

Date of Hearing: April 14, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY
Ash Kalra, Chair
AB 2781 (Committee on Judiciary) – As Amended April 8, 2026

PROPOSED CONSENT

SUBJECT: CIVIL CASES: FILING FEES

KEY ISSUE: SHOULD THE LEGISLATURE UPDATE CIVIL FEE FILING STATUTES TO ALIGN WITH RECENTLY ENACTED CHANGES TO JURISDICTIONAL LIMITS?

SYNOPSIS

In response to the inflationary impacts of the post-pandemic economy, in 2023, the Legislature enacted SB 71 (Umberg) Chap. 861, Stats. 2023 to raise the jurisdictional limits for civil actions filed as a small claim, limited civil, or unlimited civil matter. While SB 71 made consistent changes to limited and unlimited civil jurisdictions, the bill did not evenly apply to small claim matters. This uneven application to small claims courts also resulted in outdated references in various filing fees. Additionally, several other filing fee statutes reflecting the new amount in controversy for limited civil cases were not updated as part of the previous legislation, resulting in courts receiving inadequate filing fees.

This bill would address these issues by updating and harmonizing filing fee statutes with the jurisdictional structure established by SB 71. This bill is sponsored by the Superior Court of the County of Los Angeles and has no registered opposition on file.

SUMMARY: Updates several filing fee statutes to reflect recent updates to jurisdictional limits and makes other technical changes. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Clarifies that the jurisdictional amount associated with certain filing fees in small claims court cases is six thousand two hundred fifty dollars (\$6,250) rather than five thousand dollars (\$5,000).
- 2) Clarifies that the jurisdictional limit associated with certain filing fees in small claims court cases filed by a natural person is twelve thousand five hundred dollars (\$12,500) rather than ten thousand dollars (\$10,000).
- 3) Clarifies that the jurisdictional limit associated with certain filing fees in limited cases is thirty-five thousand dollars (\$35,000) rather than twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000).
- 4) Makes various technical and conforming changes across numerous code sections to implement the provisions of 1), 2), and 3).

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Provides that a small claims court maintains jurisdiction over the following claims:
 - a) For recovery of money, if the amount of the demand does not exceed six thousand two hundred fifty dollars (\$6,250);

- b) To enforce payment of delinquent unsecured personal property taxes in an amount not to exceed six thousand two hundred fifty dollars (\$6,250), as specified;
 - c) To issue a writ of possession if the amount of the demand does not exceed six thousand two hundred fifty dollars (\$6,250), as specified;
 - d) To confirm, correct, or vacate a fee arbitration award not exceeding six thousand two hundred fifty dollars (\$6,250) between an attorney and client that is binding or has become binding, or to conduct a hearing de novo between an attorney and client after nonbinding arbitration of a fee dispute involving no more than six thousand two hundred fifty dollars (\$6,250), as specified; and
 - e) For an injunction or other equitable relief only when a statute expressly authorizes a small claims court to award that relief. (Code of Civil Procedure Section 116.220 (a).)
- 2) Provides that, in addition to the matters outlined in 1), the small claims court has jurisdiction in an action brought by a natural person, if the amount of the demand does not exceed twelve thousand five hundred dollars (\$12,500). (Code of Civil Procedure Section 116.221.)
- 3) Prohibits a person from bringing more than two small claims actions worth more than two thousand five hundred dollars (\$2,500) in a calendar year, as specified. (Code of Civil Procedure Section 116.231.)
- 4) Provides that, in a case where the amount demanded, excluding attorney's fees and costs, is ten thousand dollars or less, the uniform fee for filing the first paper is two hundred five dollars (\$205). The first page of the first paper shall state whether the amount demanded exceeds or does not exceed ten thousand dollars. (Government Code Section 70613.)
- 5) Provides that if a plaintiff or petitioner who previously was charged the filing fee under 4) files an amended complaint or other initial pleading that increases the amount demanded to an amount that exceeds ten thousand dollars but does not exceed twenty five thousand dollars so that the higher filing fee 4) would have been required if such a demand had been made in the original pleading, a fee equal to the difference between the fee for the original filing fee and the filing fee for the new amount demanded shall be charged to make up the difference between the filing fees. Specifies this fee will be distributed to the Trial Court Trust Fund. (Government Code Section 70613.5.)
- 6) Provides an action or special proceeding is treated as a limited civil case if all of the following conditions are satisfied:
- a) The amount in controversy does not exceed thirty-five thousand dollars (\$35,000).
 - b) The relief sought is a type that may be granted in a limited civil case.
 - c) The relief sought, whether in the complaint, a cross-complaint, or otherwise, is exclusively of a type described in one or more laws that classify an action or special proceeding as a limited civil case or that provide that an action or special proceeding is within the original jurisdiction of the superior court. (Code of Civil Procedure 85.)

