

TEXAS COURT ACTIVITY

OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITY FOR YEAR ENDED AUGUST 31, 1995

APPELLATE COURTS

SUPREME COURT

The 1,021 applications for writs of error filed during fiscal year 1995 represented a 3.1 percent decrease from the 1,054 applications filed in fiscal year 1994, and was 1.0 percent higher than the 10-year average of 1,011.

The Court "passed on" (disposed of or otherwise acted upon) a total of 3,074 matters during fiscal year 1995, a decrease of 4.1 percent from the 3,297 matters passed on in fiscal year 1994.

During the fiscal year 1995, the justices of the Supreme Court wrote 246 opinions (or an average of 27.3 opinions each), 7.4 percent more than the 229 opinions written in fiscal year 1994 and 13.5 percent more than the 10-year average of 215.

COURT OF CRIMINAL APPEALS

The 348 cases added to the docket of the Court of Criminal Appeals in fiscal year 1995 represent an increase of 1.8 percent from the 342 cases added during fiscal year 1994, which ended August 31, 1994.

Judges of the Court of Criminal Appeals wrote 526 opinions during fiscal year 1995, of which 341 (64.8 percent) were "deciding" opinions disposing of cases. The remainder were dissents, concurrences, and opinions on rehearings. Of the deciding opinions, 127 were signed and 214 were per curiam. During 1994, members of the Court wrote 468 opinions, 73.0 percent of which were deciding opinions.

COURTS OF APPEALS

The Courts of Appeals disposed of 9,649 total cases during the year, an average of 121 dispositions (64 criminal and 57 civil) per justice. The pending caseload increased from 9,127 at the beginning of the fiscal year to 9,438 at the end of the year.

A total of 9,734 cases was filed in the Courts of Appeals during the fiscal year, which included 5,430 criminal cases and 4,304 civil cases. This was an increase of 4.7 percent from the 9,297 total new cases filed in fiscal year 1994. New criminal cases increased 8.5 percent from the 5,210 filed in fiscal year 1994 and civil cases increased 1.9 percent from the 4,380 filed in fiscal year 1994.

The average lapse of time between the filing of a civil case in a Court of Appeals and its disposition ranged from 4.8 months in the Sixth Court of Appeals in Texarkana to 12.6 months in the Thirteenth Court of Appeals in Corpus Christi. The average lapse of time in the 14 courts for civil cases was 8.2 months.

The average lapse of time between the filing of a criminal case in a Court of Appeals and its disposition ranged from 8.5 months in the Sixth Court of Appeals in Texarkana to 22.3 months in the Fifth Court of Appeals in Dallas. The average lapse of time for the 14 courts was 12.4 months.

In fiscal year 1995, the justices of the Courts of Appeals wrote 9,172 opinions, 1.5% less than the 9,301 written in 1994.

TRIAL COURTS

DISTRICT COURTS

Forty-six death sentences (compared to 43 in 1994) and 476 life sentences were assessed in the district courts during the year. Of the 200,793 criminal cases disposed by the district courts of Texas, 31.5 percent were disposed of in a period of less than two months from the date of indictment or information, 10.3 percent took two to three months, 8.7 percent took three to four months, and 49.5 percent took over four months.

Criminal cases added to the docket decreased 5 percent in the ten urban counties during fiscal year 1995 as compared to 1994. This compares to a decrease of 1 percent in criminal filings for all other counties of the State. Criminal filings increased in two of the ten urban counties: Nueces (18 percent) and Denton (22.1 percent). Counties reporting a decrease in criminal cases added to the docket were Harris (5 percent), Dallas (3 percent), Bexar (10 percent), Tarrant (3 percent), El Paso (26 percent), Travis (5 percent), Hidalgo (16 percent), and Collin (4 percent).

Civil cases accounted for 71 percent of all new cases filed during the fiscal year. The largest segment of civil cases filed (31.2 percent of new civil filings) were divorce actions.

During the fiscal year, the district courts disposed of 95.4 percent of the total civil and criminal cases added to their dockets, compared to 97.3 percent in 1994.

District courts handled 1.1 percent fewer divorce actions during 1995 than during 1994. During the fiscal year, 117,625 divorce cases, or 26.6 percent of all disposed civil (non-juvenile) cases, were handled by district courts. Some 16.3 percent of divorce cases were dismissed.

The total number of civil cases pending in the district courts on August 31, 1995, was 554,826 or 5.9% more than the 523,835 pending on September 1, 1994. Criminal cases pending increased 0.4 percent, from 168,467 to 169,063.

COUNTY-LEVEL COURTS

During the twelve-month reporting period, the county-level courts of the State disposed of 46.1 percent of the 1,370,314 total criminal, civil, and juvenile cases on their dockets (added during the year or carried over from the previous year).

From the number of cases reported, criminal cases constituted 74.0 percent (496,230) of the 670,878 new cases filed or appealed from lower courts. Civil cases accounted for 13.1 percent (87,775), probate cases represented 8.2 percent (55,192), and mental health cases represented 4.0 percent (26,783). New juvenile cases filed were 0.7 percent (4,898) of the total.

Total cases pending on the dockets of the county-level courts increased by 3.7 percent from 712,539 on September 1, 1994, to 738,514 on August 31, 1995.