

Examining the Work of State Courts, 2002
A National Perspective from the Court Statistics Project

Edited by
Brian J. Ostrom
Neal B. Kauder
Robert C. LaFountain

Court Statistics Project Staff and Contributors

Brian J. Ostrom, Director
Fred L. Cheesman, II, Court Research Associate
Neal B. Kauder, Consultant, VisualResearch, Inc.
Robert C. LaFountain, Court Research Analyst
Nicole L. Mott, Court Research Associate
Shauna M. Strickland, Court Research Analyst
Brenda K. Uekert, Senior Court Research Associate
Brenda G. Otto, Program Specialist

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



BJS

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National Center for State Courts
ISBN 0-89656-221-2

Suggested Citation:

B. Ostrom, N. Kauder, & R. LaFountain
*Examining the Work of State Courts, 2002: A National Perspective from
the Court Statistics Project*
(National Center for State Courts 2003)

This report was developed under Grant 2002-BJ-CX-K010 from the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Points of view are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Acknowledgments

The members of the Court Statistics Project (CSP) gratefully acknowledge assistance and guidance from throughout the state court community. At the heart of this national effort is the strong and continuing support of the state and trial court administrators, the appellate court clerks, and their staffs, who have provided most of the information included in *Examining the Work of State Courts, 2002* and *State Court Caseload Statistics, 2002*. They have been consistently patient and helpful in answering written and telephone inquiries for additional data or for explanations of the data provided. 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 contact persons between their offices and the Court Statistics Project.

The content and design of all products produced by the CSP benefit greatly from the guidance of the 12 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 the generous support of the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The authors wish to acknowledge the guidance and constructive advice provided by Steven Smith, the project monitor at the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Nevertheless, the points of view stated in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the policies of the agency. The more general responsibility for developing the CSP products and promoting improvements to court statistics is shared with the National Center for State Courts management, working under the policy direction of the COSCA Court Statistics Committee.

A special debt is owed to the advice and editorial skills of our colleagues William E. Hewitt and Ann L. Keith who offered a range of valuable input that considerably improved the final product. This publication benefited greatly from the careful editing of Lorie J. Gomez. Judith Ann Sullivan skillfully managed page design and coordinated the printing of this publication.

Finally, the Committee and Project Director would like to express their gratitude to three staff members who departed the Project after many years of hard work. Karen Gillions Way, whose primary responsibility was the collection of state-level trial court data, retired after having been on the CSP staff since the 1985 annual report. Carol R. Flango left the Research Division to take the position of Director of the NCSC's Knowledge and Information Services department after working on the CSP since the 1987 annual report. Melissa Cantrell provided administrative and program support for the project for nearly five years and has left to begin a family. The staff bids all three of our colleagues farewell and good luck.

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Table of Contents

Foreword..... 8

Overview of State Trial Court Caseloads..... 9

 93 million state court filings in 2001 10

 There are more than 15,500 state courts in the United States with
 just over 29,000 judicial officers 11

 Only 10 states have more than five judges per 100,000 population 13

 In federal courts, bankruptcy filings increased 14 percent in 2001 13

Civil Caseloads in State Trial Courts..... 15

 Civil caseloads increased slightly in 2001 16

 Has civil litigation outpaced the growth of population? 17

 Which states have the most civil litigation? 17

 All but three states cleared over 90 percent of their civil caseload between 1999 and 2001 20

Tort and Contract Caseloads in State Trial Courts 23

 Tort cases garner the most interest of all state court cases 24

 Tort filings in 30 states have decreased since 1992 24

 Population-adjusted tort filings declined in 22 of 30 states examined 25

 Automobile tort filings are down but still dominate the tort caseload 26

 In 2001, raw medical malpractice filings increased for the first time in five years 27

 Medical malpractice filings vary across states 28

 Contrasting automobile and medical malpractice trials..... 29

 Contract filings once again outpace tort filings in 2001 30

 Contract filings decline in 15 of 19 states 31

Domestic Relations Caseloads in State Trial Courts 33

 Domestic relations filings increased seven percent between 1996 and 2001 34

 Between 1996 and 2001, custody filings rose dramatically, while interstate
 support filings declined 34

 Most states have difficulty reporting more detailed domestic relations data 37

 Variations in state reporting practices call for uniform data collection 37

 Divorce cases comprise 32 percent of domestic relations caseloads..... 38

 Domestic violence data will be refined in future data collection practices 38

 Courts are often unable to provide complete statewide data, despite an
 improvement in data collection efforts 38

