

Analysis of Activity for the Year Ended August 31, 2000

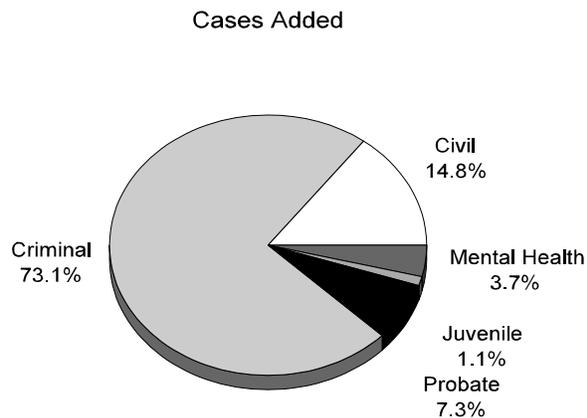
Overview

This section contains the court activity of the 254 constitutional county courts, the 192 statutory county courts-at-law, and the 15 statutory probate courts.

Cases Added

From the number of cases reported in fiscal year 2000, criminal cases constituted 74 percent (566,705) of the 774,764 total cases added to the dockets of the county courts. Total cases added includes all criminal, civil, and juvenile cases added to the dockets, as well as cases filed under probate and mental health. Of the remaining cases, civil cases accounted for 15 percent (114,414), probate cases represented 7 percent (56,627), mental health cases represented 4 percent (28,792), and juvenile cases represented 1 percent (8,226) of the total. Figure 1 below shows the breakdown of total cases added to the dockets of the county courts.

Figure 1: Total Cases Added (774,764)



Civil Docket

Of the new civil cases filed, the appeals to the county-level courts, and those cases otherwise added during the year ended August 31, 2000, 32 percent were classified as suits on debt, 15 percent concerned personal injury/damage suits, 7 percent were divorce suits, 9 percent concerned other family matters, 36 percent were other civil cases, and the remaining cases were tax suits.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Criminal cases constituted 74 percent of the 774,764 new cases added or appealed from the lower courts.
- The county-level courts had a clearance rate (total cases disposed/total cases added) of just slightly under 100 percent.
- The county-level courts disposed of 689,072 cases during the fiscal year.
- Twenty-seven percent of all criminal disposition were by dismissal.
- Total cases pending on the dockets of the county-level courts increased by 2 percent -- from 765,344 on September 1, 1999 to 779,906 on August 31, 2000.

Criminal Docket

Considering only criminal cases, 22 percent of the new cases filed, appealed to the county-level courts, or otherwise added, were for theft or worthless check, 19 percent were for driving while intoxicated or under the influence of drugs (DWI/DUID), 11 percent for violations of drug laws, 10 percent were for assault, 12 percent for traffic offenses, and 27 percent were for other criminal offenses.

In fiscal year 2000, 23,839 cases on the county-level criminal court dockets came by way of appeal from justice of the peace or municipal courts rather than being originally filed at the county-level courts or added in another manner.

Dispositions

Although the county courts had a clearance rate (total cases disposed/ total cases added) of just slightly under 100 percent for the fiscal year, during the twelve-month reporting period, the county-level courts of the State disposed of only 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). No statistics on the disposition of probate or mental health cases are recorded. The disposition rate was highest for juvenile cases, with 66 percent. Forty-eight percent of the criminal cases and 42 percent of the civil cases on the docket were disposed.

Of the criminal cases on the docket, the county-level courts disposed of 59 percent of the drug charges, 48 percent of the DWI/DUID charges, 34 percent of theft charges, 56 percent of assault charges, 56 percent of traffic cases, and 55 percent of other criminal cases. Of the criminal dispositions during the year, 47 percent of them were convictions, and less than 1 percent were acquittals.

Deferred adjudication accounted for 74,231 disposition, or 13 percent of the total amount of dispositions. Deferred adjudication was most frequent in traffic cases and drug offense cases—fourteen percent of traffic cases were disposed of by deferred adjudication, and 13 percent of drug offenses.

In fiscal year 2000, there were 2,951 total acquittals in criminal cases, a significant decrease from the 6,231 total acquittals in criminal cases. Of the acquittals, 51 percent occurred in non-jury trials, 43 percent were from jury verdicts, and 6 from direct verdict (or JNOV).

Twenty-seven percent of all criminal dispositions were by dismissal. Within each case category, dismissals accounted for 13 percent of the DWI/DUID case dispositions, 44 percent of the theft cases, 18 percent of the drug cases, 32 percent of the assault cases, 31 percent of the traffic cases, and 24 of the other criminal case dispositions. Seven percent, or

10,485, of the cases were dismissed due to insufficient evidence against the defendant, and 3 percent, or 3,964 of cases were dismissed due to Speedy Trial Act limitations.

With regard to civil cases, only 1 percent, or 843, of the cases were determined by jury verdicts. Fifteen percent of the cases were determined by judgements after trial without a jury, and 36 percent of the disposition were by dismissals. The remaining 48 percent were default judgements, agreed judgements, show causes, or other dispositions.

Total Pending Caseload Increases Slightly

Total cases pending on the dockets of the county-level courts increased by 2 percent--from 765,344 on September 1, 1999, to 779,906 on August 31, 2000. This does not include probate or mental health cases. See Figure 2 below for the ten-year trend.

Of the pending caseload, 78 percent were criminal cases, 21 percent were civil cases, and 1 percent were from the juvenile docket. The number of pending criminal cases increased 2 percent during the fiscal year, from 601,544 at the end of fiscal year 1999 to 612,209 at the end fiscal year 2000. Civil cases also increased 2 percent from 159,773 to 163,549, and juvenile cases increased 3 percent from 4,027 to 4,128 over the fiscal year.

Figure 2: Cases Added, Disposed, and Pending

