

2020-2024 STRATEGIC PLAN



United States Bankruptcy Court
Central District of California



An aerial photograph of Long Beach Harbor. In the foreground, a white lighthouse with a red lantern room stands on a circular green lawn. A paved walkway circles the lawn. In the middle ground, a large white ferry is docked at a pier. The harbor is filled with smaller boats. In the background, a dense city skyline with various skyscrapers is visible under a clear sky.

“For all of its uncertainty, we cannot flee the future.”

—Barbara Jordan

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*“The best way to predict the future
is to create it.”*

—Abraham Lincoln



Photo: Downtown Los Angeles

Message from the Chief Judge

On behalf of my colleagues, it is my pleasure to present the Strategic Plan of the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Central District of California for 2020 through 2024. This Strategic Plan was approved by the Board of Judges on December 13, 2019 and is the product of an inclusive planning process in which judges, executive management, staff, attorneys, and others came together during the past eight months to craft a vision for the future of our court.

Our court is one of largest and busiest bankruptcy courts in the nation, with 37,911 filings for the 12-month period ending September 30, 2019. We have five divisions -- Los Angeles, Riverside, Santa Ana, San Fernando Valley, and Northern. Within our borders, we have a wonderfully diverse population and an amazing variety of large and small businesses. Our 20 active judges, recalled judges, and dedicated clerk's office and judicial staff serve a population of approximately 19.5 million people representing nearly 50 percent of the state's population. At least 24 languages are spoken in the Central District which covers seven counties and encompasses over 40,000 square miles. By including photographs of places in each of the five divisions served by the Court, we seek to share our pride in the district. The people and businesses we serve stretch north to Morro Bay, east to the Joshua Trees, south to Mission San Juan Capistrano, and west to the Pacific Ocean.

We are proud of the advances we have made under our previous Strategic Plan. This Plan will help implement new technologies and programs to make the Court more responsive and effective, enabling greater access to justice. Though we face difficult economic times ahead, we remain committed to providing excellent service, efficient operations, and thoughtful use of judicial resources. This Strategic Plan defines the mission and values of this Court. We will use the strategies and goals outlined here as a blueprint for our future, directing the commitment of our resources during the next five years as we strive to provide the best service in the administration of justice to residents of the Central District of California.


Honorable Maureen A. Tighe
Chief Judge

Message from the Clerk of Court

On behalf of the Clerk's Office, I am pleased to join with Chief Judge Maureen A. Tighe to present the Court's Strategic Plan for 2020 through 2024. The Strategic Plan affirms the importance of four fundamental issues upon which the Court will focus over the next five years to achieve specific and measurable results: enabling broad access to the Court; fair and effective court operations; the judiciary workforce of the future; and a flexible and responsive infrastructure. The Plan also includes seven core values that will serve to guide our actions and decision-making in meeting the Court's mission and vision. These values were the product of extended discussion among judges and staff and represent what is important to us to create the future we want to experience: respect, integrity, diversity, exceptional service, innovation, collaboration, and education.

The Clerk's Office strives to deliver exemplary customer service responsive to the needs of the Central District's diverse community and seeks to increase trust and confidence in the judicial system through the prudent management of public funds. Given the difficult economic times facing the Federal Judiciary, defining the key issues we face and implementing effective strategies to address them is now more critical than ever as we focus on increasing the Court's efficiency and conserving its very limited resources.

Specific goals and strategies outlined in the Strategic Plan include: enhancing procedures and forms that are clear and responsive to the needs of litigants; ensuring individuals and businesses know how to appropriately access bankruptcy resources; and developing, managing, and using the best technology to sustain and further effective operations. To hold ourselves accountable for the results the public has a right to expect, the Clerk's Office has developed a companion Action Plan that will be used to measure the Court's progress and report our Strategic Plan accomplishments each year.

On behalf of the talented and outstanding employees in the Clerk's Office, I want to thank all who so generously participated in the development of our Strategic Plan. We look forward to meeting the challenges ahead!