FISCAL EFFECT: As currently in print this bill is keyed fiscal.

COMMENTS: To promote judicial efficiency California's civil justice system is divided into three tiers depending on the amount in controversy (the value of the claims to be adjudicated) in a given matter. The idea behind the tiered system is that the greater the amount in controversy, the greater the complexity of a case, thus necessitating more time and tools to adjudicate the matter. Because of the impact of post-pandemic inflation, the Legislature enacted SB 71 (Umberg) Chap. 861, Stats. 2023 to increase these amount-in-controversy amounts. Specifically, the bill expanded the small claims court's jurisdiction to \$6,250 or \$12,500 for actions filed by a natural person and raised the amount for limited civil cases from \$25,000 to \$35,000. For the most part, the bill did this successfully; however, there remain some outdated references to the previous jurisdictional limits throughout several codes, including filing fee statutes. As a result of these outdated references in filing fee statutes, courts have been receiving inadequate filing fees.

According to the author:

When the Legislature enacted SB 71 to raise the amount in controversy levels that guide filings in various civil cases, the Legislature did not make the corresponding adjustment to the amount in controversy references in various filing fee statutes. This has resulted in revenue losses for the courts as they are currently collecting filing fees based on the prior amount in controversy levels. In these difficult budget times, when every dollar matters for state agencies, this bill would adjust the filing fees to reflect accurate jurisdiction for filing civil matters.

To address this issue, *this bill* simply corrects this unintentional oversight by updating various filing fee statutes to reflect the jurisdictional amounts originally intended in SB 71. Currently, Government Codes Section 70613, 70613.5, 70614, 70621, as well as Code of Civil Procedure Section 116.23, still reference outdated monetary thresholds. Throughout those codes, this bill would update those references and clarify that the jurisdictional amounts associated with certain filing fees are as follows:

- 1) Six thousand two hundred fifty dollars (\$6,250) in small claims court cases;
- 2) Twelve thousand five hundred dollars (\$12,500) in small claims court cases filed by a natural person; and
- 3) Thirty-five thousand dollars (\$35,000) in limited cases.

Given that courts have been unable to collect adequate fees because of the current errors in existing law, this bill's update seems both reasonable and necessary.

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: The Superior Court of Los Angeles County, the sponsor of the bill, states the following in support of the bill:

Senate Bill 71 increased jurisdictional limits for small claims and limited civil cases, expanding small claims jurisdiction to \$6,250 or \$12,500 for actions filed by a natural person, and raising the limited civil jurisdictional cap from \$25,000 to \$35,000. These changes took effect on January 1, 2024.

However, several statutes governing civil filing fees, including Government Code Sections 70613, 70613.5, 70621, as well as Code of Civil Procedure Section 116.23, still reference outdated monetary thresholds. As a result, the current law contains conflicting fee triggers based on the amount in controversy rather than case designation. This inconsistency creates uncertainty for litigants, complicates processing for court staff, and risks inconsistent fee application across California. AB 2781 addresses these issues by updating and harmonizing filing fee statutes to reflect the jurisdictional structure established by SB 71. Specifically, the bill ensures that limited civil filing fees apply uniformly to all cases with amounts in controversy of \$35,000 or less and eliminates outdated and confusing monetary thresholds.

These technical amendments will eliminate conflicting statutory language, promote consistent statewide application of filing fees regardless of county, reduce confusion for litigants, including self-represented litigants, and lessen administrative burdens on courts by reducing the risk of erroneous fee collection.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**Support**

Superior Court of Los Angeles County (sponsor)

Opposition

None on file

Analysis Prepared by: Kristian Wright / JUD. / (916) 319-2334