



Commissioner Weber to hold meeting on court finances

OCTOBER 20, 2013 7:00 PM • BY BARBARA LABOE / THE DAILY NEWS

Cowlitz County Commissioner Dennis Weber is holding a Nov. 20 town hall meeting about Superior Court funding — and inviting several critics of the county's budget process to participate.

The county has received 40 form letters about Superior Court funding, saying the courts shouldn't take any cuts as commissioners work to trim \$4 million from the 2014 budget.

The letters were primarily sent by local lawyers who say the reductions and layoffs have already hindered their clients' ability to get civil cases, such as divorces and child custody cases, heard. Sometimes clients wait years for resolution, they said.

Commissioners responded with a form letter of their own, disputing some claims and saying they've actually worked to shield Superior Court from previous cuts. They also urged the letter writers to become involved in finding a solution.

Weber, in a letter announcing the town hall, said he hopes the letter writers will form a citizens task force to take more formal action.

"My goals for this meeting are to share where we are budget-wise, share where we are with certain law and justice reforms, and hopefully inspire you to take your concerns to the next level of action," Weber wrote.

Commissioners and Superior Court judges have sparred about budget cuts for the past several years. Commissioners say the budget is cut so close to the bone that courts and law enforcement simply can't be spared. Judges, however, say state law requires them to provide some services and they can't knowingly cut those.

At the judges' and commissioners' requests, the Washington State Center for Court Research is undertaking a review of Cowlitz courts to see what the courts are and are not allowed to cut. Results are not expected in time for the 2014 budget decisions.

Weber's town hall will be from 7 to 9 p.m. on Nov. 20, on the third floor of the county Administration Building, 207 Fourth Avenue North, Kelso.