

Caseload Trends in Juvenile Caseloads of District & County Courts

OVERVIEW

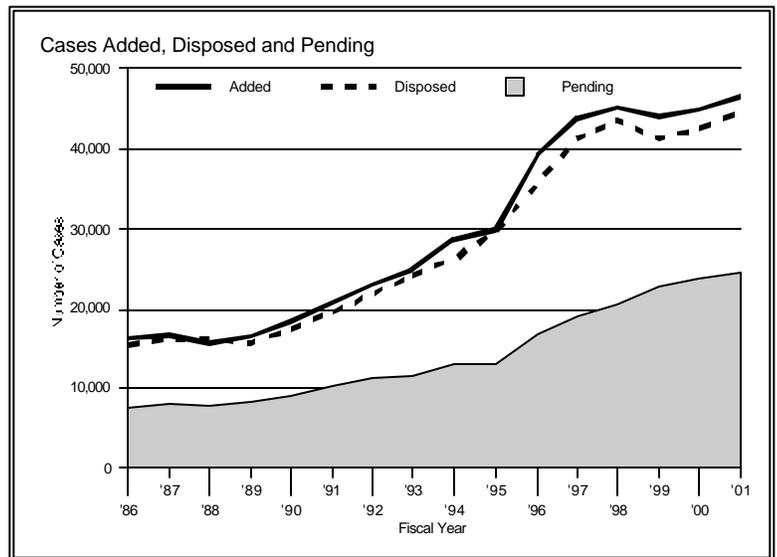
Section 51.04 of the Texas Family Code provides for the designation of a court or courts in each county as the juvenile court, to hear proceedings under Title 3 of the Family Code. The court designated must be either a district court, criminal district court, county court at law, or constitutional county court. The designation is made by the juvenile board in each county, or if no board exists, by the judges of the previously mentioned courts.

In an effort to address the rise in juvenile crime over the past decade, juvenile courts in the larger Texas counties have been using juvenile law masters, referees, and associate judges to assist with detention hearings and the adjudication of cases under Title 3 of the family Code. Sixteen counties are currently utilizing the services of juvenile law masters, referees, or associate judges to assist with juvenile matters.

This section contains the combined juvenile activity previously reported in the district and county level courts sections of this report. Of the 46,570 juvenile cases disposed by Texas courts in fiscal year 2001, the vast majority (82.2 percent) was disposed by district courts, and county-level courts disposed the remaining cases.

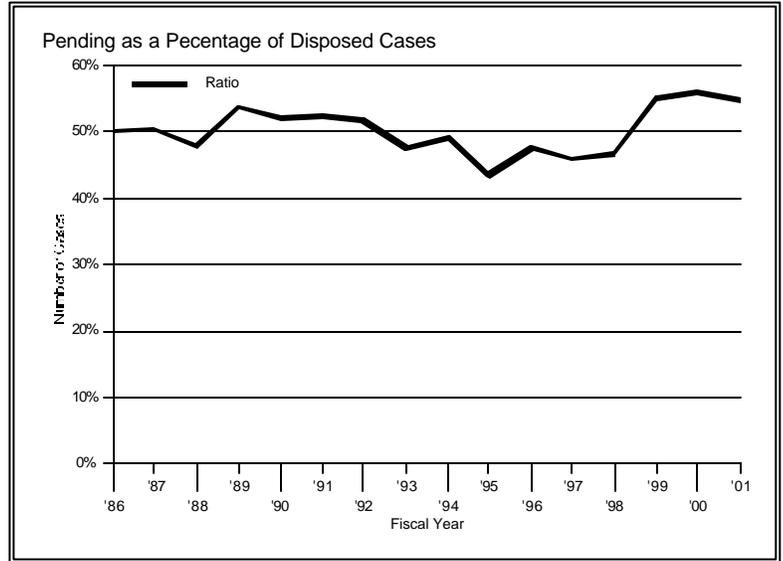
OVERVIEW

- **Since FY 1995, the number of cases added to the juvenile court dockets increased by 55.3 percent, from 29,973 cases in FY 1995 to 46,570 cases in FY 2001.** To put this increase in perspective, during that same period of time, the number of new criminal cases involving adults added to the dockets of the district courts increased by just 6.3 percent (12,661 cases). While the explosion in the number of cases occurred between fiscal years 1995 and 1997 (see chart below), more recent totals have not shrunk from those highs. In fact, during the four years since FY 1997, the number of cases added has increased by an additional 6.1 percent (2,673 cases).
- **Since FY 1995 the number of dispositions in juvenile cases increased by 14,907 cases or 50.2 percent.** Despite this tremendous increase in dispositions, courts have not quite been able to match the increase in cases added (see chart at right). The result is a rising pending caseload.
- **Since FY 1995, the number of pending juvenile cases in district and county courts has increased by 89.1 percent (11,590 cases).** This explosion in pending cases is the consequence of the dramatic increase in cases added over the same period. The backlog would be much greater had the court system not adjusted by increasing its capacity to dispose of many more juvenile cases each year. The chart at the top of the next page provides another gauge of the magnitude of the increased backlog by showing the ratio of backlog to annual disposition totals. While the ratio has stayed just below 56 percent during the past three years, that rate represents a fifteen-year high. Certainly, this measure of backlog does not show a picture as bleak as merely looking at the tremendous nominal increase; however, the elevated rates of the past five years should emphasize that the juvenile docket is still a growing area of need in the judicial system.
- **The five most populous counties in Texas, based on the 2000 census, account for over half 54.9 percent (25,583) of the new juvenile cases added to the docket during FY 2001.** Harris County alone accounted for nearly one-quarter (11,617) of the new juvenile cases added to the courts' dockets in FY 2001. Dallas County accounted for 4,458 cases added; Tarrant County, 3,179; cases Bexar County, 4,409 cases; and Travis County, 1,920 cases. These figures are almost identical to FY 2000 figures.



FINDINGS IN JUVENILE CASES

- **In juvenile cases where the court made a finding regarding delinquent conduct, only one of every 56 was a negative finding in FY 2001.** In juvenile cases in which the court made a finding regarding conduct in need of supervision (C.I.N.S), fewer than one of every hundred findings was negative (6 negative and 619 affirmative findings).
- **In FY 2001 the vast majority (87.1 percent) of findings of delinquent conduct or C.I.N.S, or disposition involving motions to revoke probation, resulted in probation being granted or continued.** In FY 2001, probation was granted under parental care in 80.9 percent of the cases, to residential treatment facilities in 18.6 percent of the cases, and under foster care in the remaining 0.5 percent of the cases.



- **In FY 2001, a total of 2,541 commitments (or 8.5 percent of all dispositions resulting in findings of delinquent conduct) were made to Texas Youth Commission (T.Y.C) facilities.** This represents an increase of 1.8 percent in the number of children ordered confined to T.Y.C facilities in FY 2000, yet it is still far below the 2,953 commitments made in FY 1999 and the 3,151 made in FY 1998.

OTHER ACTIVITY

- **During FY 2001, a total of 186 children were certified to stand trial as adults (less than 1 percent of all dispositions resulting in findings of delinquent conduct).** This total is down 40.2 percent from FY 2000, when 311 children were certified to be tried as adults, and down 63.3 percent from FY 1996, when 507 children were certified for trial as adults.
- **Other actions taken by juvenile courts during FY 2001 included the holding of 32,158 detention hearings and 2,593 hearings on motions to modify court orders.** The 32,158 detention hearings was just 137 fewer than last year, yet the 2,593 hearings on motions to modify was 1,025 fewer, a decrease of 28.3 percent.