 Domestic violence filings increased 16 percent over the last six years 41

Table of Contents, continued

Juvenile Caseloads in State Trial Courts	43
Juvenile filings dropped to less than two million in 2001	44
Delinquency dispositions are less likely to involve property and more likely to involve violent, drug, and public order offenses	46
The number of juvenile cases judicially waived to adult court is decreasing	47
Blended Sentencing in Juvenile Courts	50
Criminal Caseloads in State Trial Courts	53
The number of criminal cases in 2001 was just over 14 million	54
Courts of limited jurisdiction processed almost twice the amount of cases as general jurisdiction courts	54
DWI filings are down from 2000	56
Fifteen states account for nearly three-fourths of the total general jurisdiction criminal caseload	56
Clearance rates reflect reductions in a court's pending caseload	59
Seventeen states had three-year clearance rates of 100 percent or more	59
Very few criminal cases are resolved at trial	61
Felony Caseloads in State Trial Courts	63
Felony filings rise for two straight years—2000 and 2001	64
Felony filing rates varied from a high of 2,605 in the District of Columbia to a low of 79 in Massachusetts	66
Clearance rates fell in most general jurisdiction courts between 1999 and 2001	66
State Court Appellate Case Filings	69
The number of appeals filed in state appellate courts declined for the third consecutive year	70
Appellate court filings vary considerably across states	70
Mandatory cases in intermediate appellate courts constitute the largest share of state appellate caseloads	72
The most common dispositions are signed opinions and pre-argument dismissals	72

State Court Appellate Case Filings, *continued*

Intermediate Appellate Courts	74
Mandatory civil and criminal appeals in IACs declined in 2001	74
Civil cases account for almost half of mandatory appeals in IACs	74
The majority of intermediate appellate courts are keeping up with their incoming caseloads	75
About half of the IACs reported an increase in the percentage of mandatory criminal appeals ...	76
Courts of Last Resort	77
Discretionary civil and criminal petitions in COLRs declined in 2001	77
Criminal cases comprise 45 percent of the discretionary petitions in COLRs	78
The number of applications for writs and original proceedings has increased in COLRs	79
About 7 percent of discretionary petitions are granted in COLRs	80
Part II: Examining Serious Crime	81
Examining Serious Crime	82
What issues are of most concern to Americans?	83
What are public perceptions about crime and public safety?	85
What are the trends in reported violent crime and arrests over the past three decades?	85
How have violent crime victimization rates varied over the past 20 years?	86
What circumstances surround homicide, and what weapons are used?	87
What are some key characteristics of abductions and kidnappings?	88
How do arrest rates compare to conviction rates for serious crime?	89
What are the trends in death penalty convictions and executions?	90
Appendix	91
Index of states included in section graphics	92
Court Statistics Project Methodology	94
State Court Caseload Statistics, 2002	95
The NCSC Court Statistics Project	96
The Caseload Highlights Series	97

Foreword

USA Today has come out with a new survey—apparently, three out of every four people make up 75% of the population.

— David Letterman

This report offers a full and clear portrait of the work of the nation's state courts. Reading the litigation landscape requires an understanding of the current business of state trial and appellate courts, as well as how it is changing over time. Although our primary audience is the state court community, the information presented in this report is also valuable to legislative and executive branch policymakers.

Publications produced and disseminated by the Court Statistics Project (CSP) are the prime source of information on the work and organization of the state courts.

Examining the Work of State Courts, 2002, provides a comprehensive analysis of the business of state trial and appellate courts in a non-technical fashion. Accurate, objective, and comparable data across states provide a relative yardstick against which states can consider their performance, identify emerging trends, and measure the possible impact of legislation. Without baseline data from each state, many of the most important questions facing the state courts will go unanswered. This volume facilitates a better understanding of the state courts by making use of closely integrated text and graphics to describe plainly and succinctly the work of state trial and appellate courts.

A second volume, *State Court Caseload Statistics, 2002*, is a basic reference that contains detailed information and descriptions of state court systems. Individuals requiring more complete information, such as state-specific information on the organization of the courts, total filings and dispositions, the number of judges, factors affecting comparability between states, and a host of other jurisdictional and structural issues, will find this volume useful.

A third series, *Caseload Highlights*, recognizes that informed judges and court managers want comparative information on a range of policy-relevant topics, but they want it in a timely fashion and in a condensed, readable format. Whereas other project publications take a comprehensive look at caseload statistics, *Caseload Highlights* targets specific and significant issues and disseminates the findings in short reports. Because they fill the gaps in distribution cycles between the two annual reports, *Caseload Highlights* are also timely in terms of the data and subject matter covered.

Taken together, these publications constitute the most complete research and reference source available on the work of the nation's state courts. The publications are a joint project of the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA) and the National Center for State Courts. COSCA, through the work of the Court Statistics Committee, hopes this information will better inform local, state, and national discussions about the operation of state courts.