

# Caseload Trends in Municipal Courts

## OVERVIEW

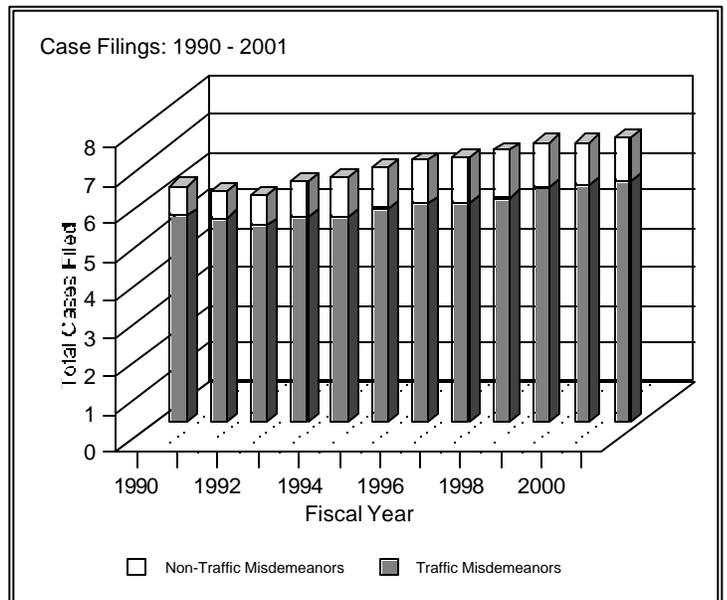
During state FY 2001, municipal courts operated in 869 Texas cities, compared to 861 courts operating during FY 2000. Section 71.035 of the Texas Government Code and Sections 171.1 and 171.2 of the Texas Administrative Code require each court to submit a monthly activity report to the Texas Judicial Council. Statewide, the Council received 9,417 reports out of a possible 10,440 for the year (a 90 percent reporting rate).

## REVENUE

- Municipal court revenue increased by two percent in FY 2001.** Revenue collected by the reporting courts totaled \$451,599,258 for the year. The amount of revenue per disposition averaged approximately \$62, compared to \$57 a year ago. The courts deposit this revenue in the treasury of the city where the court has jurisdiction; however, certain court costs on each case are remitted to special funds of the State.

## FILINGS AND DISPOSITIONS

- Municipal court caseloads continued to grow in FY year 2001.** In FY 2001, filings in Texas municipal courts grew by 1.9 percent, while dispositions grew by 1.3 percent. There were 7,443,443 filings and 7,280,452 dispositions. As the chart to the right indicates, this increase is consistent with the steady increase over the past decade. Most of the 138,188 additional filings were non-parking traffic cases (112,275).

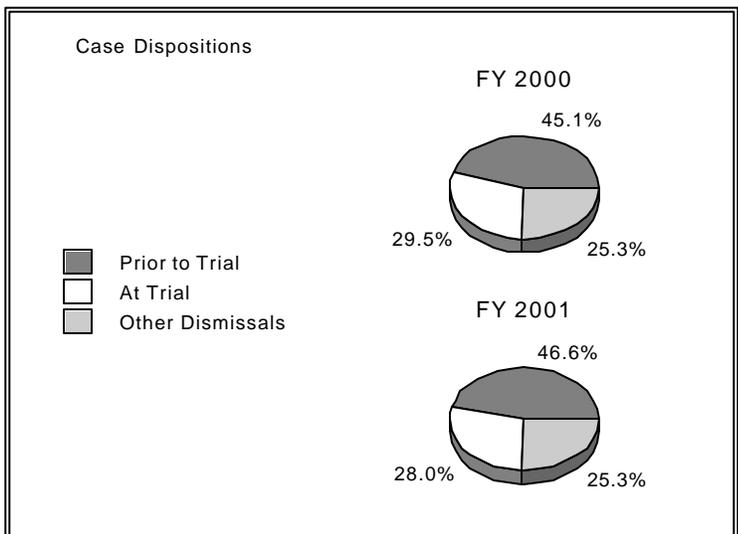


- During FY 2001, traffic cases continued to dominate docket activity.** Of the total cases filed, traffic cases accounted for 84.4 percent, and non-traffic criminal cases accounted for the other 16 percent of all cases filed. Non-parking-traffic (moving violations) filings accounted for 70.1 percent of the overall caseload, while parking-traffic cases accounted for just 14.3 percent of all case filings.

- In FY 2001, parking case filings remained constant, while non-parking traffic case filings rose.** The additional non-parking traffic cases noted above amount to a 2.2 percent increase in filings. However, parking cases increased by just over one-tenth of one percent, a trend consistent with recent years.

