

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING
AB 1950 (Harabedian)
As Amended March 18, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Authorizes the Superior Court of Los Angeles County to conduct a pilot program ordering any civil matter into mediation, notwithstanding the general \$75,000 amount in controversy limitation permitting civil cases to be ordered to mediation.

Major Provisions

- 1) Provides that notwithstanding the existing \$75,000 amount in controversy limit for ordering cases to mediation, the Superior Court of Los Angeles County may order any case into mediation, as specified.
- 2) Provides that if the Los Angeles County Superior Court issues an order permitting the provisions of 1) to take effect, all other restrictions on mandatory mediation in existing law remain in effect.
- 3) Requires all mediations conducted pursuant to 1) to comply with the following:
 - a) All cases ordered to mediation are to be entitled up to three hours of no-cost mediation services provided by a court-sanctioned mediation program;
 - b) Parties subject to the mediation may appear remotely; and
 - c) A mediation ordered pursuant to 1) cannot delay or serve as grounds to continue the trial date or delay or continue any expedited procedures.
- 4) Requires, if the Los Angeles County Superior Court issues an order permitting the provisions of 1) to take effect, the court to transmit a report to the Assembly and Senate Committees on Judiciary on or before January 31, 2028, and annually thereafter, containing all of the following:
 - a) The number of cases ordered to mediation pursuant to 1);
 - b) The number of cases in which the trial date was delayed after being ordered to mediation;
 - c) The number of cases in which a full or partial settlement was reached as a result of mediation.
- 5) Requires, if feasible, the information provided pursuant to 4) to be reported by case type.
- 6) Makes various findings and declarations to declare this bill is a special statute.
- 7) Provides that provisions of the bill are to sunset on January 1, 2032.

COMMENTS

Court-ordered mediation is the process whereby the judge overseeing a civil action sends the dispute to a neutral person or facilitator before trial seeking to promote productive communication between the disputants to assist them in reaching a mutually acceptable agreement. Seeking to ensure that many civil matters remained eligible for mediation following the 2023 adjustment of the amount in controversy levels for unlimited civil cases, last year the Legislature approved AB 1523 (Committee on Judiciary) Chapter 201, Statutes of 2025, to increase the jurisdictional limit on cases that could be referred to mediation.

Notwithstanding AB 1523, the Superior Court of Los Angeles County requested additional flexibility to order matters into mediation given the unique size and nature of the Los Angeles County court system. To that end, this bill authorizes the Superior Court of Los Angeles County to conduct a pilot program to study the impact of removing the jurisdictional limit on ordering civil matters into mediation.

Under the correct circumstances, mediation can facilitate the resolution of a civil dispute without a trial. For over 30 years, California's civil courts have had the ability to direct some civil actions to mediation before a case proceeds to trial. The mediation process is designed to force all of the parties to a civil action to work with a trained mediator to see if a mutually agreeable solution to the dispute can be reached. When all of the parties to a matter are open to mediation, the process can be successful. However, given the potentially contentious nature of litigation, frequently, the parties are not prepared to amicably resolve their differences, especially if mediation is ordered before all discovery has been conducted and if other procedural disputes are still playing out. In cases in which the parties are not amenable to mediation, the process frequently serves as a waste of time and money that delays the inevitable trial.

Unfortunately, outside of a twenty-plus year old study, there is little information outlining the success or failure rates for mediation in California's civil justice system. While the Judicial Council of California tracks when civil cases are disposed of, and reports that 80 percent of unlimited cases in recent years were disposed of before trial, the Council does not specify how pretrial resolutions were reached. (*2024 Court Statistics Report*, Judicial Council of California (2024) at p. 51.) Accordingly, the 80 percent of cases resolved before trial may have been settled without mediation, dismissed for lack of evidence, or otherwise resolved. Nonetheless, recognizing that mediation can serve as a useful tool in resolving civil matters, last year the Judiciary Committee authored the aforementioned AB 1523 to ensure that new jurisdictional limits for unlimited civil matters would not forestall the use of mediation.

Due to its size, the Superior Court of Los Angeles County faces unique challenges but has also proved more innovative than many other jurisdictions in California. The Superior Court of Los Angeles County is the largest trial court in the nation. The Superior Court operates 36 courthouses, conducts nearly 2,500 jury trials annually, employs more than 4,600 staff, and maintains an annual budget well in excess of one billion dollars. (Superior Court of Los Angeles County, *About the Court*, available at: <https://www.lacourt.ca.gov/pages/lp/court-communications/tp/about-the-court>.) Given the massive workload facing the judicial officers in Los Angeles County, the Superior Court notes that the AB 1523 framework does not enable the court to move a sufficient number of civil matters into mediation, thus causing significant delays in processing civil cases through the justice system. The court also notes that due to the higher cost of living in Los Angeles, when compared to some of the state's smaller and more rural

counties, the existing \$75,000 amount in controversy cap for mandated mediation also disqualifies a significant number of cases pending before the Superior Court of Los Angeles County's civil departments.

