

Activity in Juvenile Matters

Analysis of Activity for the Year Ended August 31, 1999

Introduction

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.

This section contains the combined juvenile activity previously reported in the district and county level courts sections of this report. Of the 41,310 juvenile cases disposed by Texas courts in fiscal year 1999, the lion's share (81.1 percent) were disposed by district courts, and the remaining 18.9 percent were handled by county-level courts.

Historical View of the Juvenile Court Dockets

Over the past five years, the number of cases added to the juvenile court dockets has increased by 48 percent from 29,723 in fiscal year 1995 to 44,003 in 1999.¹ To put this increase in perspective, during that same five-year period of time, the number of new criminal cases involving adults added to district courts' dockets has increased by just 5.5 percent.

The number of cases added to the juvenile court dockets in Texas have continued to increase over the past ten years. This year, fiscal year 1999, was the first year in more than a decade that the number of new cases added to the dockets dropped from the previous year. In fiscal year 1998, a total of 45,162 juvenile cases were added to the courts' dockets compared to 44,003 in 1999. This represents a modest 2.6 percent decline in new juvenile cases (See Figure 1).

The five most populous counties in Texas, based on the 1990 census, account for over half (54.3 percent) of the new juvenile cases added to the docket during fiscal year 1999: Harris County (10,302 cases); Dallas County (4,029 cases); Bexar County (4,596 cases); Tarrant County (2,620 cases); and El Paso County (2,329 cases). Harris County alone accounted for

nearly one-quarter (23.4 percent) of the new juvenile cases added to the courts' dockets in 1999.

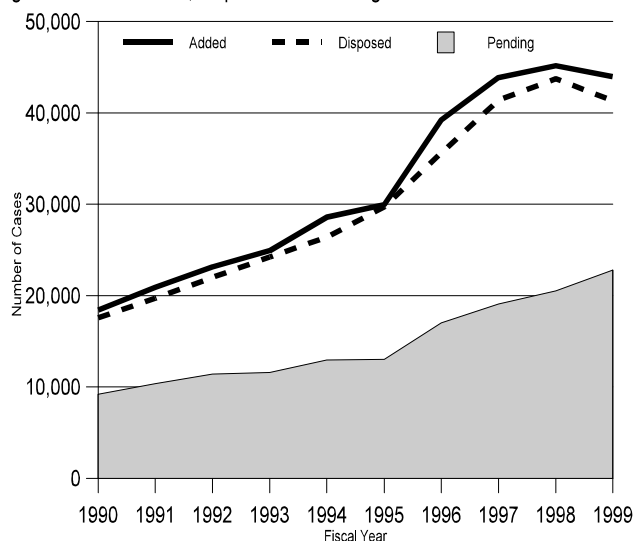
In an effort to address the rise in juvenile crime over the past decade, juvenile courts in the larger Texas counties have been using juvenile law masters, referees, and associate judges to assist with detention hearings and the adjudication of cases under Title 3 of the family Code. Sixteen counties, including Hidalgo County which hired a juvenile law referee in 1999 through a Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grant, are currently utilizing the services of juvenile law masters, referees, or associate judges to assist with juvenile matters.²

Juvenile Case Dispositions

In fiscal year 1999, a total of 41,310 juvenile cases were disposed by district and county courts in Texas, or 93.9 percent of the 44,003 new cases added to the docket during the year. Of the dispositions made in 1999, 24,044 (58.2 percent) resulted in findings of delinquent conduct or conduct in need of supervision (C.I.N.S).

The vast majority (85.2 percent) of findings of

Figure 1: Cases Added, Disposed and Pending



¹New cases added to the docket include new petitions filed (34,978), motions to revoke probation filed (4,933), and other cases added (4,092).

²See *Results of the Study of Juvenile Case Processing* (Office of Court Administration, August 1998).

delinquent conduct or C.I.N.S, or disposition involving motions to revoke probation, resulted in probation being granted or continued. In 1999, probation was granted under parental care in 82 percent of the cases, to residential treatment facilities in 17.4 percent of the cases, and under foster care in the remaining 0.4 percent of the cases.

In fiscal year 1999, a total of 2,953 commitments (or 12.7 percent of all dispositions resulting in findings of delinquent conduct) were made to Texas Youth Commission (T.Y.C) facilities. This is roughly the same percentage of children (12.6 percent) ordered confined to T.Y.C facilities in 1998.

certified to stand trial as adults (or 1.5 percent of all dispositions resulting in findings of delinquent conduct). This total is down 14.7 percent from 1998, when 408 children were certified to be tried as adults, and down 30 percent from 1995, when 499 children were certified for trial as adults.

Other actions taken by juvenile courts during the fiscal year included the holding of 32,894 detention hearings and 2,936 hearings on motions to modify court orders.

During 1999, a total of 348 children were