

Family Justice Initiative

Texas Judicial Council

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Austin, Texas

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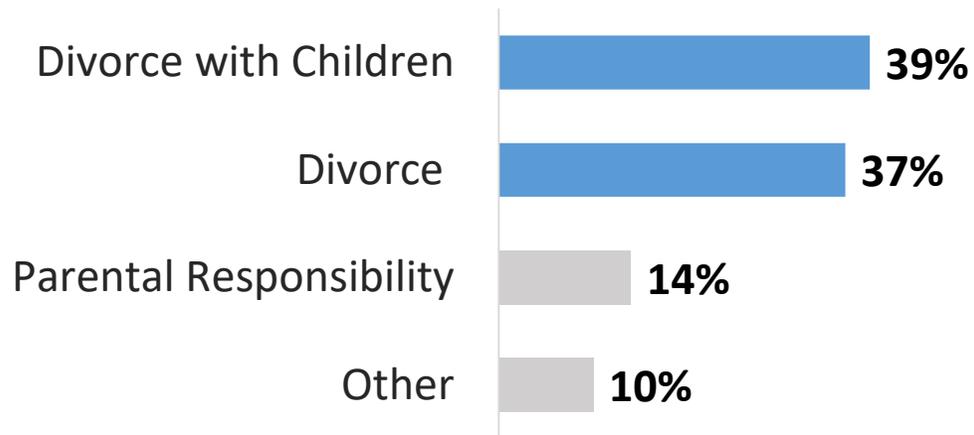
Landscape of Domestic Relations Cases in State Courts

(July 2016 – June 2017)

Filings

4.5 MILLION (*estimated*) domestic relations cases were filed in 2016.

Three-quarters of petitions involved **divorce** cases, just over half of which involved children.



64% of cases were **uncontested**.

*Cases involving **children** and **reopened** cases were more likely to be contested, but more than half were **uncontested**.*



1 in 5 cases were **reopened** cases.



In many courts, the majority of litigants did not have legal representation. **72%** of cases involved at least **1 self-represented** party.



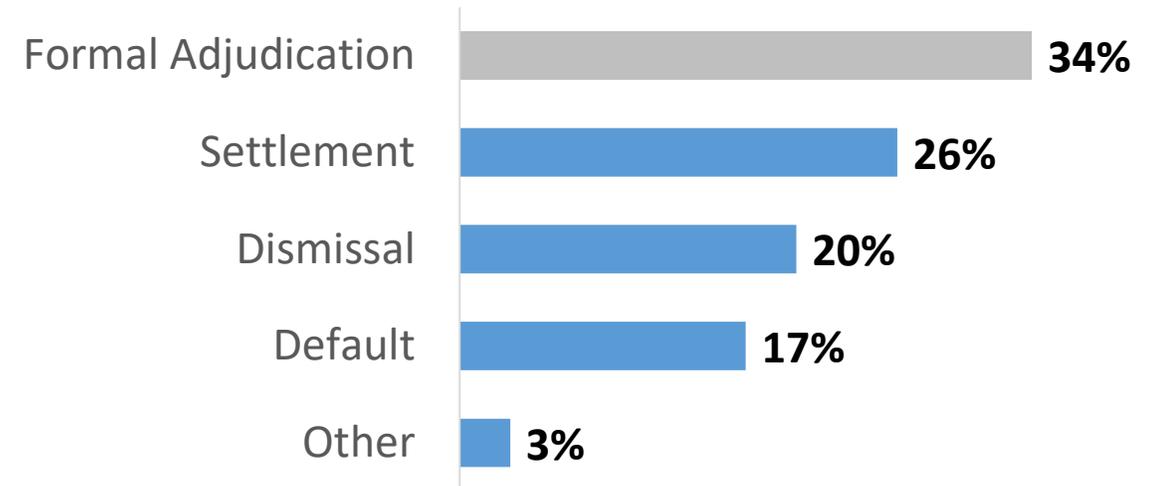
Disposition

Meaningful case events such as pretrial conferences and in-court hearings were **held infrequently**, even in contested cases.