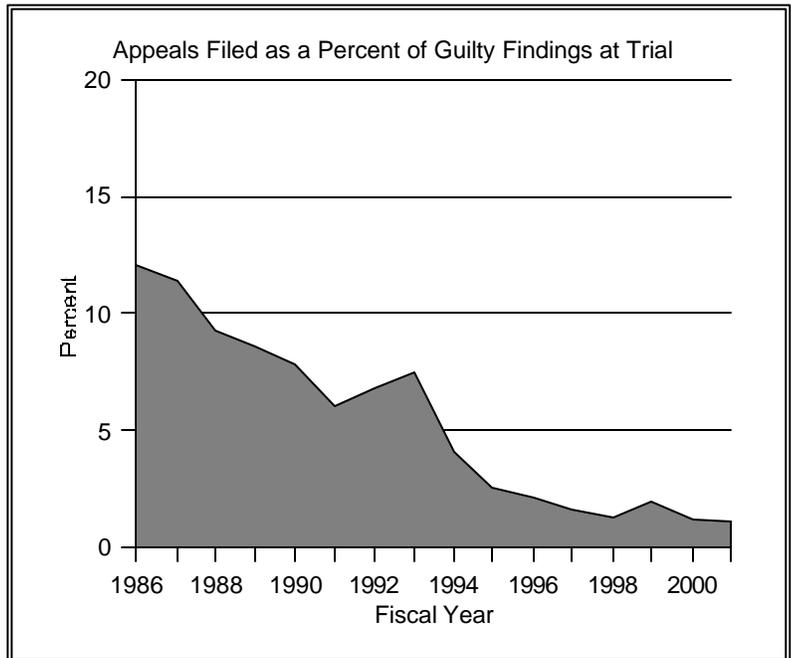
- City ordinance misdemeanor filings dropped for the first time since FY 1988, while state law misdemeanor filings increased in FY 2001.** State law misdemeanors rose by 27,615 cases in FY 2001, accounting for a 3.1 percent increase over FY 2000. Also, city ordinance filings fell by 2,930 cases, a drop of 1.2 percent.

- In FY 2001, Dispositions prior to trial made up 46.6 percent of all dispositions.** As a percent of all dispositions, dispositions prior to trial grew by an additional 1.5 percent. Most of these dispositions, 83 percent, were by payment of fine. The rate of dispositions prior to trial lost 1.5 percent, while the rate of other dismissals remained constant (See chart at bottom of page).



## OTHER ACTIVITY

- **Bench trials accounted for 99.6 percent of all cases reaching a verdict in FY 2001.** Of the 1,226,628 cases that went to trial and were not dismissed, 1,221,799 were tried before a judge alone, and 4,829 cases were disposed by jury trials. Defendants appearing before the judge only were acquitted in just 1 of every 33 cases, while those appearing before a jury fared much better, receiving acquittals in approximately 1 out of every 4 cases.



- **In FY 2001, 1,581 fewer traffic cases were appealed.** This 12.6 percent drop occurred despite an additional 30,497 guilty findings during the year (3.5 percent more than in FY 2000). Consequently, the rate at which traffic cases were appealed from guilty verdicts fell from 1.4 percent in FY 2000 to 1.2 percent in FY 2001. This perpetuates a fifteen-year pattern of decline in rate of appeals in municipal court traffic cases. Since FY 1993 alone, appeals from traffic cases have dropped 83 percent (from 66,153 to 10,996), while the number of guilty dispositions has increased by 42 percent (from 639,661 to 909,013).

- **Appeals in non-traffic misdemeanor cases increased by 8.6 percent in FY 2001.** The additional 162 appeals in non-traffic misdemeanor cases amounted to an 8.6 percent increase over last year. Because guilty findings in such cases increased by nearly the same rate, the rate of appeals rose only one-tenth of one percent (from 0.6 to 0.7).

- **Municipal court judges issued over 2 million arrest warrants in FY 2001.** During FY 2001, 2,000,053 arrest warrants were issued, 5,247 search warrants were issued, 189,628 magistrate warnings were given, and 5,392 emergency protective orders were issued. All of these figures are up from FY 2000.

- **Juvenile activity fell by 9.6 percent in FY 2001.** In FY 2001, municipal courts handled 286,261 juvenile matters, compared to 313,443 the previous year. There were 121,167 transportation code offenses, 41,013 alcoholic beverage code offenses, and 2,898 DUI of alcohol offenses filed. Non-traffic fine-only offenses accounted for 85,070 of the juvenile cases filed.

- **In FY 2001, filings in the eight largest courts continued to decline as relative to the rest of the state.** The combined filings of the eight largest courts, including Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, El Paso, Austin, Fort Worth, Arlington, and Corpus Christi, sank to 3,244,062 in FY 2001. This accounts for 47 percent of the total municipal court filings in the state. This is a drop from FY 1999 when these eight courts accounted for half of the municipal court filings in the state and from FY 1998 when these eight courts accounted for over half of statewide filings.

