

Judicial and Courthouse Security Survey Results Overview

The Office of Court Administration (OCA) distributed on January 22, 2016, an electronic survey to all judges in the state for whom OCA has email addresses. The survey asked judges a series of questions regarding their opinions about courthouse and personal security for judges. The distribution included 2,579 judges (out of just over 3,300 total judicial officers), and 1,115 judges responded – representing a 43.2% response rate. The high response rate makes the survey generalizable to the broader population of judges with a confidence level of 99% and a margin of error of +/- 2.91.

Responses were received from:

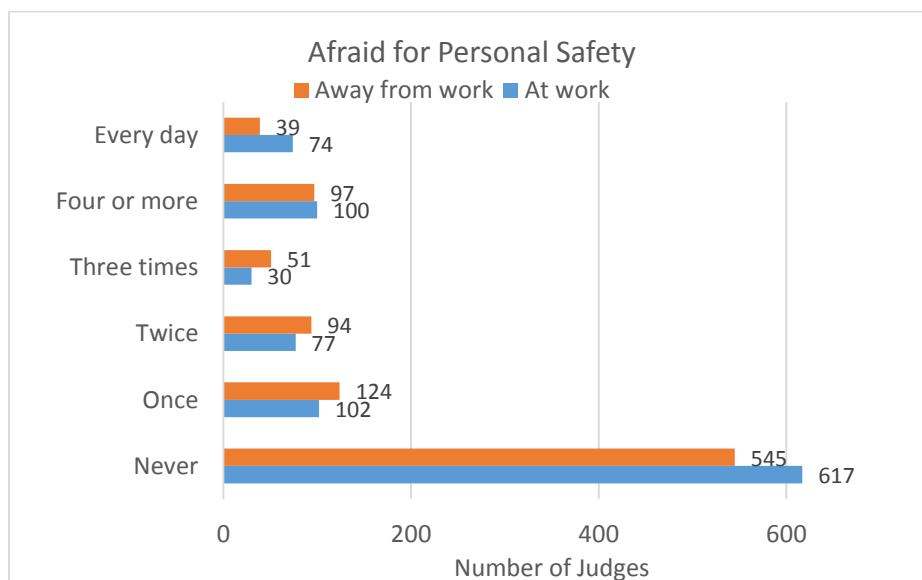
- 44/98 appellate judges (44.9%)
- 229/464 district judges (49.4%)
- 146/241 county court at law judges (60.6%)
- 14/18 statutory probate judges (77.8%)
- 87/254 constitutional county court judges (34.3%)
- 241/807 justices of the peace (29.9%)
- 254/1,272 municipal court judges (20.0%)
- 88/140 associate judges (62.9%)
- 48/300 assigned judges (16.0%)

While a full report of the results is not being made public due to security concerns, an overview of some of the key findings is below.

Judges' Personal Safety Concerns

While the majority of judges report never feeling afraid for their personal safety **at work** within the past two years, 10% report feeling afraid once, 10% four or more times, 8% twice, 7% every day, and 3% three times – a total of 38%. Judges' reasons for feeling insecure were most often related in stories detailed in the comments of the survey, while almost 40% were verbal or written threats.

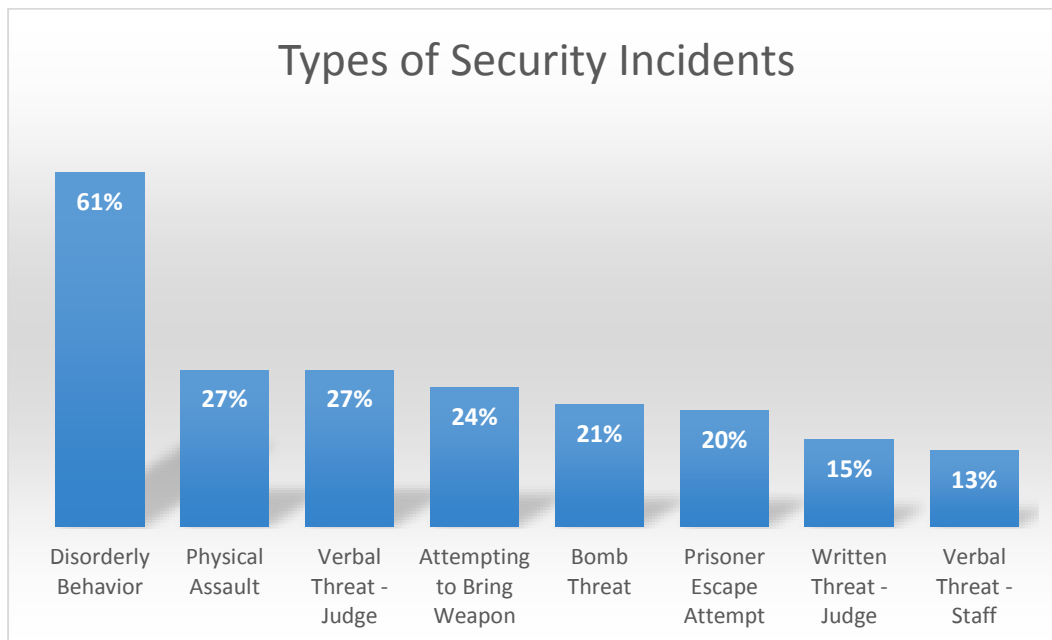
While 57% indicate never having felt afraid for their personal safety **away from work**, 13% report feeling afraid once, 10% four or more times, 10% twice, 5% three times, and 4% every day – a total of 42%.



