of hearings and trials, turnover of judicial officers, challenges with the timing of notices, and need for improved communications.

In response to these concerns, Judge Bowman approved the following measures in November 2022:

- **Assignment of an Additional Judicial Officer to Probate Court:** A commissioner position was approved and Commissioner Heath Langle hired in August 2023 to bolster the court’s capacity to handle probate proceedings.
- **Additional Staff Approved and Hired:** The court hired five Probate File Examiners and additional support staff to process an increased number of proceedings. This allowed a new protocol and deficiency notes are posted 10-12 days before hearings and again five days before hearings which improves preparation for court proceedings and reduces the need for case continuances.

In mid-September 2023, the court started scheduling an additional 25 hearings per day, Tuesday through Thursday, and added a half day for trials. This change has allowed the court to reduce delays in setting hearing dates from 160 days in November 2022 to 75

days in November 2023. The target is to set hearings 60 days out starting February 1, 2024.

Additional improvements planned for the Probate Division in the second quarter of 2024 include:

- **New Communication Protocol:** A protocol to allow parties and attorneys to communicate with Probate File Examiners about deficiency notes will be implemented.
- **New Continuance Policy:** The court will introduce a new continuance policy for estate and trust cases to streamline the process, enabling parties and attorneys to request continuances if deficiencies cannot be resolved before hearings.
- **Tentative Ruling System:** A new tentative ruling system for some proceedings will be introduced to expedite the decision-making process.

“These measures mark a significant step towards a more efficient and responsive Probate Division and demonstrates a commitment to better serving the public,” Bowman said.

Probate Court supervises trust, decedent estate, conservatorship and guardianship proceedings. The court also reviews the conduct of fiduciaries and those who have been charged with the responsibility for the care and custody of the person and/or estate of minors and adults.