



Office of the Los Angeles City Attorney
Hydee Feldstein Soto

April 23, 2024

Honorable Members
Budget, Finance and Innovation Committee
City Hall
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Honorable Members:

It is my honor to serve as your Los Angeles City Attorney. Your willingness to partner with my office to address urgent staffing and operational needs has been both welcome and greatly appreciated. We look forward to continuing that partnership through the current budget process. I understand the importance of the work you will do over the next few weeks and the challenges you will be required to address as you consider the Mayor's proposed budget.

This year is the first year my administration has prepared a budget for the City Attorney's Office. As you know, 95 percent of our office budget is fixed funding for salaries payable to approximately 1,000 dedicated employees. Notwithstanding the limited flexibility we have in expenses, my office submitted an initial budget that we had prepared with a view to achieving reasonable savings, while maintaining the core resources needed to continue to serve the City and its residents. After our initial submission, the CAO's Office requested further reductions, including the elimination of vacant positions. We responded by further adjusting our proposal to eliminate 24 positions — both attorney and non-attorney — and cut our requested technology budget by \$1.5 million, resulting in a further budget reduction of \$5.3 million in salaries and expenses.

Unfortunately, the proposed budget for my office that is before you now incorporates additional cuts, including two that we need to urgently request be added back into our budget so that, in the coming fiscal year, we have the technology and minimum personnel to stay in compliance with state law and meet our critical operational needs. We ask for the following budget adjustments:

- **Continue our current salary savings rate at three percent rather than the four percent proposed in the budget before you.**
- **Fund the final technology purchases for our crucial Aeon/JusticeNexus project.**

My office's current salary savings rate is three percent. To achieve it, we must hold a number of approved attorney and non-attorney positions vacant. The budget proposal to increase the salary savings rate to four percent — a further cut of another \$1,416,046 — poses an unacceptable hardship on the ability of my office to fulfill our charter responsibilities including most notably the obligation to defend the City in litigation, resulting in exponentially higher costs to the City in outside counsel, settlements or judgments. We have not been able to hire a sufficient number of civil litigators, paralegals, legal secretaries and claims investigators over the last year to keep pace with the rising number of lawsuits against the City and the doubling of claims during that time frame. The ability to hire into existing vacancies in litigation is necessary as our attorneys and legal professionals are increasingly overwhelmed. Therefore, we strongly urge the City Council to **keep our salary savings rate at three percent** and not to increase it as proposed in the budget before you.

The other highly critical need that was not included in the proposed budget before you is the **Aeon/JusticNexus criminal case management system replacement project**. We are already nearly two years into this technological upgrade project and have spent \$1.9 million. In this budget, we requested **\$2,608,600** to finally fund and finish the Aeon/JusticeNexus project, which started during the last administration and is indispensable to our Criminal Branch's ability to operate in compliance with applicable laws and regulations. Finishing the Aeon/JusticeNexus project is essential to our operations, necessary to our ability to **comply with federal and state criminal justice agencies**, and enables us to **implement the race-blind initial charging mandate** that will take effect in California in January 2025. Failure to fund this project could leave us without a technology solution to meet this state Department of Justice mandate and could result in significantly higher costs in personnel to staff up in order to conduct the redactions as required of us next calendar year.

My office greatly values your ongoing support. If you have any questions or need clarification, please contact Ian Thompson, Operations and Finance, at ian.thompson@lacity.org.

Sincerely,



HYDEE FELDSTEIN SOTO
Los Angeles City Attorney

cc: Mayor Karen Bass
Matt Szabo, City Administrative Officer