Case Status	Pretrial Conferences	Hearings
Uncontested	33%	16%
Contested	53%	44%

A **very small** proportion of cases involved traditional adversarial process of lawyers presenting evidence and legal arguments.

The majority of cases **did not involve a formal adjudication**.



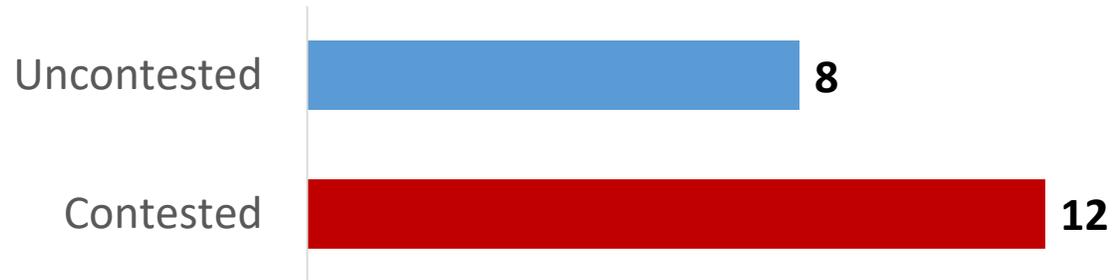
Time to Disposition

75% of **contested** cases were disposed within **12 months**, while the same percentage of **uncontested** cases resolved within **8 months**.



The *Model Time Standards for State Trials Courts* recommend that **75% of divorce cases be disposed within 4 months**, not including statutory waiting periods.

