

# NGSC Reports on Federal Activities Important to State Courts

**T**he Government Relations Office (GRO) of the National Center for State Courts monitors congressional and federal executive agency activity that affects state court operations and reports to the AJA leadership. GRO usually monitors about 25 to 30 issues at any one time. A sampling of the issues and the status of the issues that are currently being monitored follows.

## State Justice Institute (SJI)

- ✓ The FY 2002 federal budget only allocated \$3 million for SJI, the only dedicated federal funding source for the improvement of state court operations. These are close-out funds for terminating SJI effective September 30, 2002.
- ✓ GRO has coordinated an effort by judicial associations, including AJA, to encourage Congress to continue and increase funding for SJI. Numerous meetings have taken place with key players on the Appropriations Subcommittees with jurisdiction over SJI.

- ✓ The president did not include any funds in his FY 2003 budget proposal. The Senate Appropriations Committee awarded \$3.1 million to SJI in its markup on July 18, 2002. The time frame for taking the bill to the Senate floor is unknown at this time. The House Appropriations Committee has not published its FY 2003 budget yet.

## Privacy and Social Security Numbers

- ✓ Because of the concern for identity theft and stalking, a number of bills have been introduced over the last few years that require the redaction of Social Security Numbers (SSNs) from public documents or prohibit the display of SSNs on the Internet. None of these bills have passed.
- ✓ Senator Feinstein (R-CA) introduced S. 848, the SSN Misuse Prevention Act, which would require the redaction of SSNs in 11 types of public documents, including court judgments, child support documents, and divorce petitions and decrees.

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## New Book Describes More “User Friendly” Court

**R**ising costs are forcing more litigants to come to court without legal representation, especially in routine matters. Is your court system prepared to deal with the growing number of litigants who choose to represent themselves? A new book from the National Center for State Courts, *The Self-Help Friendly Court: Designed from the Ground Up to Work for People Without Lawyers*, will show you how to redesign your court to provide more affordable justice for all. This book will show you how to

- Overcome barriers to innovations to help all litigants
- Design the courthouse as an overall helping, informing, and deciding environment
- Use technology to improve your court’s service to the public
- Manage cases that involve both represented and unrepresented litigants

This book was published by the National Center for State Courts with funding from the State Justice Institute and the Open Society Institute. For more information, contact the National Center’s Research Division at (800) 616-6109. 

