

E-SJI News

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HOUSE AND SENATE PROVIDE FUNDING LEVELS FOR FY 2009



On June 19, 2008, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved the Commerce, Justice, Science (CJS) Bill (S 3182), which includes \$5.0 million for SJI in FY 2009; an increase of \$1.24 million over FY 2008. On June 25th the House Appropriations Committee approved the CJS Bill (bill number pending), providing \$4.1 million for SJI; an increase of \$340,000 over FY 2008. SJI greatly appreciates the House and Senate's continued support.

It is possible there will not be any action on SJI's final appropriation until after the next administration takes office. As in prior fiscal years when the spending bills were not complete prior to the beginning of the federal fiscal year (October 1), Congress passes Continuing Resolutions (CRs) funding the government until the final appropriation is approved. It is likely that SJI will be funded under a CR(s) for several months into FY 2009. While under a CR, SJI will make grant awards contingent upon final appropriations. For example, if a grant application is approved by the Board for the 1st Quarter of FY 2009, no grant funding may be drawn down for the project until SJI receives its appropriation. Potential applicants for the 1st Quarter are advised to request permission in advance to use cash match funds until SJI funding is available, so that the project is not delayed.

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LSC/SJI PARTNER GRANT INCLUDES TRAINING FOR LEGAL SERVICES PROVIDERS



LSC and SJI began a Partnership in FY 2006 to tighten the bonds between courts and legal aid providers. SJI provides additional funding for LSC to make awards for projects that have a court component in their Technology Initiative Grants (TIG) program. LSC and SJI work together to determine appropriate projects for joint funding.

A component of this Partner Grant included a two-day training workshop for grantees. The workshop provided training on creating plain English language court forms and instructions for self-represented litigants. Twenty-five people attended the first training session this past year from nineteen jurisdictions, the furthest being from Guam. Participants from both the courts and legal services providers attended the training, which was led by Maria Mindlin, Chief Executive Officer of the language consulting firm Transcend. Both LSC and SJI are considering providing additional training programs in the future. More information about the TIG program can be found by visiting the website: <http://tig.lsc.gov/>.



LSC/SJI-Sponsored Plain Language Workshop

UPDATES ON EFFORTS TO ADDRESS IMMIGRATION IN THE STATE COURTS

In May 2008, SJI finalized FY 2008 awards for the Strategic Initiatives Grants (SIG) program. This year, SJI is using the SIG Program to focus on the impact of immigration in the state courts. Four priorities will guide these efforts: 1) increased understanding and awareness about the impacts of immigration in the state courts; 2) development and testing of state and local approaches for addressing the impact of immigration in the state courts; 3) enhanced state and local capacity to improve court services affected by immigration; and 4) the establishment of effective partnerships for addressing the impact of immigration on court processes. Two grants were awarded; one to the Center for Public Policy Studies (CPPS); and another to support a collaborative effort between the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) and the National Judicial College (NJC).

One of the first steps is to identify the major challenges and opportunities state courts need to address the impact of immigration. To date there has been no systematic, comprehensive documentation of the issues. There is a substantial body of literature that discusses immigration issues in general, but not how those issues affect courts and court services. To address this gap, CPPS is now preparing a comprehensive inventory of where and how immigration issues are affecting the courts. This inventory will be used throughout the project as CPPS works with specific jurisdictions serving as pilot sites to prepare both lessons learned and suggested procedures and programs for the courts.

In addition to this inventory, CPPS will be working with the selected sites and NJC to develop a bench book to help judges address the practical implications of immigration. Among the issues to be included in this bench book are: bail decisions; decisions regarding eligibility for and conditions of probation; taking guilty pleas and the effect of guilty pleas on immigration status; and other intersections of federal and state laws.

As these projects move forward, SJI will continue to provide updates in future editions of the E-SJI News and on the SJI website.

NEW ONLINE COURSE AVAILABLE ON CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS FOR COURTS

The National Center for State Courts (NCSC) has recently released a self-paced online course that includes presentations by court professionals who are experts in emergency management preparedness – many as a result of facing their own emergencies. Some of course topics include: the COOP planning process, succession orders and delegation of authorities, alternate facilities, vital records and databases, and testing/training exercises. The course can be accessed using the following link: http://www.ncsconline.org/D_Research/coop/curriculum.html.

The course is designed to augment and reinforce the information provided in the COOP Planning Guide: http://www.ncsconline.org/D_Research/coop/.

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The State Justice Institute is a private, nonprofit corporation established by Federal law in 1984 to improve the quality of justice in state courts, and foster innovative, efficient solutions to common issues faced by all courts. SJI is governed by a Board of Directors appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate.



SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Next grant and scholarship application deadline: November 1, 2008 (1st QTR, FY 2009).
- The next Board meeting is September 19, 2008 (4th QTR, FY 2008).

ACCEPTABLE EXPENSES FOR SJI SCHOLARSHIPS

SJI's Scholarship program supports the training of State court judges and court managers. Scholarships are awarded to individuals to attend out-of-state, court-related educational programs within the United States or online court-related educational programs. A SJI scholarship may cover the costs of tuition, transportation to and from the educational program, and reasonable lodging (up to \$150 per night, including taxes), **up to a maximum total of \$1,500 per scholarship**. Transportation expenses include round-trip coach airfare or train fare. Funds to pay tuition, transportation, and lodging expenses in excess of \$1,500 and other costs of attending the program such as meals, materials, and transportation (including rental cars) at the site of the education program, must be obtained from other sources or be borne by the scholarship recipient.

In the past SJI has made scholarship awards based on the amount requested by the individual (and subsequently approved by the Board). For example, if the total cost to attend an education program was \$1,400, SJI would award this amount as opposed to the full \$1,500. This has led to some issues where the approved costs end up being higher once the judge or court manager has attended the class. The main reason why this happens is because at the time the individual is planning his or her training, the tuition, airfare, transportation, and lodging expenses are often estimated. However, once the actual costs are known, these estimates could be too low. By making all awards up to \$1,500 for approved costs, this will correct this problem and make it easier for individuals to receive appropriate reimbursement for their scholarship costs. Should the individual not need the full \$1,500, the remaining balance will be deobligated at the end of the scholarship award period. The deobligated funds will then be made available for future scholarship awards during the fiscal year.

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