Months to Disposition – 75% of Cases

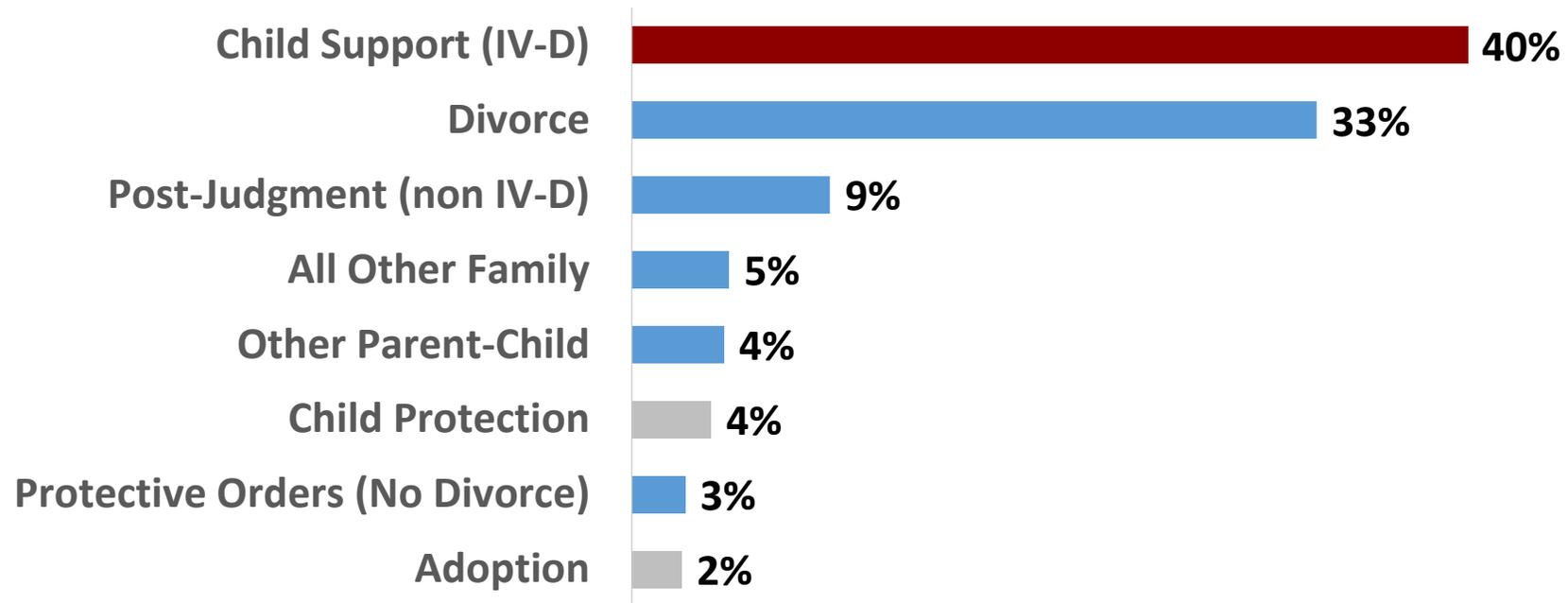


Landscape of Family Law Cases in *Texas*

(September 2017 – August 2018)

380 THOUSAND new family law cases were filed in 2018, accounting for 20% of district court and 3% of county court at law caseload.

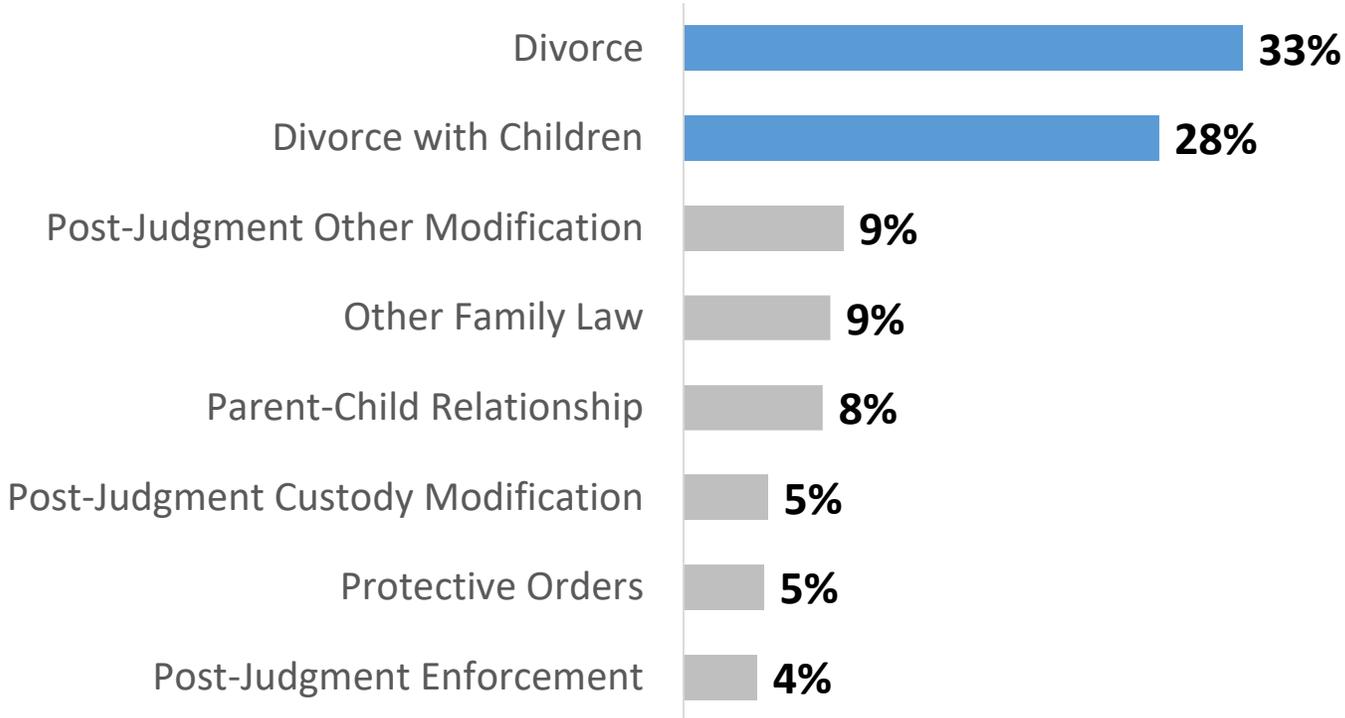
Domestic relations cases accounted for 54% of cases, and **IV-D child support** cases accounted for 40%.



