



American Bar Association
News Release



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DELEGATIONS FROM 37 STATE-LEVEL JURISDICTIONS COMBINE FORCES TO PRESERVE JUSTICE SYSTEMS AS THE 'BUSINESS OF GOVERNMENT'

CHICAGO, April 16, 2009—State governments across the nation are eyeing tax hikes, budget cuts and reductions in service as the economic crisis spreads from the private to the public sector. State court system responses range from cutting hours of operation, reducing such services public defense or probation supervision and shifting from personnel to technology for functions like preserving a record of proceedings.

In a cooperative effort to leverage resources, talent and creativity among all branches of government to preserve justice systems, leaders from 34 states, two territories and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico will convene May 7-9 in Charlotte, N. C. The leaders are being called together by American Bar Association President H. Thomas Wells Jr. to a national summit titled "Justice Is the Business of Government: The Critical Role of Fair and Impartial State Courts."

The leaders will compare their own ideas to respond to budgetary stress with public reactions to such options as forgoing juries for trials, closing courthouses one or more days per week, hiking filing fees or simply leaving benches vacant when judges retire or die.

The national summit is sponsored by the ABA Commission on Fair and Impartial State Courts and the National Center for State Courts to foster inter branch cooperation among state officials to maintain justice systems as the foundation for fair government. The agenda features former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, former Georgia Gov. Roy E. Barnes, Speaker Joe Hackney of the North Carolina House of Representatives, David Adkins, executive director of the Council of State Governments, Susan K. Urahn, managing director of the Pew Center on the States, and a host of other leaders from around the country, all focusing on how the three branches of state government can work in tandem to address thorny policy issues.

Justice O'Connor and Chief Justice Margaret H. Marshall of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, NCSC chair, will keynote the summit.

In one session of the summit, leaders from five states will share strategies and tactics to promote cooperative approaches to addressing problems that engage all three branches of government, such as the foreclosure crisis, juvenile justice and mental health issues. Another session will detail how tensions among branches of state government affect fair and impartial courts. In a third, Prof. Pamela S. Karlan of Stanford Law School will contrast public expectations for team work and leadership among the three governmental branches with the views of state leaders participating in the summit. She will review responses to a public opinion poll examining the public's confidence in state and local governments to perform their jobs in areas such as prison overcrowding and caring for abused and neglected children, the public's preferences regarding control over court decisions and budgets, and the public's view of how courts should adjust to diminished resources.

Complete details on the summit and information about justice system funding issues in many states are available at <http://www.abavideonews.org/ABA2831/>.

With more than 413,000 members, the American Bar Association is the largest voluntary professional membership organization in the world. As the national voice of the legal profession, the ABA works to improve the administration of justice, promotes programs that assist lawyers and judges in their work, accredits law schools, provides continuing legal education, and works to build public understanding around the world of the importance of the rule of law.