



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BUDGET CUTS WILL CLOSE STATE COURTS ON FRIDAYS

Oregon Chief Justice Paul J. De Muniz today announced that all state courts will be closed on Fridays beginning on Friday, March 13, 2009. The closures will remain in effect at least through June 30, 2009. Future closures depend on budget decisions the legislature will make later in its session.

"These budget reductions are a huge blow to Oregon's courts and the people we serve and will affect public safety, the welfare of children, and everyone who needs their day in court," Chief Justice De Muniz said. "Oregonians will have the unfortunate opportunity to learn how justice delayed means justice denied."

The closures are made necessary by an \$11.1 million General Fund reduction to the Oregon Judicial Department's 2007-09 budget. That cut was approved today by the legislative Ways and Means Committee. If approved by the full legislature and signed by the governor, expected next week, the cuts will require all department employees to take 16 unpaid furlough days before the end of June. Chief Justice De Muniz said he will issue a closure order when the governor signs the budget reduction into law.

The Friday closures will affect over 12,000 trials and other proceedings already scheduled through June. The closures threaten the courts' ability to meet statutory deadlines in all cases and cause lengthy delays in resolving landlord/tenant, divorce, child support, child custody, and many other civil cases. More than 50,000 new cases are filed in Oregon circuit courts each month. Of particular concern is the continuing ability of courts to meet federal deadlines to review and handle child welfare cases to ensure their proper placement.

More drastic reductions in court services were avoided when the legislature reduced proposed General Fund cuts to the court system from \$16.1 million to \$11.1 million.

The cuts remove about 28 percent of the department's remaining General Fund appropriation and take another \$6.7 million in Other Funds (money from fees and fines), including \$1.2 million in funds intended for enhanced courthouse security.

While saving the state about \$3 million in staff salaries and benefits, the furloughs will cost the state about \$5 million in reduced collections of court-imposed fees and fines in 2007-09. Restitution for crime victims and funds for other state and county services also will be reduced. Federal child welfare funds also might be affected if the courts cannot meet legal timelines to hear child welfare cases.

Further information on how this will affect the individual courts and calendars will be made available by these courts next week as they finish their plans.

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