Kathleen J. Campbell
Clerk of Court

Mission, Vision, and Values

Our Mission

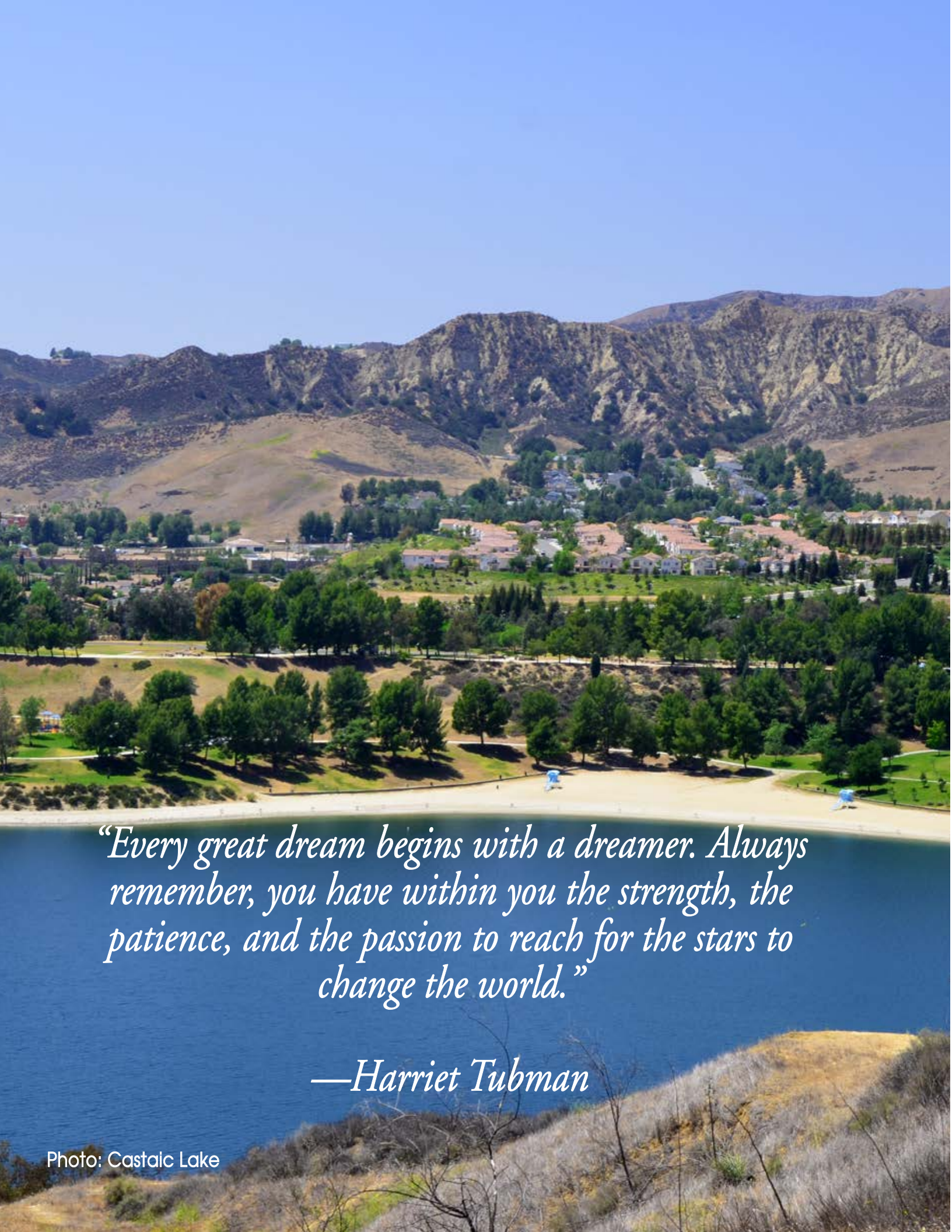
To serve the most populous and diverse judicial district in the country by providing bankruptcy relief, fair and impartial justice, and a prompt and efficient resolution of disputes.

Our Vision

The United States Bankruptcy Court for the Central District of California will be aligned with the public's needs and future trends and will be a model of exemplary service with expert, resourceful employees.

Our Values

- Respect
- Integrity
- Diversity
- Exceptional Service
- Innovation
- Collaboration
- Education



“Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.”

—Harriet Tubman

Summary of the Plan

This plan defines the strategic direction for the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Central District of California from 2020 through 2024. The Court will focus on the following four fundamental issues to achieve specific and measurable results:

Issue 1: Enabling Broad Access to the Court

Issue 2: Fair and Effective Court Operations

Issue 3: Judiciary Workforce of the Future

Issue 4: A Flexible and Responsive Infrastructure

“The keystone to justice is the belief that the legal system treats all fairly.”