Seeking to manage this massive workload, the Superior Court of Los Angeles County has been far more proactive than other superior courts across the state at utilizing data-driven strategies to generate efficiencies in day-to-day court operations. In a Fall 2025 presentation to Judiciary Committee staff, the Los Angeles County Superior Court highlighted its innovative partnership with Stanford Law School to utilize data backed solutions to promote access to justice. Unlike most superior courts, Los Angeles County has analyzed case filing and outcome data to develop technological tools intended to help litigants. For example, a new system deployed by the court aims to reduce the rate of default judgments in debt collection and unlawful detainer actions. The Superior Court of Los Angeles County is now utilizing data to track the effectiveness of the new system. In conversations with the Committee, the Superior Court of Los Angeles County notes that it has the capacity to bring a similar granular-level data analysis to mandated mediation and associated case outcomes.

This bill authorizes the Superior Court of Los Angeles County to conduct a pilot program to study the effect of eliminating the amount in controversy cap from mediation. The bill maintains all of the procedural safeguards surrounding mediation adopted in AB 1523, provides that litigants must be provided several hours of free mediation services, and clarifies the use of remote technology for conducting mediations. The bill also ensures that trials will not be delayed by mediation. Finally, building on the Superior Court of Los Angeles County's impressive data collection and analysis capabilities, this bill requires the court to submit to the Legislature annual reports on the effectiveness of the pilot program, including data regarding how many cases were sent to mediation, the success rate of mediation, and any scheduling issues caused by the use of mandatory mediation. This bill would sunset in 2032, although the data generated by Los Angeles County may be useful in debating the expanded use of mandatory mediation statewide.

According to the Author

AB 1950 establishes a Los Angeles County-specific pilot program to expand access to court-ordered mediation and improve civil case resolution. Between 2022 and 2025, unlimited civil filings increased by 39 percent, causing immense pressure on the court system.

In response to this rapid caseload growth, AB 1950 moves civil cases into early, collaborative mediation thereby reducing trial court dockets and judicial backlog. This approach will accelerate access to justice and lower costs for both litigants and the court system. By expanding access to mediation and prioritizing early resolution, AB 1950 advances a more efficient, equitable, and responsive civil justice system for Los Angeles County.

Arguments in Support

This bill is supported by the Superior Court of Los Angeles County. In support of the bill, the court writes:

Over the past three years, civil filings in Los Angeles County – both limited and unlimited – have surged by approximately 67 percent. In the past year alone, the Court's Civil Division received more than 110,000 new unlimited civil filings and nearly 175,000 new limited civil filings. On average, a new civil case is filed in our Court approximately every two minutes of every working day.

Because the amount in controversy in the majority of our civil filings exceeds the recently increased \$75,000 threshold for mandatory mediation (effective January 1, 2027), the Court and litigants will be unable to meaningfully benefit from recent statutory changes. In addition, the current ‘one-size-fits-all’ threshold does not adequately account for regional differences in case volume, court capacity, and cost of living. Factors that are particularly significant in a jurisdiction as large and complex as Los Angeles County.

AB 1950 would complement the substantial investments the Court has made in mediation programs. Central to these efforts is the Court’s dedicated Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Office, which oversees a broad network of programs and a custom digital platform launched in 2025 to expand mediation access and efficiency. The return on these investments has been significant. A Judicial Council evaluation of court mediation programs found an approximately 50% resolution rate, a 30% reduction in the trial rate, and a 23-day reduction in the time to resolution. These outcomes translate to into lower litigation costs for parties and more timely access to justice.

From a judicial perspective, AB 1950 provides the bench with an essential case management tool. Rather than being constrained by an arbitrary monetary threshold, judicial officers would be able to exercise their discretion to determine when mediation is appropriate based on the specific circumstances of each case.

The Superior Court of Los Angeles County's mission is to serve our community by providing equal access to justice through the fair, timely, and effective resolution of all cases. AB 1950 would help advance that mission by expanding opportunities for parties to resolve disputes efficiently while preserving their right to trial. For these reasons, the Court respectfully requests your AYE vote for AB 1950.

Arguments in Opposition

None on file

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, cost savings (Trial Court Trust Fund) of an unknown, but likely significant amount. Los Angeles Superior Court’s current Alternative Dispute Resolution program is a free three-hour session offered to eligible litigants and funded via base budget funds from its annual trial court budget allocation. The mediators in the program serve pro bono. The court estimates that 500 to 1,000 additional cases would be ordered to mediation if this bill were enacted. Based on historical trends, the court estimates that approximately 50% of those cases will settle, resulting in 250 to 500 fewer cases going to trial. The anticipated cost savings from judicial time and courtroom resources would be significant.

Nonetheless, consistent with the committee rules, this bill is a candidate for the committee’s suspense file because it has the primary purpose of creating a pilot program.

VOTES

ASM JUDICIARY: 12-0-0

YES: Kalra, Macedo, Bauer-Kahan, Bryan, Connolly, Dixon, Harabedian, Pacheco, Papan, Sanchez, Stefani, Zbur

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

VERSION: March 18, 2026

CONSULTANT: Nicholas Liedtke / JUD. / (916) 319-2334

FN: 0002611