
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 1524 (Committee on Judiciary) - Courts: fees

Version: June 19, 2025

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: July 14, 2025

Policy Vote: JUD. 13 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Liah Burnley

Bill Summary: AB 1524 prohibits a court from charging a fee for services not specifically authorized by rule or statute that exceeds the cost to the court of providing that service or product.

Fiscal Impact:

- Revenue loss (Trial Court Trust Fund, General Fund) of an unknown but potentially significant amount to the courts. Given the number of courts and the apparent ubiquity of these fees, and the significant declines in fine and fee revenue to the courts in recent years, the impact of lost revenue resulting from this bill may be significant and may increase the demand for General Fund backfill to the Trial Court Trust Fund.
- Workload costs (Trial Court Trust Fund, General Fund) of an unknown amount to the courts to comply with the bill's provisions regarding public access to court records, and to Judicial Council to complete the required reports.

Background: Some courts in the state charge the public to access to their public court records which are posted online in an electronic format. The Judicial Council states the reason is to cover costs associated with the creation, maintenance, and management of their electronic systems that allow for public access to those electronic records. The Assembly Judiciary Committee analysis of this bill notes that:

According to the JCC, in 2021, 16 counties in the state provided online access to electronic civil case records. Ten of those 16 courts charged \$22.7 million in fees to the public who accessed court records during that two-year period. The JCC states that the reason why courts charge fees is to "cover costs associated with the creation, maintenance, and management of their electronic systems that allow for public access to those electronic records." If all 58 trial courts were able to "recover costs" at this rate, the estimated statewide total fees would add up to approximately \$32 million per year. Given that the state funds the court's computer systems and personnel expenses in the Budget process, it is difficult to understand how and why such fees are justified.

Proposed Law:

- Authorizes the court, in the absence of a statute or rule explicitly authorizing or prohibiting a fee by the superior court for a particular service or product, to charge a fee not to exceed the cost to the court of providing the service or product. A fee not explicitly authorized by statute or rule must be approved by the Judicial Council.
- Requires, by December 1, 2027, the Judicial Council to submit a report to the Legislature, as provided, regarding each fee currently charged by a superior court in the 2026-27 fiscal year for which the revenue collected by and distributed to the court as a result of the fee exceeds the court's cost of providing the service or product. Requires Judicial Council, by December 1, 2028, and December 1, 2029, to submit a report to the Legislature regarding fiscal years 2027-28 and 2028-29 that includes the information.
- Requires a member of the public requesting to view and duplicate a public court record on the premises of the court to be allowed to use the requester's equipment on those premises, without being charged any fees or costs, to photograph or otherwise copy or reproduce the record in a manner that does not require the equipment to make physical contact with the record, as specified.

Related Legislation: AB 1758 (Committee on Judiciary), of the 2023-24 Legislative Session, would have prohibited the superior courts from collecting any fee not authorized by statute. AB 1758 was held on this Committee's suspense file.

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