Reporting of Security Incidents

The survey confirmed that there is underreporting of security incidents to the state. Despite the statutory requirement for local administrative judges to notify OCA of security incidents, 64% of judges are unaware of the requirement. For those who are aware of the requirement, 72% have never made a report. Those judges familiar with the requirement indicate that local administrative judge (28%) is responsible for reporting the incident. Just over 25% indicate they do not know who is responsible for reporting.

Almost half of the judges indicate that they are unaware of a security incident in their courthouse within the past ten years. However, 40% indicate an incident within the past two years (18% = past 6 months, 12% = last year, 10% = past two years). The most common occurrence (61%) is disorderly behavior, followed by physical assault (27%), verbal threat against the judge (27%) and attempting to bring a weapon into the courtroom or building (24%).



Only 26% were aware of a situation in which a member of the public was found to have brought weapons into the court or offices utilized by the court. Those who were aware indicated that a firearm was the weapon found most often (53%), followed by an illegal knife (36%) or other knife (28%).

Courthouse Entrance & Parking

While a majority of the courthouses have a single point of entry for the public, few have a separate entrance for court/county staff or special entrances for judges. Secured parking for judges is infrequent and is a concern for the judges in the state.

Prohibited Weapons

Even though Penal Code 46.03 prohibits certain weapons in the courthouse, there is not uniformity in the prohibition of these weapons in courthouses. Firearms are prohibited in almost three-fourths of the courthouses, followed closely by illegal knives (64%) and brass knuckles (52%).

Courthouse Security Measures

Confirming that security measures in courthouses are based upon local decisions and protocols, almost half of the judges who sit in different courthouses report that the security situation in the courthouses is vastly different, with an additional 20% reporting the security situation is somewhat different.

An additional concern raised is that security screening at public entrances is inconsistent, with almost half of the courthouses containing no screening at public entrances. Movement inside the courthouse is generally unrestricted, with a significant number of courthouse containing no separation in hallways utilized by the public and judges.

Cameras in the courthouse are common, mostly in the entrances/exits to/from the building (54%) and areas around the courtroom (44%), while few have them in the courtroom. One-quarter report not having cameras. Even when a courthouse contains security equipment, there is often not a security command center where monitoring occurs.

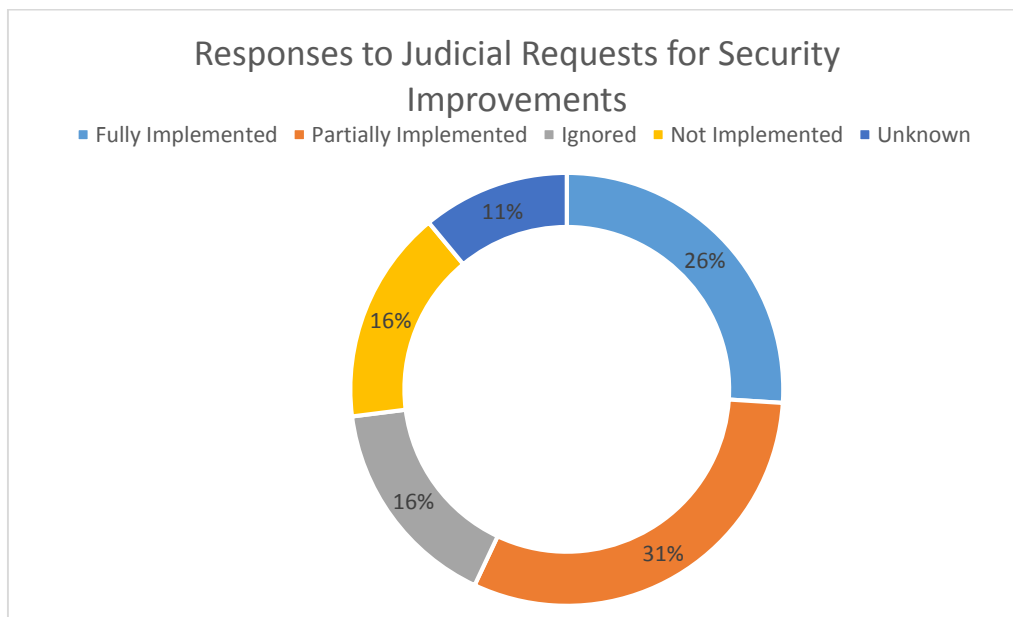
When there is an emergency occurring in the courthouse, most judges are notified person-to-person or by phone.

Court Security Training and Improvements

Only 22% of the judges report having been trained in court security measures.

Judges rated the quality of courthouse security services at their courthouse at 2.88 out of 5.

While 57% of judges have requested increased courthouse security in the past, only 57% report that the request was partially (31%) or fully implemented (26%). Thirty-two percent indicate that it was ignored (16%) or not implemented (16%). The most common reason given for not fully implementing the request was **a lack of funding for staff (49%), lack of funding for equipment (38%), lack of will to make the change (37%), or lack of a recognized problem (35%).**



Judges ranked the need for improved courthouse security in the following order of importance:

1. Point of entry screening
2. Security and emergency preparedness training
3. Law enforcement officer and/or court security training
4. Physical security systems
5. Judge/judicial officer movement in the courthouse
6. Mail and package delivery screening
7. In-custody defendant movement in the courthouse, including holding cells

Home Security

Almost half of the judges who can have their home addresses unlisted find the process to be too difficult, while very few found the process to be simple.

Technology security training for judges is virtually nonexistent, with 80% reporting no training.

Training and Technical Assistance

Forty-four percent of judges are interested in technical assistance with courthouse or personal security, with another 29% possibly interested. Sixty percent of judges report being interested in attending a summit dedicated to educating judges about the best practices in courthouse and personal security for judges.