—Janet Reno

Photo: The Japanese Garden in Van Nuys

Issue 1 - Enabling Broad Access to the Court

Issue Description. How can the Court assist individuals and businesses in need of bankruptcy relief or needing to respond to a bankruptcy filing? How can the Court provide individuals and businesses with proper access to the Court or alternative resources?

GOAL 1.1: OUTREACH FOR INDIVIDUALS

Ensure that individuals know how to appropriately access bankruptcy resources

Strategies:

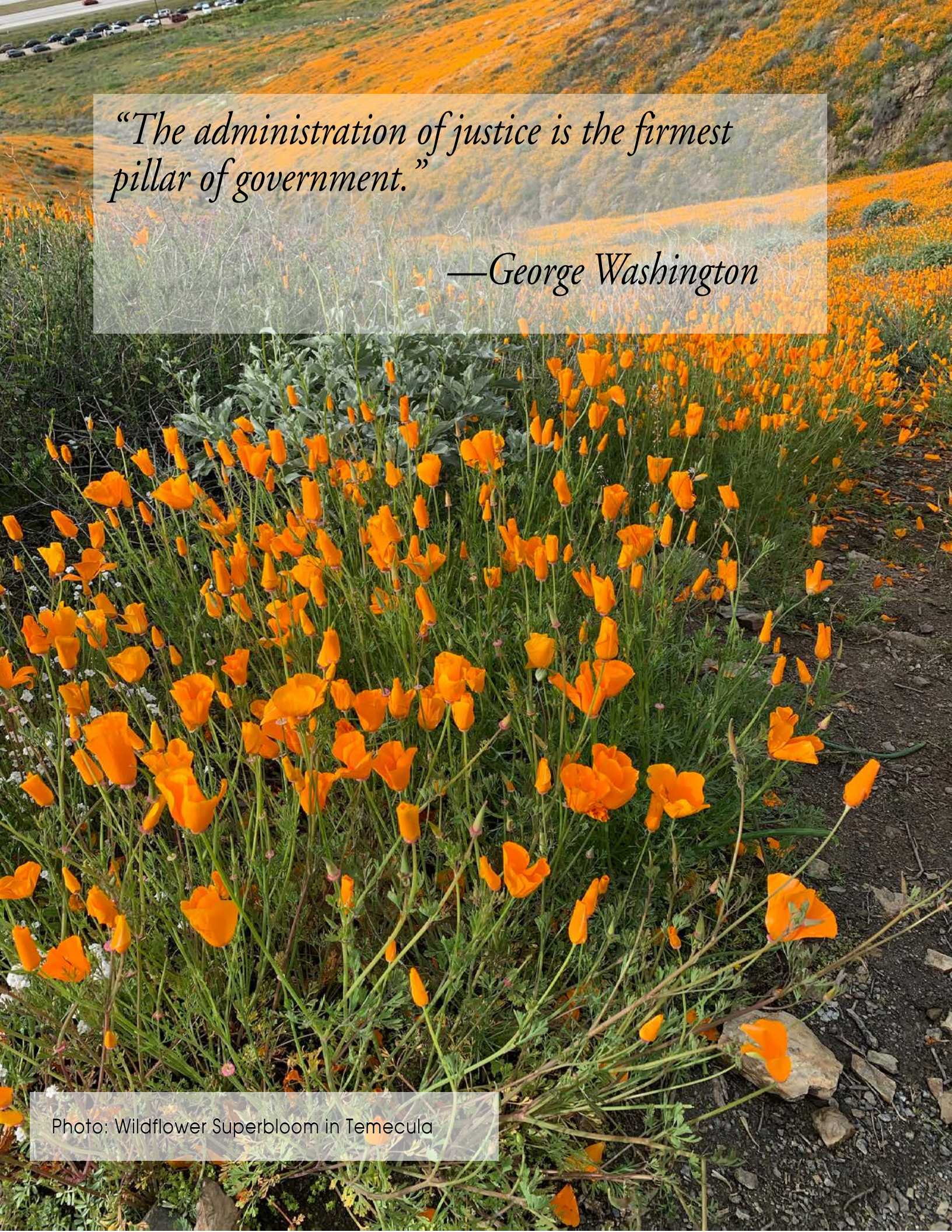
- Expand outreach and education about attorney referrals, self-help desks, website resources, and financial literacy, as well as unethical bankruptcy petition preparers
- Identify issues, conditions, and trends likely to have a significant impact on the Court
- Enhance and improve the Court's website for maximum effectiveness
- Increase outreach to underserved communities and partner with organizations such as educational institutions, charities, houses of worship, uniformed services, groups with potential vulnerable populations, and other governmental organizations
- Support and facilitate self-help centers and pro bono programs throughout the District