Domestic Relations Cases

Filings

More than **60%** of domestic relations cases were new **divorce** cases, 46% of which involved children.



1 in 5 cases were **reopened** cases.



40% of petitioners were **self-represented** at the time of filing.

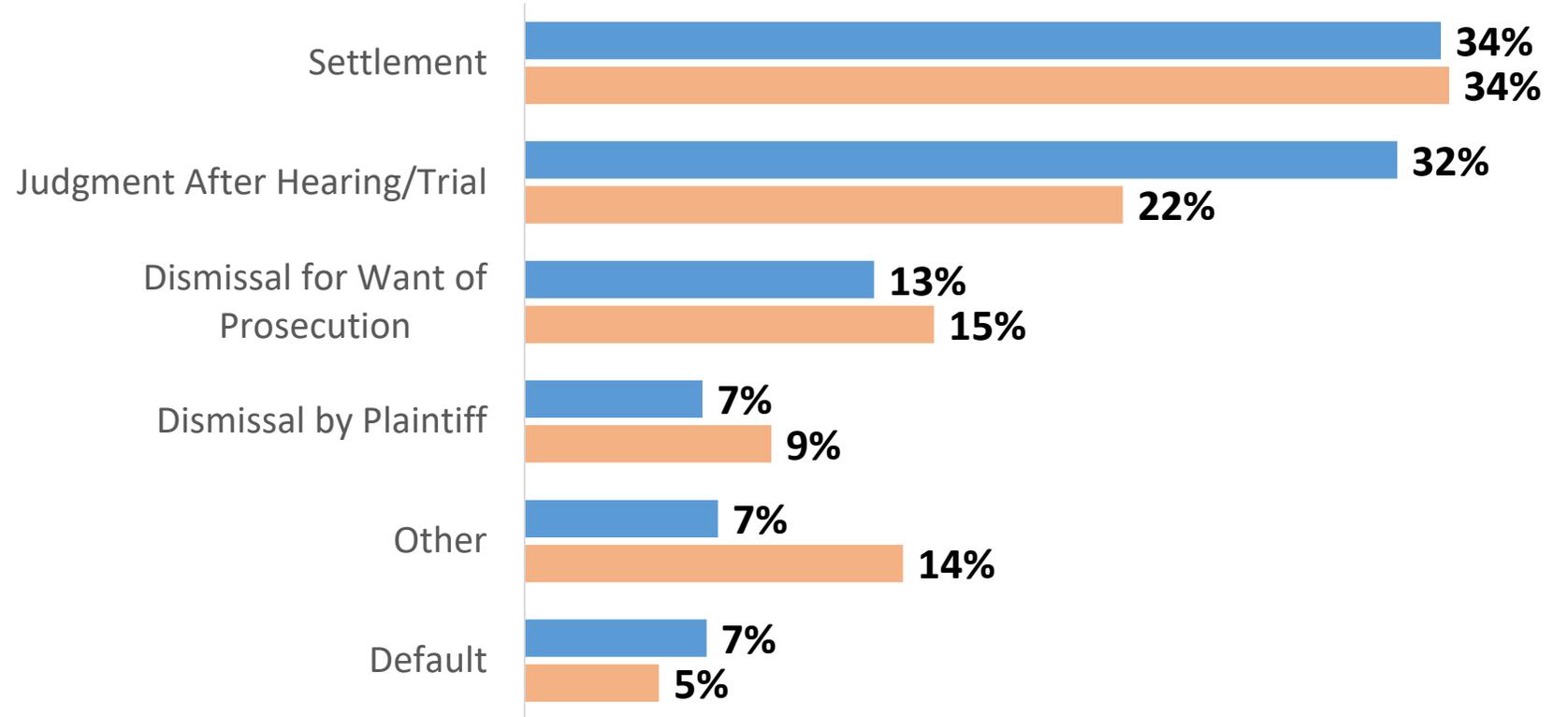


Disposition

The majority of cases **did not involve a formal adjudication.**

New and **reopened** cases were equally likely to be disposed by **settlement.**

New cases were more likely than reopened cases to be disposed after a **hearing or trial**, and **reopened** cases were slightly more likely to be **dismissed.**

