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## Court system cutbacks: Let's hear from you

A new bulletin board on The Florida Bar Web site allows attorneys to post accounts of how the state budget crisis is affecting their ability to get cases heard and disputes resolved in Florida's courts.



"We are 84,000 members strong and we can make a difference," said Bar President Jay White, as he encouraged members to log on and tell their stories. "Let your voices be heard before legislators meet again. This crisis is too important to leave to others."

Eugene Pettis, chair of the Bar's [Judicial Independence Committee](#), which came up with the bulletin board idea, said the courts face an ongoing financial crisis. Florida courts sustained two mid-year budget cuts in 2007-2008 with a 10 percent cut to this year's budget eliminating 280 positions and \$44 million.

Pettis said the Judicial Independence Committee wants to bolster grassroots support for getting Florida's courts on fiscally sound footing by collecting factual accounts from those who use and rely on Florida's courts every day.

"It is important that the Legislature appreciates the real-life impact that these budget cuts have," Pettis said. "We want to tap into the stories of our members to express how budget reductions affect the courts' ability to render justice."

Linda Courtney Clark of Tampa already logged on and left the message that family law cases in her area are "in gridlock."

"Temporary relief takes months; mediation is required beforehand most of the time, and that is also in gridlock," Clark wrote. "Family homes and businesses are lost or suffer great hardship without prompt court intervention. Without court orders, many parents refuse to pay child support at all. Courts feel that support and visitation are not 'emergency' issues so litigants are stuck waiting. Children have been removed from day-care due to nonpayment. Families have to relocate due to no support. Something must/should be done. . ."

Pettis said when lawmakers learn of stories such as Clark's, it will help them to understand that further cuts to the third branch of government may restrain the courts' ability to "carry out their constitutional mandates."

To participate, attorneys may visit [www.floridabar.org](http://www.floridabar.org). Attorneys need to log in to post comments, which will be accepted through December 20.

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