

Superior Court of California County of Santa Clara

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From Then to Now: How the Court Has Evolved to Serve You

One hundred years ago, California established the Judicial Council of California to create a more consistent, efficient, and fair judicial system for all Californians. Since 1926, the Judicial Council has provided statewide leadership that has enabled California's courts to evolve with the changing needs of our communities while remaining firmly grounded in the enduring principle of equal access to justice.

Over the past century, the administration of justice has undergone a remarkable transformation. Court operations that once depended almost entirely on paper files, in-person appearances, and manual processes have become increasingly digital, connected, and customer-focused. While the mission of the courts has remained constant, ensuring fair and impartial justice, the methods by which courts deliver services have evolved dramatically.

Santa Clara County Superior Court reflects this evolution. Through sustained investments in technology and service delivery, the Court has expanded public access while improving operational efficiency. Court users can now file documents electronically, access case information online, make payments digitally, schedule services remotely, and receive assistance through a variety of virtual customer service tools. These advancements allow individuals to engage with the Court more conveniently and efficiently, often without needing to travel to a courthouse.

Perhaps one of the most significant advancements has been the expansion of remote access to court proceedings. Building on innovations accelerated during the pandemic, remote appearances are now available for many hearings, allowing litigants, attorneys, witnesses, interpreters, and justice partners to participate from locations throughout the county and beyond when authorized by law. Remote access has reduced unnecessary travel, minimized time away from work, lessened childcare challenges, and improved participation for individuals with disabilities, transportation limitations, or other barriers that might otherwise prevent meaningful access to the courts. By bringing the courtroom closer to the communities it serves, technology has made justice more accessible while preserving the integrity of the judicial process.

Behind these public-facing improvements are equally significant technological advancements that have modernized court operations. Electronic filing has streamlined the movement of cases, digital case management systems have improved the speed and accuracy of case processing, and secure cloud-based technologies have strengthened business continuity and system reliability. Enhanced online services, accessible websites, and digital communication tools provide greater transparency while enabling the Court to serve a growing and increasingly diverse population more effectively.

Access to justice also depends upon ensuring that every person can understand and participate in the judicial process. In one of the nation's most culturally and linguistically diverse communities, Santa Clara County Superior Court has expanded language access through certified interpreter services, translated court materials, multilingual online resources, and technology that connects court users with language assistance more quickly and efficiently. These efforts help ensure that language is never a barrier to receiving fair treatment under the law.

Modernization, however, extends beyond technology. Santa Clara County Superior Court strives to continually evaluate how services are delivered, identify barriers to access, and adapt to the evolving expectations of the public. Innovation is meaningful only when it strengthens public confidence, improves accessibility, and allows the courts to better fulfill their constitutional responsibilities.

The Judicial Council's centennial provides an opportunity to reflect on a century of progress while looking toward the future. California's courts have demonstrated that innovation and tradition are not competing values. By embracing new technologies, expanding access, and strengthening partnerships with the communities they serve, the judicial branch continues to uphold the rule of law while meeting the changing needs of Californians.

As we commemorate this historic milestone, we recognize the thousands of judicial officers and court professionals whose dedication has made this progress possible. Their commitment to service, innovation, and equal access to justice honors the Judicial Council's century-long legacy and ensures that California's courts remain prepared to serve future generations with fairness, integrity, and excellence.