

# Caseload Trends in the District Courts

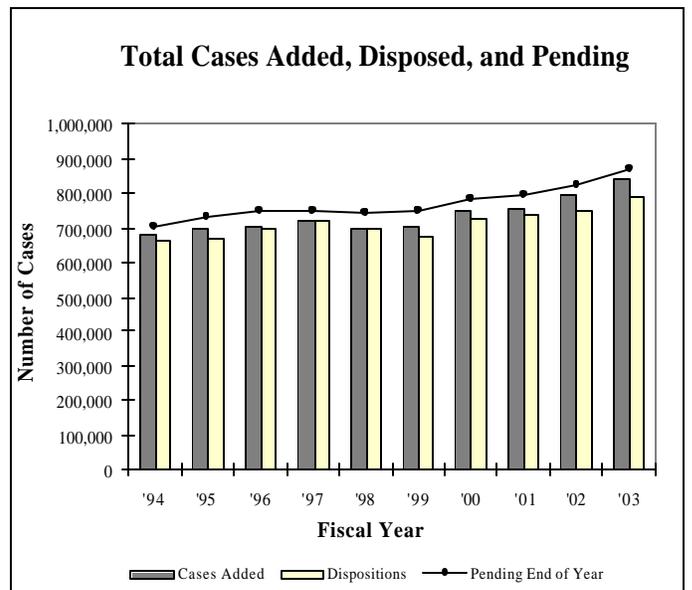
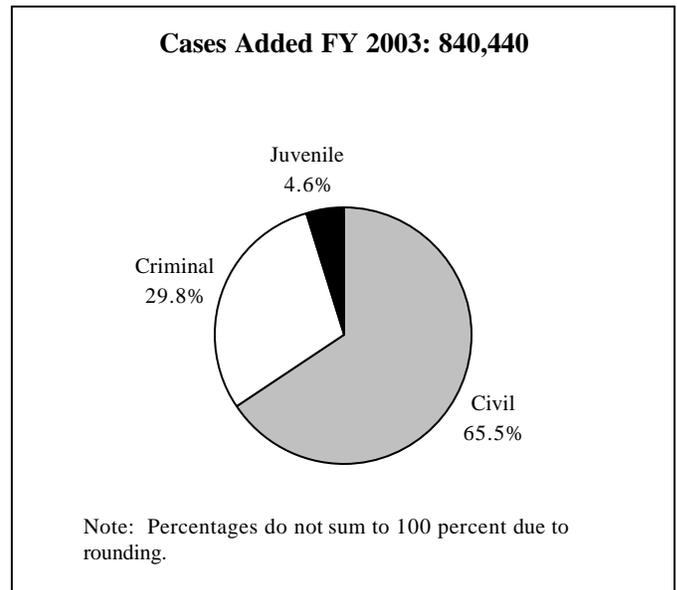
## Analysis of Activity for Year Ended August 31, 2003

### BACKGROUND

As of August 31, 2003, 418 district courts were operating in Texas. District courts, the primary trial courts in Texas, are courts of general jurisdiction, and most of these courts exercise both criminal and civil jurisdiction. In metropolitan areas, however, district courts tend to specialize in civil, criminal, or family law matters. Additionally, in a few localities, courts that primarily exercise criminal jurisdiction are designated "criminal district courts." A limited number of district courts in the state also possess subject matter jurisdiction normally exercised by county courts.

