

Examining the Work of State Courts, 2007

A National Perspective from the Court Statistics Project

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A joint project of the Conference of State Court Administrators, the Bureau of Justice Statistics,
and the National Center for State Courts.



BJS



Suggested Citation

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Examining the Work of State Courts, 2007:
A National Perspective from the Court Statistics Project
(National Center for State Courts 2008)

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National Center for State Courts
ISBN 0-89656-266-2

This project was supported by Grant No. 2007-BJ-CX-K016, awarded by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Acknowledgments

The Court Statistics Project is made possible by the continued support of state court administrators, trial court managers, appellate court clerks, and their staff. We owe a special debt of gratitude to the staff members of the administrative offices of the courts and of the appellate courts who serve as liaisons between their offices and the Court Statistics Project and who continuously seek to improve the quality, depth, and consistency of their state court data.

This year, a number of states made significant improvements in the level of detail provided by their trial courts. The enhancements to this data come as a result of implementing the data definitions, counting rules, and reporting framework published in the *State Court Guide to Statistical Reporting*. In some cases, states have taken advantage of new case management systems to make the change, while in others substantial effort has been made to reprogram existing systems to provide more meaningful statistics. These changes range from reporting additional case types to changing the method of counting criminal cases to distinguishing reopened and reactivated cases from new filings. In some instances, these changes applied to all the trial courts, while in others specific efforts were made in particular courts (e.g., district, circuit, juvenile, municipal).

We would like to acknowledge the work of the offices of the state court administrator in the following states for their important data improvement efforts: Iowa (criminal, domestic relations, juvenile), Kansas (civil, criminal, juvenile, traffic/ordinance), Minnesota (criminal, domestic relations), Montana (civil, criminal, traffic/ordinance), Nebraska (civil, criminal, domestic relations, traffic/ordinance), Ohio (domestic relations), South Dakota (civil, juvenile), Tennessee (domestic relations, traffic/ordinance), Wisconsin (juvenile), and Utah (criminal, juvenile). Both Oklahoma and Wyoming resumed reporting to the CSP for the first time in several years, and we appreciate their renewed commitment to reporting their caseload data.

The content and design of all reports and the Court Statistics Project Web site are guided by the members of the Court Statistics Committee of the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA). The committee members have given generously of their time, talent, and experience, and their participation has been invaluable to project staff.

The Court Statistics Project is funded through a cooperative agreement with the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). The authors wish to acknowledge the review and constructive comments provided by Thomas Cohen and Lynn Langton at BJS.

Special thanks to Neal Kauder of VisualResearch, Inc., for his innovative information design and to Judith Sullivan Phillips who skillfully created these pages and managed the printing.

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Foreword

The Court Statistics Project (CSP) provides the most comprehensive, up-to-date information regarding the nation's state courts through its annual publications, *Examining the Work of State Courts* and *State Court Caseload Statistics*. These reference works are supplemented by the *Caseload Highlights* series. All these publications are available at the Court Statistics Project's Web site, www.courtstatistics.org.

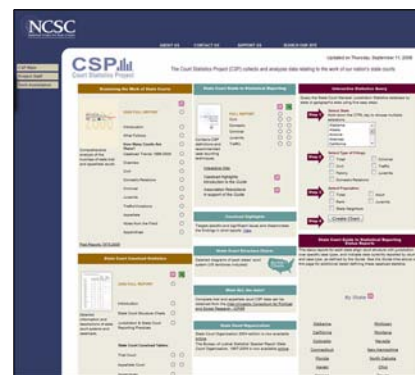
The purpose of *Examining the Work of State Courts* is to provide a concise, graphically oriented volume that makes state court statistics highly accessible. *Examining the Work of State Courts* has been designed to be interactive, giving the reader on-line access in its interactive PDF version to information that cannot reasonably be included in the text of the document. The links provided in this format encourage the use of the Web and provide the reader with additional resources that help to facilitate the understanding of the work of state courts.