GOAL 1.2: OUTREACH FOR BUSINESSES

Ensure that businesses know how to appropriately access bankruptcy resources

Strategies:

- Have sufficient outreach and public education to ensure that businesses in financial distress are aware of bankruptcy laws, referral resources, and bankruptcy-related fraudulent schemes
- Investigate and identify barriers that prevent small businesses from accessing court resources
- Maintain and develop relationships with a diverse range of organizations, community groups, and bar associations
- Study the existing business bankruptcy procedures to see whether there are barriers to business access



“The administration of justice is the firmest pillar of government.”

—George Washington

Photo: Wildflower Superbloom in Temecula

Issue 2 - Fair and Effective Court Operations

Issue Description. How can the Court take into consideration the circumstances and needs of a wide variety of parties and professionals? How should the Court operate effectively so that cases are heard and ruled on quickly and easily? How can the Court increase the fairness and effectiveness of how parties and professionals interact with the Court?

GOAL 2.1: NON-DISCRIMINATION

Deliver justice that is impartial and fair, regardless of financial circumstances, English-proficiency, race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, pregnancy, religion, age, or disability

Strategies:

- Provide sufficient explanations for litigants to understand rulings
- Ensure that the Court's website has multi-functional navigational tools for all individuals
- Promote the education of judges and court personnel on issues of diversity, implicit bias, and cultural literacy
- Consider adverse impact on parties or professionals with limited financial resources when developing procedures
- Facilitate access to court proceedings for all individuals

GOAL 2.2: CLEAR AND UNDERSTANDABLE INFORMATION AND PROCEDURES

Enhance procedures and forms to be clear and responsive to the needs of litigants

Strategies:

- Simplify forms, rules, and other resources ("plain English")
- Draft critical forms and information in common languages spoken in the District
- Strive to limit variances and effectively communicate unique procedural requirements
- Develop mechanisms to improve proceedings involving non-English-speaking individuals and others with communication barriers, including the expanded use and funding of interpreter and translator tools and services
- Continue to develop and create a central repository of informational materials and media for court users



Photo: Grand Park Arthur J. Will Memorial Fountain in Los Angeles

- Provide the public with instructions that are easily understandable and readily available
- Expand the availability of automated court information and data to the public and staff
- Evaluate and utilize social media as appropriate

GOAL 2.3: INFORMED JUDGING

Ensure judges have the resources to make informed decisions

Strategies:

- Promote educational opportunities and access to the latest developments in the law and training for judges and staff
- Provide accurate and timely procedures and rules to judges and staff
- Ensure court procedures remain in compliance with relevant statutes, rules, and policies
- Make certain that court proceedings are recorded accurately and completely, and that high-quality transcripts and audio recordings are readily accessible
- Provide resources and training on strategies for effectively dealing with litigants who may have a mental health condition

GOAL 2.4: COST-EFFECTIVENESS

Provide and promote cost-effective ways to resolve disputes

Strategies:

- Support and encourage the use of alternative dispute resolution procedures
- Develop clear procedures for remote telephonic and video appearances that are dependable and effective
- Evaluate and implement systems to broaden self-help resources available via video
- Consider commuting challenges and their impact on litigants when implementing court procedures

GOAL 2.5: ASSESS AND ENHANCE CASE MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

Improve case management procedures as needed to increase satisfaction for all user groups

Strategies:

- Maximize system performance to allow timely access to process and review court documents
- Streamline and simplify case management policies, procedures, and practices
- Identify enhancements to calendaring and order upload programs to provide more efficient processes and additional management tools
- Review and enhance the use of and content provided through digital systems

GOAL 2.6: SELF-REPRESENTED ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

Ensure that self-represented litigants are provided with easier access to the Court through technology

Strategies:

- Improve website resources and access for self-represented parties
- Enhance functionality of electronic filing
- Encourage electronic filing where consistent with court rules

GOAL 2.7: NON-ATTORNEY SERVICES

Ensure assistance is cost-effective, appropriate, and professional when litigants use the assistance of non-attorneys

Strategies:

- Continue to monitor and work to eliminate abusive and fraudulent conduct by bankruptcy petition preparers
- Study new and emerging projects and research on effective and legal use of non-attorney assistance

GOAL 2.8: SYSTEMIC IMPROVEMENT

Review, design, and implement judicial best practices and partner with individuals, bar associations, educational institutions, or other organizations to share data and information to help improve the bankruptcy system as well as other related areas of law

Strategies:


- Continue to provide accurate and helpful case data and information
- Foster dialogue between bench, bar, and staff on best practices
- Identify and communicate issues on which data and information would be most helpful to judges, federal and state lawmakers, and organizations
- Continue to evaluate and expand alternative dispute resolution programs
- Evaluate and respond, when appropriate, to obstacles litigants may encounter when there are multiple venue choices

GOAL 2.9: RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Seek the resources necessary to operate effectively

Strategies:

- Manage the Court's budget effectively and request supplemental funding when necessary
- Offer intern and extern opportunities and pursue grant funding to provide the Court with resources for special projects
- Maintain a culture of responsible stewardship of all court resources
- Develop procedures and systems for contingencies including government shutdown, mega case filings, or sudden budgetary constraints



“When we listen and celebrate what is both common and different, we become wiser, more inclusive, and better as an organization.”

—Pat Wadors

Photo: Getty Villa in Pacific Palisades

Issue 3 - Judiciary Workforce of the Future

Issue Description. How can we assist judges and staff to respond to an ever-changing caseload? How can the Judiciary and workforce also reflect the community we serve? How can we pursue effective communication and collaboration in light of the size of the Court and its geographical complexity? How do we meet the need to develop new talent for the future?

GOAL 3.1: STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

Adhere to codes of professional conduct, ethical practices, and civility standards for judges, court personnel, the bar, and other professionals

Strategies:

- Maintain a workplace that fosters dignity, courtesy, patience, and respect
- Promote performance based on integrity, efficiency, helpfulness, and empathy
- Encourage the reporting of workplace misconduct and reduce barriers to reporting workplace misconduct by implementing an interactive Employment Dispute Resolution process

GOAL 3.2: RECRUITMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Attract and retain a highly-skilled and well-trained workforce

Strategies:

- Educate judges and court personnel on existing and emerging technologies
- Foster a culture of learning where judges, chambers, and Clerk's Office staff work to keep needed skills current
- Increase retention of high-performing employees by offering continual, meaningful work tailored toward both the individual's existing and potential skillsets
- Establish programs to become an employer of choice
- Recruit people who possess the education, skills, experience, commitment, and desire to serve the public
- Examine workforce demographics, assess future human capital needs, and maintain a current workforce succession plan
- Encourage judges to obtain feedback from the bankruptcy bar on judicial performance



Photo: Huntington Beach Pier

GOAL 3.3: EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Foster a culture that keeps employees committed to the Court's mission and engaged in the work that they perform

Strategies:

- Maintain a positive work environment that recognizes high achievement, satisfaction, and employee engagement
- Boost work performance and embrace change through continuous reinforcement of mutual trust, active participation, and connection to a shared purpose
- Expand ongoing opportunities for employees to provide regular feedback
- Incorporate employee engagement strategies that recognize and promote the importance of public service and each employee's role in the Judiciary
- Offer a variety of activities to work together as one team representing the organization
- Strengthen current employee and judicial involvement with the new-hire onboarding process



Photo: Santa Barbara Promenade and Lighthouse

GOAL 3.4: LINES OF COMMUNICATION

Facilitate clear communication within the Court

Strategies:

- Promote programs and activities that enhance communication among judges, chambers, and staff
- Implement initiatives to ensure that all divisions communicate and collaborate effectively
- Build on an organizational culture that encourages open communication, transparency, civility, and consideration of all perspectives

GOAL 3.5: DIVERSITY

Develop and maintain a judiciary that reflects the community the Court serves

Strategies:

- Foster diversity in the Court's workforce by maximizing efforts to attract and retain employees of differing backgrounds, foreign language capabilities, and experiences
- Provide outreach and information to potential judicial applicants to encourage highly-qualified individuals to apply for judicial openings
- Encourage law students and attorneys to enter the bankruptcy field to provide a diverse and qualified pool of applicants for future judgeship openings

GOAL 3.6: COLLABORATION

Maximize opportunities to work together to achieve the mission of the Court and enhance the Judiciary