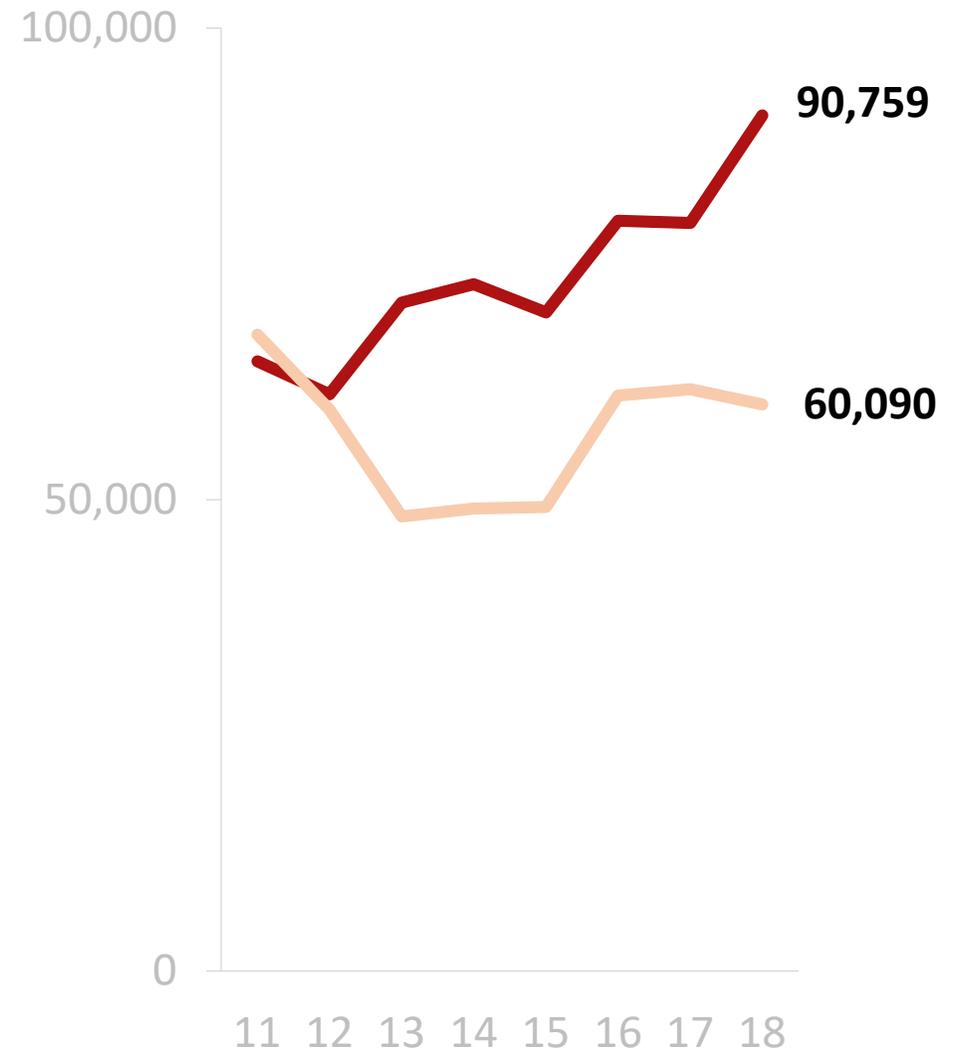


IV-D Child Support Cases

Filings

The number of **new** IV-D suits filed increased by **25 percent** over the last 5 years.

2 in 5 cases filed were **reopened** cases.