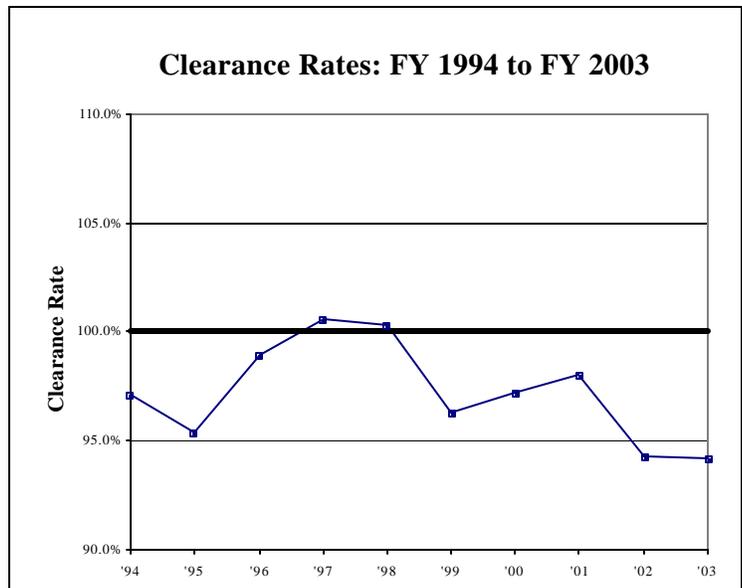
### CASE FILINGS

- District courts added more cases to their dockets overall (840,440 cases) than in any previous year.** The new high in cases added continues an upward trend that began in FY 1999, when 700,578 total cases were added. Of the cases added to the dockets in FY 2003, 65.5 percent (550,633 cases) were civil, 29.8 percent (250,791 cases) were criminal, and 4.6 percent (39,016 cases) were juvenile.
- The number of civil cases added to the dockets in FY 2003 was 550,633 cases, an increase over the previous fiscal year when 525,178 cases were added. This continues an upward trend in civil cases added that began in FY 1999.** New cases filed in FY 2003 (432,363 cases) made up the majority of the civil cases added at 78.5 percent, while show cause motions (106,848 motions) accounted for 19.4 percent. Approximately 41 percent (228,717 cases) of all civil cases added involved family law matters other than divorce. Divorce cases (119,075 cases) comprised the second largest share of civil cases added, constituting 21.6 percent of total civil cases added.
- More criminal cases were added to the dockets of district courts in FY 2003 (250,791 cases) than in any other fiscal year.** Over the past ten fiscal years, the number of criminal cases added to the dockets has ranged from 201,471 cases in FY 1995 to 250,791 in FY 2003. Of the cases added to the docket in FY 2003, cases filed by indictment (157,083 cases) represented 62.6 percent of all criminal cases added. Motions to revoke probation or deferred adjudication (57,308 motions) were the second highest category of criminal cases added (22.9 percent). Drug possession cases (52,919 cases) were the largest single type of criminal case added to the dockets, accounting for 21.1 percent of all criminal cases added. Drug sale or manufacture cases (25,308 cases) made up the second largest category of criminal cases added, representing 10.1 percent of the total.
- The number of juvenile cases added to the dockets of district courts in FY 2003 (39,016 cases) was at its highest level ever.** Since FY 1994, when 23,517 cases were added, there has been a 65.9 percent increase in the number of juvenile cases added to the dockets of district courts. Of the new cases added to the dockets in FY 2003, delinquent conduct cases accounted for 97.8 percent (38,156 cases), while conduct indicating a need for supervision (CINS) accounted for 2.2 percent (860 cases).



## DISPOSITIONS

- During FY 2003, district courts disposed of a total of 791,294 cases. On average, each of the 418 district judges disposed of 1,893 cases in FY 2003.** Since FY 1999, when 674,579 cases were disposed, there has been an increase in the number of cases disposed each year by district courts. Over the last five fiscal years (FY 1999 to FY 2003), the average number of cases disposed per year was 735,108.
- In FY 2003, the overall statewide clearance rate was 94.2 percent.** The clearance rate is the number of cases disposed in a time period divided by the number of cases added in the same time period. The clearance rate for FY 2003 was the lowest in the last ten fiscal years. Over the last ten fiscal years (FY 1994 to FY 2003), the clearance rate averaged 97.1 percent per year. During FY 2003, the clearance rate was 96.4 percent for criminal cases, 93.2 percent for civil cases, and 93.0 percent for juvenile cases.