State Court Caseload Statistics is a discrete reference volume, containing structure charts, statewide aggregate caseload data and reporting practices, population trends, and a detailed explanation of the Court Statistics Project methodology. *State Court Caseload Statistics* is exclusively available in electronic format on the Web at www.courtstatistics.org. The nature of that data also allows taking full advantage of Web publishing to make it more accessible to those who want to obtain and utilize the data, rather than view tables on a printed page.

The *Caseload Highlights* series continues to provide short, periodic reports on specific and significant issues. The Court Statistics Project recognizes that informed judges and court managers want information on a range of policy-relevant topics, and want it in a timely fashion and in a condensed, readable format.

These publications are developed through a cooperative agreement and generous support from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), Office of Justice Planning at the U.S. Department of Justice.

Detailed descriptive information on court structure is provided by another National Center for State Courts (NCSC) and



NCSC Court Statistics Project Home Page
www.courtstatistics.org

Foreword, continued

BJS joint project, *State Court Organization*. Topics covered include: the number of courts and judges; judicial selection; jury qualifications and verdict rules; and processing and sentencing procedures of criminal cases. Court structure diagrams summarize the key features of each state's court organization. The 2004 edition is available through BJS and at www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/sco04.htm.

Finally, the CSP continues to promote the implementation and use of the *State Court Guide to Statistical Reporting* (hereafter referred to as the *Guide*). Developed with support from the State Justice Institute and with close guidance from the Conference of State Court Administrators' Court Statistics Committee, the *Guide* is a tool for improving court administration by providing a national model for data reporting with concise descriptions and definitions of case types and disposition types, as well as a standardized framework in which to report these categories. The *Guide* is available in PDF on the NCSC Web site at www.courstatistics.org.

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Glossary of Terms

The terms below are used throughout *Examining the Work of State Courts, 2007* and are defined here to aid in the understanding of the following analyses. For additional definitions of items such as case type and unit of count, please refer to the *State Court Guide to Statistical Reporting*.

Begin Pending - Active: A count of cases that, at the start of the reporting period, are awaiting disposition.

Begin Pending - Inactive: A count of cases that, at the start of the reporting period, have been administratively classified as inactive. Business rules for this classification may be defined by court administrative rule or order.

Incoming Cases: The sum of all Newly Filed, Reopened, and Reactivated cases counted during the reporting period.

- **New Filing:** A count of cases that have been filed with the court for the first time during the reporting period.
- **Reopened:** A count of cases in which a judgment has previously been entered but which have been restored to the court's pending caseload during the reporting period. These cases come back to the court due to the filing of a request to modify or enforce that existing judgment and a hearing before a judicial officer is convened to review the status of the case.
- **Reactivated:** A count of cases that had previously been placed in an inactive pending status, but for which further court proceedings and activities have been resumed during the reporting period so that the case can proceed to disposition.

Outgoing Cases: The sum of all Entries of Judgment, Reopened Dispositions, and Placed on Inactive Status cases counted during the reporting period.

- **Entry of Judgment:** A count of cases for which an original entry of judgment has been filed during the reporting period. For cases involving multiple parties/issues, the manner of disposition should not be reported until all parties/issues have been resolved.
- **Reopened Disposition:** A count of cases that were disposed of by a modification to, and/or enforcement of, the original judgment of the court during the reporting period. For cases involving multiple parties/issues, the manner of disposition should not be reported until all parties/issues have been resolved.
- **Placed on Inactive Status:** A count of cases whose status has been administratively changed to inactive during the reporting period. In these cases the court will take no further action until an event restores the case to the court's active pending caseload.

End Pending - Active: A count of cases that, at the end of the reporting period, are awaiting disposition.

End Pending - Inactive: A count of cases that, at the end of the reporting period, have been administratively classified as inactive. Business rules for this classification may be defined by court administrative rule or order.

Set for Review: A count of cases that, following an initial Entry of Judgment during the reporting period, are awaiting regularly scheduled reviews involving a hearing before a judicial officer.