

Overview Of Activity For Year Ended August 31, 2000

Appellate Courts

Supreme Court

The 1069 Petitions for Review filed during fiscal year 2000 was a six percent increase from the 1,012 applications filed in fiscal year 1999, and four percent more than the 10-year average of 1,013 applications.

The Court "passed on" (disposed of, or otherwise acted upon) a total of 3,190 matters during fiscal year 2000, an increase of four percent from the 3,064 matters passed on in fiscal year 1999.

During fiscal year, the justices of the Supreme Court wrote 180 opinions (an average of 20 opinions each), nine percent more than the 165 opinions written in fiscal year 1999, but 14 percent less than the 10-year average of 209. About 55 percent (99) of the opinions written in 2000 were deciding opinions that disposed of causes.

Court of Criminal Appeals

The Court of Criminal Appeals disposed of 381 cases on direct appeal, 2,392 petitions for discretionary review, and 7,383 applications for writs of habeas corpus in fiscal year 2000.

Judges of the Court of Criminal Appeals wrote 709 opinions during fiscal year 2000, of which 569, or 80 percent, were "deciding" opinions disposing of cases. The remainder were dissents, concurrences, and opinions on rehearings. Of the deciding opinions, 162 were signed and 407 were per curiam. During 1999, members of the Court wrote 798 opinions, 71 percent of which were deciding opinions.

Courts of Appeals

The courts disposed of 13,429 total cases during the year, an average of approximately 168 dispositions (100 criminal and 68 civil) per justice. The pending caseload decreased from 10,776 at the beginning of the fiscal year 2000 to 9,690 at the end of the fiscal year.

A total of 12,339 cases were added to the dockets of the Courts of Appeals during the fiscal year, which included 7,163 criminal cases and 5,176 civil cases. As compared to the previous fiscal year, criminal cases increased by 1 percent and civil cases decreased by 1 percent. In total, there was an increase of .6 percent from the 12,291 total cases added in fiscal year 1999.

The average lapse of time between the filing of a civil case in a Court of Appeals and its disposition ranged from 6.0 months in the Twelve Court of Appeals in Tyler to 14.5 months in the Fifth Court of Appeals in Dallas. The average lapse of time in the 14 courts for civil cases was 8.8 months.

The average lapse of time between the filing of a criminal case in a Court of Appeals and its disposition ranged from 6.8 months in the Ninth Court of Appeals in Beaumont to 17.4 months in the Fourteenth Court of Appeals in Houston. The average lapse of time in the 14 courts for criminal cases was 10.5 months.

In fiscal year 2000, the justices of the Courts of Appeals wrote 12,798 opinions.

Trial Courts

District Courts

Twenty-four death sentences and 330 life sentences were assessed in the district courts during the year. Of the 219,655 criminal cases disposed by the district courts, 33 percent were disposed of in a period of less than two months from the date of indictment or information, 11 percent took two to three months, 9 percent took three to four months, and 47 percent took over four months.

Criminal cases constituted 222,882, or 30 percent, of the total cases added during the year. Of the criminal cases, 33 percent involved drug sales, manufacturing or possession, 12 percent involved a charge of theft (including auto theft), 9 percent involved burglary, 4 percent robbery, 1 percent homicide (including capital murder), 12 percent assault (including sexual assault of a child and of an adult), 6 percent felony DWI, and 3 percent were misdemeanors cases.

Civil cases accounted for 486,320, or 65 percent, of all cases added during the fiscal year. Family law matters (other than divorce actions) comprised the largest segment of civil cases added, constituting 42 percent of civil case additions.

During the fiscal year, the district courts disposed of 97 percent of the total criminal and civil cases added to their dockets, compared to 96 percent in 1999.

Of the 470,529 civil dispositions during the year, the courts disposed of 27 percent of the cases in under 3 months, 20 percent in 3 to 6 months, 20 percent in 6 to 12 months, 10 percent in twelve to eighteen months, and 23 percent in over eighteen months.

County-Level Courts

During the twelve-month reporting period, the county-level courts of the State disposed of 47 percent of the 1,468,978 total criminal, civil, and juvenile cases on their dockets (added during the year or carried over from the previous year).

From the number of cases reported, criminal cases constituted 73 percent (565,619) of the 773,708 total cases added to the dockets of the county courts. The 773,708 total cases includes all criminal, civil, and juvenile cases added to the dockets, as well as cases filed under probate and mental health. Civil cases accounted for 15 percent (114,414), probate cases represented 7 percent (56,657), mental health cases represented 4 percent (28,792), and juvenile cases represented 1 percent (8,226) of the total.

Total cases pending on the dockets of the county-level courts increased by 3 percent-- from 754,935 on September 1, 1999, to 779,906 on August 31, 2000.