Strategies:

- Pursue opportunities to share services within the Judiciary, including no cost and cost-reimbursable services
- Consider sharing positions within the Judiciary when a full-time position is not warranted or funds are limited
- Encourage collaborative work efforts through the adoption of project management principles, software, team building exercises, action learning teams, and other efforts
- Volunteer to serve on national, circuit, and other committees and working groups to ensure the Court has a voice on critical initiatives and programs
- Share the innovative uses of technologies which highlight the individual strengths and talents of the Court

GOAL 3.7: FLEXIBILITY

Be a flexible organization able to respond to changing demands

Strategies:

- Prepare employees to perform one another's jobs where feasible and appropriate to ensure uninterrupted coverage
- Increase flexibility to share work among staff in different divisions
- Enhance video hearing capability so that judges can easily hear cases in any division
- Conduct ongoing reviews of Clerk's Office organizational structure to ensure effective management practices

“Technology gives us facilities that lessen the barriers of time and distance ...”

—Emily Greene Balch



Photo: Venice Beach Canals

Issue 4 - A Flexible and Responsive Infrastructure

Issue Description. How does the Court implement new technology to achieve administrative efficiencies and improve public access? How do court facilities ensure continuity and remain safe and functional to accommodate future needs?

GOAL 4.1: TECHNOLOGY

Develop, manage, and use the best technology to sustain and further efficient and effective court operations

Strategies

- Maintain an IT project review process to determine project feasibility and prioritization
- Review the IT Strategic Plan to ensure alignment with the vision, goals, and initiatives of the Court and compliance with the *Guide to Judiciary Policy*
- Enhance and support the IT infrastructure to provide a consistent, reliable, accessible and secure technology experience
- Assess needs and implement improvements in case management systems
- Participate in national committees and programs to further the development and advancement of court technology and implementation of best practices
- Evaluate new and existing national applications on a frequent basis
- Institute IT project management and software development methodologies

GOAL 4.2: COURTROOM TECHNOLOGY

Develop a district-wide plan for courtrooms to support trends and advancements in technology

Strategies

- Examine courtroom technology guidelines and requirements
- Upgrade courtrooms to maximize use of modern courtroom technology and video appearance capability
- Implement procedures for the electronic submission of exhibits for evidentiary hearings
- Keep current on emerging technologies used by courts and public and private sector organizations



Photo: Hollywood Reservoir

- Analyze the technologies necessary to implement courtroom sharing and the associated costs
- Ensure court recording systems are current and optimized for audio quality

GOAL 4.3: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SECURITY

Promote projects to ensure the security of all the Court's information technology

Strategies

- Implement Judiciary IT Security Scorecard requirements
- Participate in IT Security Assessments and programs offered by the Ninth Circuit and the Administrative Office of the United States Courts to promote security
- Leverage available security tools, resource packets, templates, and awareness materials
- Establish and maintain redundancies to all critical systems
- Expand security awareness through training and frequent communication

GOAL 4.4: MOBILITY

Create a mobile-friendly court utilizing a secure infrastructure and systems to meet the increasing demand and evolving need for connectivity

Strategies

- Provide staff with the required training and equipment to successfully work remotely when necessary
- Utilize platform-agnostic applications and consider the potential for mobile solutions when initiating new IT projects
- Promote opportunities for digital collaboration and continuous improvement in audio and video technology
- Share and promote the use of collaboration tools and unified messaging applications

GOAL 4.5: PAPER REDUCTION

Undertake actions to set up systems, practices, and procedures that encourage a reduced reliance on paper

Strategies

- Conduct a feasibility study on existing paper-based procedures to determine what processes may be automated or digitized
- Examine the Administrative Office of the United States Courts' guidelines detailing the use of digital signatures
- Encourage use of existing electronic systems in lieu of paper to save time and space while improving access to information

GOAL 4.6: STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Improve systems and the use of technology through experiential learning

Strategies

- Involve public stakeholders in the development and upgrades of technological systems and solutions
- Implement new systems and solutions through pilot project initiatives
- Deliver pre-development stakeholder training



Photo: Oxnard Strawberry Farm

- Promote communication and facilitate the exchange of ideas through outreach and user satisfaction surveys
- Expand attorney representation and participation on IT issues

GOAL 4.7: FACILITIES AND SECURITY

Maintain safe and accessible court buildings capable of meeting the Court's current and future needs.

