

Suggested Citation

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*Examining the Work of State Courts: A National
Perspective from the Court Statistics Project*
(National Center for State Courts 2009)

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National Center for State Courts
ISBN 0-89656-271-9

This project was supported by Grant No. 2008-BJ-CX-K054,
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.



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

In an effort to recognize the efforts of particular states to improve their statistical reporting, the CSP is initiating a new feature in this publication: the CSP Reporting Excellence Award. This icon appears on pages that highlight particular states whose data reflects the counting rules, case type definitions, and case status categories defined in the *State Court Guide to Statistical Reporting*. These feature pages will highlight the benefits and insights that these complete data make possible.



A number of states made significant improvements in the level of detail provided by their trial courts this year. 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*.

We would also like to acknowledge the work of the offices of the state court administrator in the following states for their important data improvement efforts: Alabama (traffic/ordinance), Connecticut (criminal/juvenile), Idaho (domestic relations), Iowa (civil, domestic relations, criminal, juvenile, traffic/ordinance), Hawaii (criminal, traffic/ordinance), Maine (civil), Maryland (civil), Massachusetts (domestic relations, criminal), Michigan (civil, domestic relations, criminal, juvenile, traffic/ordinance), Mississippi (civil, domestic relations, juvenile), Nevada (civil), New Mexico (civil), Ohio (domestic relations), Oklahoma (civil, domestic relations, criminal), Oregon (civil), Pennsylvania (criminal), Puerto Rico (juvenile), South Dakota (criminal), Virginia (domestic, juvenile), Washington (juvenile), West Virginia (domestic relations) and Wyoming (District Court data).

This year also marks the debut of the new reporting framework for appellate court caseload statistics, the product of an intensive, multiyear collaboration between the National Conference of Appellate Court Clerks (NCACC) and CSP project staff. We appreciate the involvement of NCACC, its Special Statistics Committee, and the guidance they provided in the creation and implementation of the appellate section of the *State Court Guide to Statistical Reporting*.

The content and design of CSP's reports and 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 editorial review and helpful comments provided by Duren Banks at BJS.

Special thanks as always to Neal Kauder of VisualResearch, Inc., for his innovative information design.

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

The *Caseload Highlights* series continues to provide short, periodic reports on specific, significant, and timely issues. *Notes from the Field* is a platform for use by practitioners from the state courts from which they can share their experiences and knowledge of court statistics and the implementation of data systems. The CSP 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 with and generous support from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), part of the 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 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 most recent 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 recently revised version of the *Guide* is available in PDF on the NCSC Web site at www.courtstatistics.org.

The firm processed more than a terabyte of data every day . . . The trick, he said, was to "find the very faint phenomena amidst the cacophony of static."

Glen Whitney, former hedge fund mathematician, quoted in the *New Yorker*.

Examining the Work of State Courts is the authoritative analysis of the best available state court case filing and disposition data. Approximately ninety-five percent of all legal cases initiated in the United States are filed in the state courts. Whether the reader's objective is to assess the current legal landscape, to improve the management of a court or a state court system, to develop public policy, or to gain a better understanding of the work of our third branch of government, this publication provides the independent interpretation of reliable data that will speak to the reader's need. In fact, without the benefit of this foundational data and its expert analysis, state court leaders and managers, policy makers, and the media are too often left with little more than random anecdote and unsupported opinion as the basis for their work.

The analysis in this publication is provided by the staff of the Court Statistics Project of the National Center for State Courts. With over thirty years of experience in the collection, compilation, and interpretation of state court data, the Court Statistics Project has no peer.

State Court Administrators from the fifty states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have all contributed to the data that are presented in this publication. The commitment of these state court leaders and their staff to the accuracy and consistency of these data ensures the integrity of the data and analysis reported here.

While anecdote and opinion may have been useful in the past, the demand today is for accountability, performance measures, and evidence-based programs. Reliable empirical data provide the basis for the modern tools of court administration, including workload studies, performance measures like the *CourTools* developed by the National Center for State Courts, and the analysis of court process and outcome that can lead to improved administration of justice, enhanced service to the public, and informed public policy.

In the current era of declining state revenues and shrinking state court budgets, the need for reliable data and for the expert analysis of those data is greater than ever. *Examining the Work of State Courts* illustrates the value of good data and dependable analysis and offers a high-level perspective of the current work and prevailing trends in state courts.



Don Goodnow

Chair, Court Statistics Committee
Conference of State Court Administrators

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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 a rule of court or administrative order.

Incoming Cases – The sum of the count of New Filing, Reopened, and Reactivated cases.

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 requested to review the status of the case or initiate further proceedings in the case.

Reactivated – A count of cases that had previously been Placed on Inactive Status, but have been restored to the court's control during the reporting period. Further court proceedings in these cases can now be resumed during the reporting period and these cases can once again proceed toward disposition.

Outgoing Cases – The sum of the count of Entry 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 disposition should not be reported until all parties/issues have been resolved.

Reopened Dispositions – 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 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 due to events beyond the court's control. These cases have been removed from court control, and the court can 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 rule of court or administrative order.

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