

FEE PETITIONS

January 10, 2012

(Statement by SCTA President Pat Miller to the Board of Supervisors)

At the December 6 Board meeting Supervisor Whiteaker stated that no one had come forward to object to increasing fees for services provided the public. Gentlemen, I present to you 102 signatures of Sutter County residents and one Yuba County resident who are opposed to the recent fee increases passed by this board. Supervisor Whiteaker's statement, on its face, was inaccurate as Elaine Miles, a Sutter County Taxpayers Association board member spoke in opposition to the increased fees.

One fee in particular is egregious – the \$118 per hour charge to check signatures on petitions submitted by the public which would stifle the right of the public to petition their government. Supervisor Cleveland stated that groups circulating initiatives or petitions should have to pay to have the signatures checked. The county has since privately back peddled on the issue stating the signature checking fee was to be charged other government agencies. However, that is not what was in the staff report and no official clarification has been published. The staff report states on page 6: "It should be emphasized that the fee schedules only address fees that are charged to the public and, generally, do not include charges that the County may make to other governmental agencies."

Work by the county for other governmental agencies is typically done by contract between the two agencies.

Copying fees were increased to \$3.75 per page in the Clerk/Recorder's Office. Copying costs in other departments vary and can be as high as \$6 in the Planning Department. County officials say that the cost includes the staff time to pull the document. However, there is no charge if the requesting person walks away without requesting a copy which means there would, therefore, be no charge for the employee's time. When the public can get a copy of an 8-1/2 x 11 document at a commercial for-profit business, for 10 cents or less, it is obvious that the county is using fees to bolster its income to pay for salaries and benefits. The county employee is there and is paid whether he or she is making copies or not.

A statement for an increase in copy work in Recorder's Office is ridiculous. The staff report states: "Recommend an increase in Department Hourly billing rate as a result of increased employee costs due to fewer staff available to recover costs." Just the opposite is true, fewer employees should reduce the cost to the public.

There are also discrepancies in charges for school board filings. The charge for candidate statements for the Yuba College Board of Trustees is \$250 to \$500 depending on the district and the charge for filings for the Yuba City Unified School District Boards is \$250 to \$450 depending on the district. There is no explanation of why there is a difference.

SCTA has concerns as to how the charges were established. Normally a cost analysis study is made to establish a direct connection with the action required and the service received. The county's fee schedule is open to broad interpretation and criticism that income was the goal and not fairness in costs. SCTA believes that the functions that fees are being charged to cover are what county government is supposed to be providing their citizens through property and sales tax revenues. Instead fees are being charged for many of the services that county government should provide without charge.

These high copying fees are being legally challenged in other counties. California Public Records Research, Inc. has filed lawsuits in Sacramento and Monterey Counties to overturn the high fees.

SCTA is formally requesting that the county rescind the fee increases passed by this board on December 6.

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