Strategies

- Identify, monitor, and address building and safety improvements
- Maintain an updated district-wide long-range space plan
- Pursue funding to ensure all courtrooms are ADA compliant
- Participate in security committees to enhance security and safety
- Design cost-effective office spaces as funding permits to incorporate healthy, well-building inspired principles

- Continue to strengthen the Court's relationship with both the United States Marshals Service and the Federal Protective Service
- Cultivate close working relationships with all federal court representatives to ensure the space needs of the Court are addressed

GOAL 4.8: EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS

Adopt procedures that protect people, processes, technology, and facilities to ensure employee and public safety and continuity of operations in the event of an emergency or disaster

Strategies

- Review and periodically re-evaluate the Court's security and emergency procedures
- Conduct systematic testing and training on security and emergency procedures
- Maintain an up-to-date Continuity of Operations Plan for the Court and Occupant Emergency Plan for all court facilities
- Communicate and coordinate the Court's Continuity of Operations Plan and strategies with other court units and appropriate public safety agencies

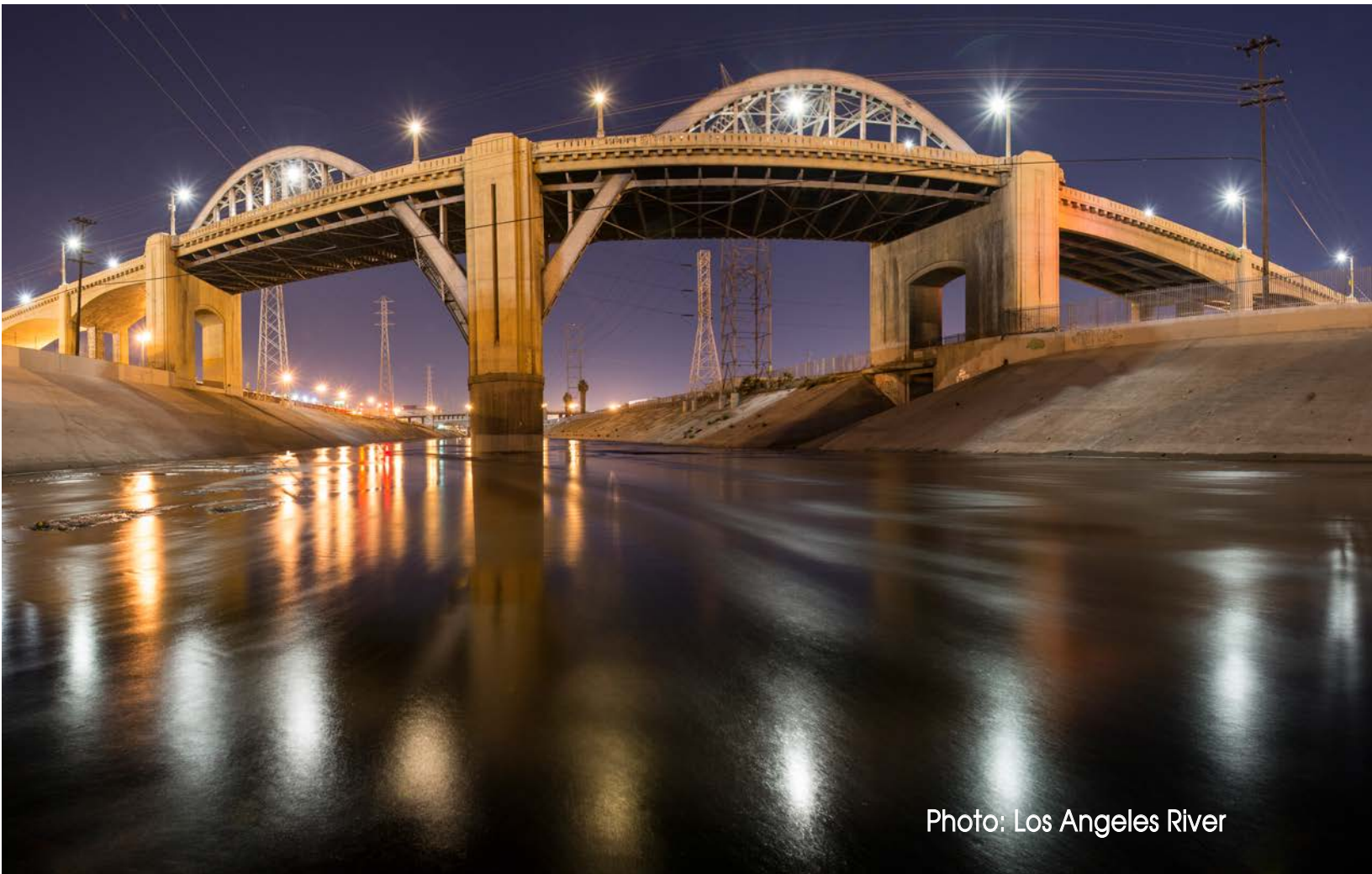


Photo: Los Angeles River

JUDGES OF THE COURT

By Seniority (Top to Bottom)

Honorable Maureen A. Tighe
Chief Bankruptcy Judge

Honorable Barry Russell

Honorable Robert N. Kwan

Honorable Julia W. Brand

Honorable Vincent P. Zurzolo

Honorable Catherine E. Bauer

Honorable Neil W. Bason

Honorable Ernest M. Robles

Honorable Deborah J. Saltzman

Honorable Mark D. Houle

Honorable Erithe A. Smith

Honorable Mark S. Wallace

Honorable Scott H. Yun

Honorable Sheri Bluebond

Honorable Scott C. Clarkson

Honorable Martin R. Barash

Honorable Theodor C. Albert

Honorable Wayne Johnson

Honorable Victoria S. Kaufman

Honorable Sandra R. Klein

RECALLED JUDGES

Alphabetically (Top to Bottom)

Honorable Alan M. Ahart

Honorable Thomas B. Donovan

Honorable Robin L. Riblet

Honorable Peter H. Carroll

Honorable Geraldine Mund

CLERK OF COURT

Executive Officer/Clerk of Court
Kathleen J. Campbell

Chief Deputy of Operations
Benjamin Varela

Chief Deputy of Administration
