

Bill would have Judicial Council move judges to needier counties

Judge relocation bill to be heard

By Renee Flannery

A bill that would give the Judicial Council more influence in reallocating five judges to Riverside and San Bernardino counties from elsewhere in the state will likely be heard in the Senate Judiciary Committee in the latter half of June, said its sponsor, Assemblyman Jay Obernolte.

The proposal has been regarded by some as a step in the right direction to alleviating the judge shortage in the two counties. But several trial court employees unions have told Obernolte, R-Big Bear Lake, that AB 2341 is unconstitutional.

Obernolte developed the proposal with the Judicial Council in response to concern about the lack of California judgeships and Gov. Jerry Brown's veto of previous bills meant to add more state judges.

"The bill would require the Judicial Council to develop the methodology, criteria, and standards to determine which five vacant judgeships would be reallocated from one court to another," Obernolte said in an email late last week.

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Federal prosecutor challenges sitting judge, criticizes appointment timing

By Justin Kloczko

As far as federal prosecutor Carla Keehn is concerned, Judge Keri G. Katz occupies a seat on the San Diego County Superior Court bench because of partisan politics.

On a late Friday afternoon in January 2014, Judge Alvin Green announced his retirement. It was the last day to do so before the office would become an open seat, and Katz was appointed by Gov. Jerry Brown the same day.

"Had he retired on Monday it would have been an open seat," said Keehn, referencing the state Constitution and its call for judicial elections. Keehn seeks Katz's seat in Tuesday's election.

Katz responds that she's gone through the same process as any other judge who gets appointed throughout any of the 58 counties in the state, and that an appointment process is more thorough than an election.

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OC prosecutor challenges judge sanctioned for sex

By Meghann M. Cuniff

An experienced political influencer in Orange County recently offered Deputy District Attorney Karen L. Schatzle his blunt assessment of her bid to unseat a Superior Court judge censured two years ago for courthouse sex.

"He said, 'You need to have a Plan B, because you're not going to win,'" Schatzle recalled.

Schatzle feels she already has a backup if she loses to Superior Court Judge Scott A. Steiner on Tuesday: She's worked in the Orange County district attorney's office since 1995, for the last 10 years as a senior deputy district attorney. But she also fears retaliation for challenging the only sitting judge up for reelection in Orange County this year, and her campaign recently sparked a terse response from her boss, District Attorney Tony J. Rackauckas.

Responding to claims by Schatzle that her supervisors blocked a promotion plan for her after they learned she was challenging Steiner, Rackauckas reiterated his endorsement of Steiner and said he accepts Steiner's apology and believes he deserves a second chance "for his failings off the bench." Those include a 2014 censure and discipline from the state Commission on Judicial Performance for sex with law clerks in his chambers and attempts to get them jobs at the district attorney's office. Rackauckas also said Schatzle is mischaracterizing what happened regarding her employment.



Courtesy Karen L. Schatzle and Orange County Superior Court
From left: Orange County Deputy District Attorney Karen L. Schatzle and Orange County Superior Court Judge Scott A. Steiner. Schatzle is challenging Steiner, who was sanctioned in 2014 for having sex in his chambers, for his seat.

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