- Criminal cases accounted for 30.6 percent (241,854 cases) of all cases disposed in FY 2003, civil dispositions comprised 64.8 percent (513,142 cases), and juvenile cases comprised 4.6 percent (36,298 cases).**
- FY 2003 marked the first time that more than half a million civil cases (513,142 cases) were disposed in a single year.** Over the last ten fiscal years (FY 1994 to FY 2003), the district courts have averaged 468,014 civil case dispositions per year.
- During FY 2003, 23.2 percent (118,853 cases) of all civil cases disposed were disposed by a trial before a judge, while 0.4 percent (1,842 cases) were disposed by a trial before a jury.** Show causes accounted for 18.5 percent (95,163 cases) of all civil dispositions in FY 2003, while 16.8 percent (85,961 cases) were dismissed by the plaintiff, 15.4 percent (79,050 cases) were agreed judgments, 8.7 percent (44,392 cases) were dismissed for want of prosecution, and 8.1 percent (41,461 cases) were default judgments.
- Of the 513,142 civil cases disposed in FY 2003, the courts disposed of 70.7 percent (362,794 cases) within twelve months.** The percentage of civil cases which were disposed within twelve months was higher than the five-year (FY 1999 to FY 2003) average of 68.5 percent on average per year and the ten-year (FY 1994 to FY 2003) average of 67.2 percent on average per year.
- The total number of criminal cases disposed in FY 2003 was 241,854, the highest number ever.** This represents a 14.3 percent increase over the ten-year (FY 1994 to FY 2003) average of 211,549 cases disposed per year.
- Cases in which there was a conviction (106,130 cases) accounted for 43.9 percent of all criminal cases disposed in FY 2003.** The defendant entered a plea of guilty or nolo contendere in 42.3 percent (102,418 cases) of criminal cases disposed during FY 2003. Deferred adjudication dispositions made up 15.9 percent (38,559 cases) of all criminal cases disposed in FY 2003, while dismissals accounted for 14.8 percent (35,893 cases) and motions to revoke hearings held, both granted and denied, represented 21.3 percent (51,580 hearings) of the total criminal dispositions in FY 2003.

**Criminal Cases Reaching Trial: FY 2003**

	Bench	Jury	All Trials
<b>Convictions</b>	577 (51.0%)	3,135 (80.9%)	3,712 (74.2%)
<b>Acquittals</b>	554 (49.0%)	738 (19.1%)	1,292 (25.8%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	1,131 (100%)	3,873 (100%)	5,004 (100%)

- Only 2.1 percent (5,004 cases) of the criminal cases disposed in FY 2003 were disposed at trial.** Of the 5,004 criminal cases that went to trial, 3,873 cases (77.4 percent) were tried before a jury, and the remaining 1,131 cases (22.6 percent) were tried before a judge. Acquittals occurred in 49.0 percent (554) of cases that were disposed by trial before a judge in FY 2003, compared to only 19.1 percent (738) of cases decided by a jury.

- **Of the 241,854 criminal cases disposed in FY 2003, the district courts disposed of 32.4 percent (78,403 cases) within 60 days, 10.6 percent (25,553 cases) in 61 to 90 days, 9.2 percent (22,265 cases) in 91 to 120 days, and 47.8 percent (115,633 cases) in over 120 days from the date of filing.** These percentages are almost identical to the ten-year averages (FY 1994 to FY 2003) of 32.5 percent for cases disposed within 60 days, 10.6 percent in 61 to 90 days, 9.0 percent in 91 to 120 days, and 47.9 percent disposed in over 120 days from the date of filing.
- **During FY 2003, district courts disposed of 36,298 juvenile cases.** The number of juvenile dispositions has remained relatively stable over the past five fiscal years (FY 1999 to FY 2003), during which the average number of juvenile dispositions was 35,512 cases disposed per year.
- **In FY 2003, there were 128 children certified by district courts to stand trial as an adult in criminal court.** This is significantly below the five-year (FY 1999 to FY 2003) average of 249 children per year certified to stand trial as an adult.
- **Out of the 35,476 delinquent conduct cases disposed of in FY 2003, a finding of delinquent conduct was made in 53.0 percent (18,814 cases) of the cases.** An affirmative finding of conduct indicating a need for supervision (CINS) occurred in 38.8 percent (278 cases) of the 822 CINS cases disposed.

## **OTHER ACTIVITY**

- **During FY 2003, 26 death sentences and 346 life sentences were assessed in district courts statewide.** The number of death sentences assessed in FY 2003 was lower than the ten-year (FY 1994 to FY 2003) average of 34 death sentences assessed per year. Similarly, the number of life sentences assessed in FY 2003 was below the ten-year (FY 1994 to FY 2003) average of 392 life sentences assessed each year. Harris County led the state with nine death sentences assessed in FY 2003. Dallas and Tarrant counties each had five death sentences, and Bexar County had three death sentences assessed during the fiscal year.
- **The 4,605 post-conviction writs of habeas corpus disposed in FY 2003 continued the stable five-year trend.** The average for the last five-year period (FY 1999 to FY 2003) was 4,552 writs disposed per year. The number of bond forfeiture proceedings disposed during FY 2003 (7,853 proceedings) was higher than the five-year (FY 1999 to FY 2003) average of 7,191 bond forfeiture proceedings disposed per year.