John C. Hermann

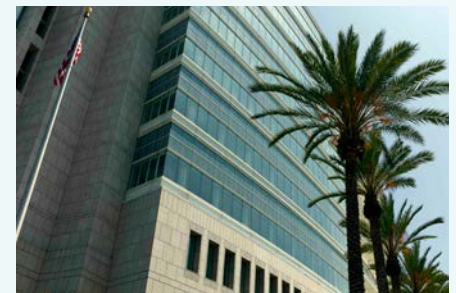
LOCATIONS OF THE COURT



Los Angeles Division
Edward R. Roybal Federal Building
and United States Courthouse
255 East Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012



Riverside Division
3420 Twelfth Street
Riverside, CA 92501



Santa Ana Division
Ronald Reagan Federal Building and
United States Courthouse
411 West Fourth Street
Santa Ana, CA 92701



San Fernando Valley Division
21041 Burbank Boulevard
Woodland Hills, CA 91367



Northern Division
1415 State Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Acknowledgments

The Strategic Plan of the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Central District of California was crafted by a Strategic Planning Committee appointed by the chief bankruptcy judge and composed of executive management, staff, and judges representing the core of the Court's judicial committees. The group reached out to the public, bar associations, law professors, court staff and other public interest group partners for their ideas and comments. Through this process, the Strategic Planning Committee identified fundamental long-term issues facing the Court and formulated goals and strategies to address these issues. Implementation of the plan will be the responsibility of the Court's judicial committees with direction from the Court's Executive Committee and assistance from the Clerk of Court and staff.

Strategic Planning Committee

Maureen A. Tighe, Chair, Chief Bankruptcy Judge

Sheri Bluebond, Bankruptcy Judge

Victoria S. Kaufman, Bankruptcy Judge

Scott C. Clarkson, Bankruptcy Judge

Neil W. Bason, Bankruptcy Judge

Scott H. Yun, Bankruptcy Judge

Kathleen J. Campbell, Executive Officer/Clerk of Court

Benjamin Varela, Chief Deputy of Operations

John C. Hermann, Chief Deputy of Administration

Beryl Dixon, Director of Human Resources and Court Services

Blake Francois, Manager, Planning & Research

Vanessa Keith Garcia, Special Projects Manager

Estella Chavarin, Senior Court Analyst

The United States Bankruptcy Court for the Central District of California would like to thank the judicial officers, staff, attorneys, and members of the public for their contributions to the development of this strategic plan.

Credit goes to John C. Hermann and Laura Piedra for many photos of our district included in this publication.