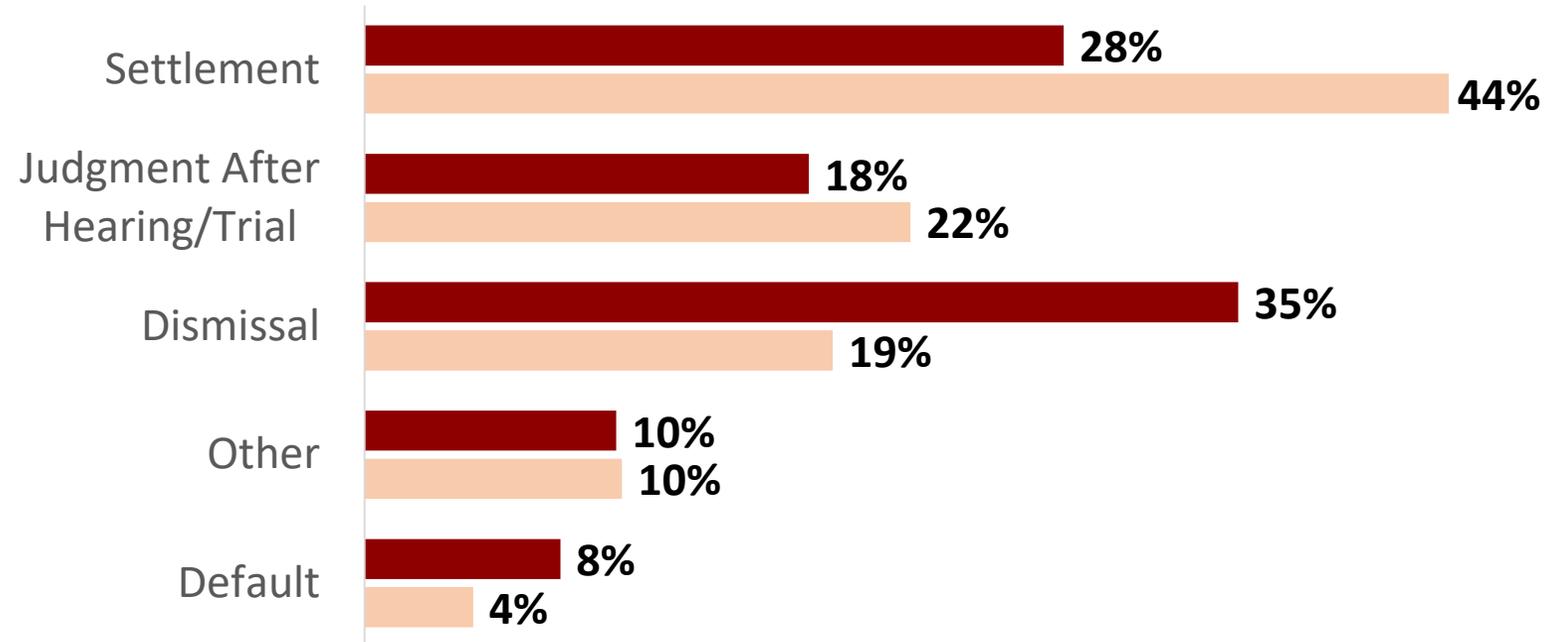


Disposition

The majority of cases **did not involve a formal adjudication.**

New cases were most likely to be dismissed while **reopened** cases were more likely to settle.

A formal adjudication was slightly more likely in a **reopened** case.

