

SEATTLE TIMES

Originally published Wednesday, April 17, 2013 at 4:44 PM

## Editorial: Don't cut the courts in the state budget

Chief Justice Barbara Madsen argues that the court system take no further budget cuts, and The Seattle Times agrees.

Seattle Times Editorial

CHIEF Justice Barbara Madsen of the Washington Supreme Court has said in a letter to state senators that the budget they passed “will totally cripple” the state courts, and that the cuts to the courts “cannot be implemented” and “should not move forward in any form.” That is strong language from the chief justice, and legislators should heed it. Already the court has undertaken to tell the Legislature that it has been underspending on the state’s K-12 schools with its McCleary ruling, without saying just how much is enough. In the extreme instance, the court could make a similar ruling about the judicial system, including itself. “I hope we don’t get to that point,” Madsen said in an interview. Legislators should hope the same.

The suggested cut is billed as 5 percent, but it is of a group of things, some of which are exempt from cuts, such as the salaries and benefits of superior court judges.

The result is that the Administrative Office of the Courts would be hit the hardest. This support function has already been cut 27 percent since 2009. Adding the proposed new cuts, plus reductions in pass-through funding, would be a cumulative cut of 42 percent, which is too much.

One of the services affected is a computer system that holds court records on thousands of cases. It is essential.

The system of justice would seize up without it. The computer is a 35-year-old mainframe that is costly, difficult to maintain and is set to be replaced. The Senate budget takes away the money to do it.

The Legislature needs to get its priorities straight. It is right that education gets most of the projected increase in state revenue.

But the budget must preserve the core functions of government, which include the system of justice.

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