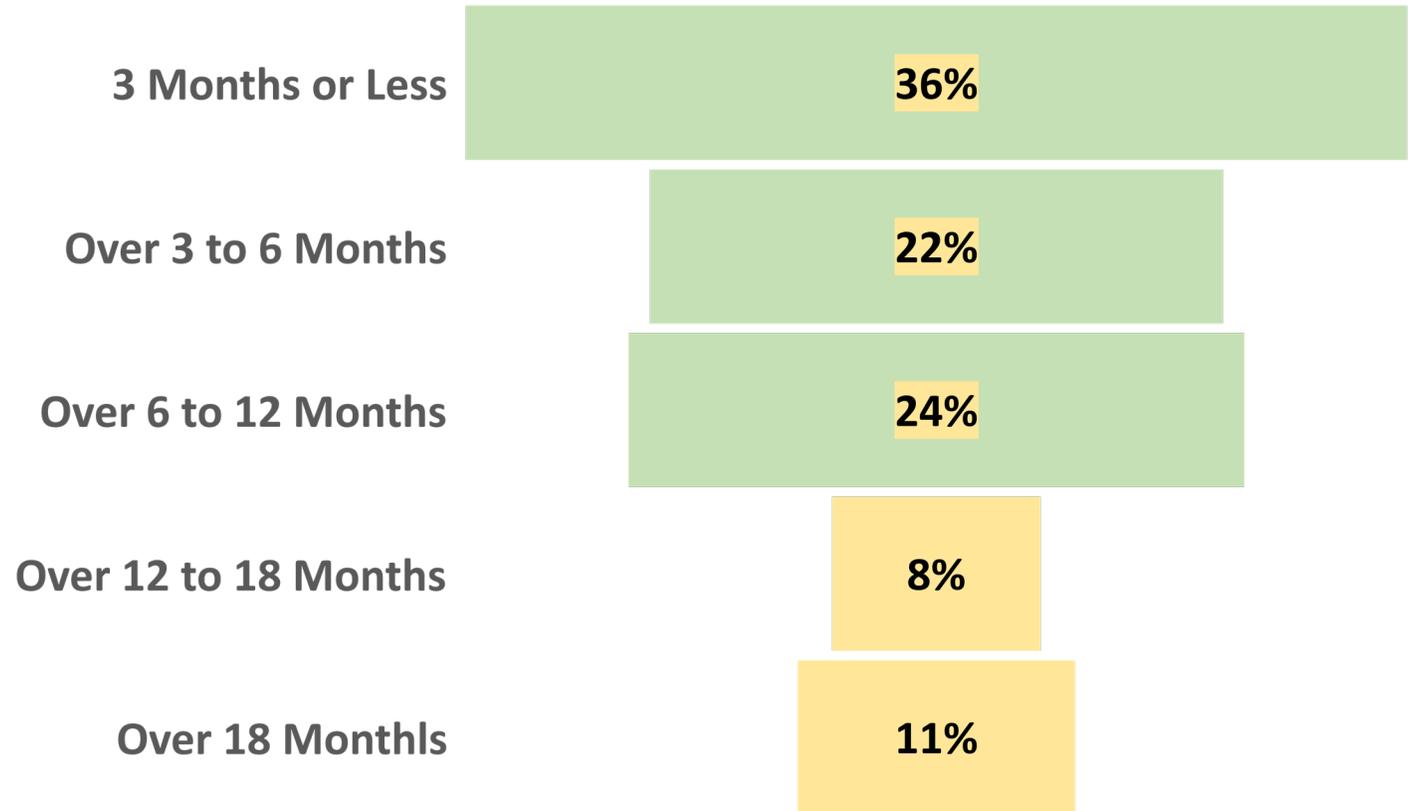


Time to Disposition

All Family Law Cases

58% of all family law cases were disposed within 6 months and **81%** were disposed within 12 months.

State law requires a 60 day waiting period from the date a divorce suit is filed until the court may grant a divorce.

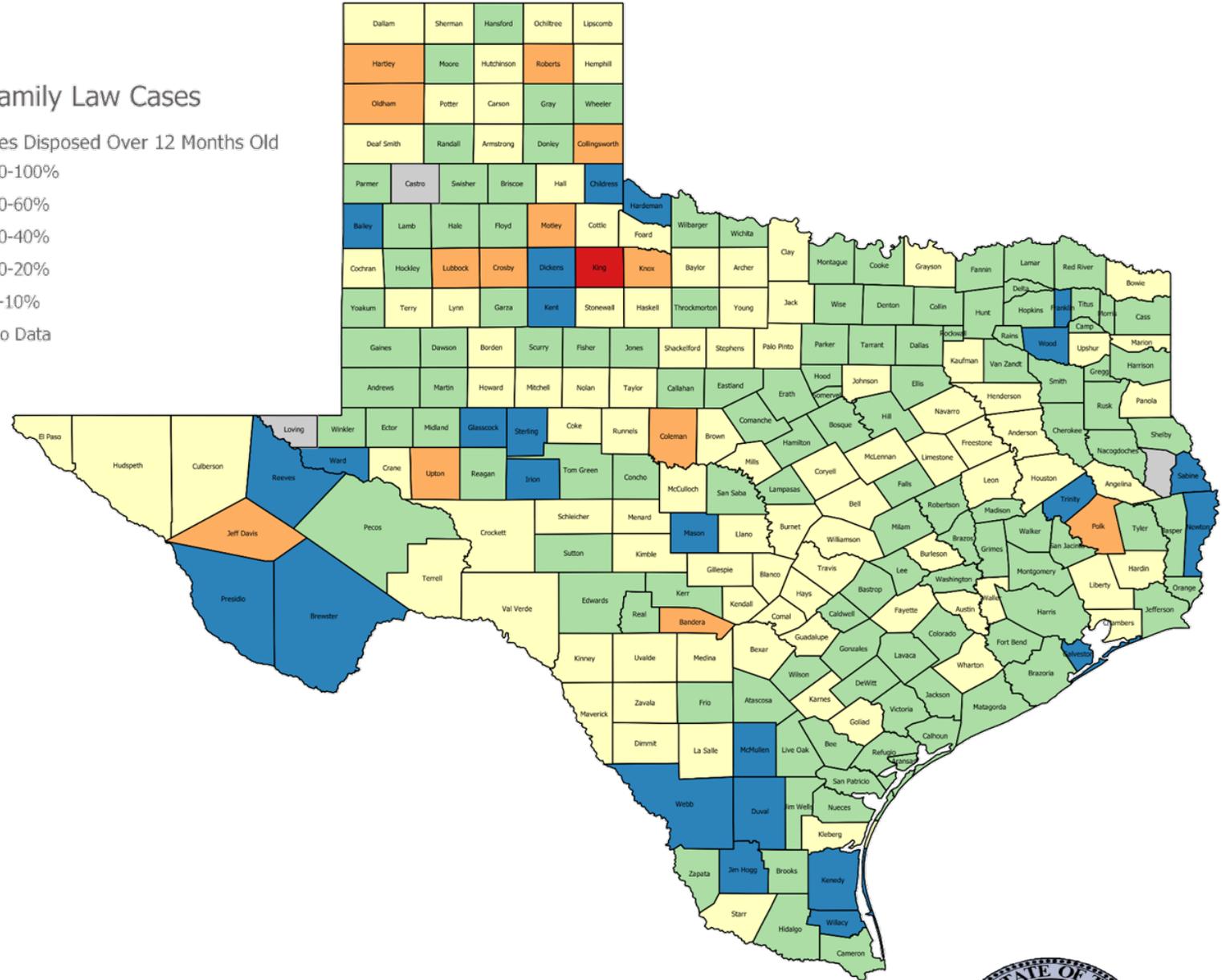


This map shows the percentage of all family law cases **disposed** by county that were **older than 12 months**, with **red** being the **highest** and **blue** being the **lowest**.

All Family Law Cases

% Cases Disposed Over 12 Months Old

- 60-100%
- 40-60%
- 20-40%
- 10-20%
- 0-10%
- No Data



Family Justice Initiative

The Family Justice Initiative (FJI) was established to provide courts across the county with validated, data-informed strategies for improving the way they process domestic relations cases.



Family Justice Initiative Principles

- **Principle 1** – Direct an Approach that Focuses on Problem Solving
- **Principle 2** – Involve and Empower Parties
- **Principle 3** – Courts are Safety and Trauma-Responsive
- **Principle 4** – Provide Information and Assistance



Family Justice Initiative Principles

- **Principle 5** – Use a Service-based Pathway Approach
- **Principle 6** – Streamlined Pathway
- **Principle 7** – Tailored Services Pathway
- **Principle 8** – Judicial/Specialized Pathway



Family Justice Initiative Principles

- **Principle 9** – Training and Stakeholder Partnerships
- **Principle 10** – Identify and Strengthen Community Partnerships
- **Principle 11** – Improve Ongoing Data Collection, Analysis and Use of Data to Inform Case Management
- **Principle 12** – Collect and Analyze User-Evaluation Metrics
- **Principle 13** – Implement Innovative and Appropriate Technology



Study on Improving Family Court Outcomes in Texas

In November 2018, OCA received grant funding from SJI to partner with NCJFCJ and the Child and Family Research Partnership at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas.



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Thank You

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