

State Court Structure Charts

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Understanding the Court Structure Charts

The court structure charts summarize in one-page diagrams the key features of each state's court organization. The format meets two objectives: (1) it is comprehensive, indicating all court systems in the state and their interrelationship, and (2) it describes the jurisdiction of the court systems, using a standard set of terminology and symbols. The court structure charts employ the common terminology developed by the National Center for State Courts' Court Statistics Project for reporting caseload statistics.

The first chart is a prototype. It represents a state court organization in which there is one of each of the four court system levels recognized by the Court Statistics Project: courts of last resort, intermediate appellate courts, general jurisdiction trial courts, and limited jurisdiction trial courts. Routes of appeal from one court to another are indicated by lines, with an arrow showing which court receives the appeal or petition.

The charts also provide basic descriptive information, such as the number of authorized justices, judges, and magistrates (or other judicial officers). Each court system's subject matter jurisdiction is indicated using the Court Statistics Project case types. Information is also provided on the use of districts, circuits, or divisions in organizing the courts within the system and the number of courts.

The case types, which define a court system's subject matter jurisdiction, require the most explanation.

Appellate Courts

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The rectangle representing each appellate court contains information on the number of authorized justices; the number of geographic divisions, if any; whether court decisions are made en banc, in panels, or both; and the Court Statistics Project case types that are heard by the court. The case types are shown separately for mandatory and discretionary cases. The case types themselves are defined in other Court Statistics Project publications, specifically the *State Court Guide to Statistical Reporting, 2003*.

An appellate court can have both mandatory and discretionary jurisdiction over the same Court Statistics Project case type. This arises, in part, because the Court Statistics Project case types are defined broadly to be applicable to every state's courts. There are, for example, only two appellate Court Statistics Project case types for criminal appeals: capital and noncapital. A court may have mandatory jurisdiction over felony cases, but discretionary jurisdiction over misdemeanors. The list of case types would include "criminal" for both

mandatory and discretionary jurisdiction. The duplication of a case type under both headings can also occur if appeals from one lower court for that case type are mandatory while appeals from another lower court are discretionary. Also, statutory provisions or court rules in some states automatically convert a mandatory appeal into a discretionary petition—for example, when an appeal is not filed within a specified time limit. A more comprehensive description of each appellate court’s subject matter jurisdiction can be found in *Appellate Court Procedures, 1998*.

Trial Courts

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The rectangle representing each trial court also lists the applicable Court Statistics Project case types. These include civil, , domestic relations, criminal, traffic/other violation, and juvenile. If a case type is simply listed, the court system shares jurisdiction over it with other courts. The presence of exclusive jurisdiction is always explicitly stated.

The absence of a case type from a list means that the court does not have that subject matter jurisdiction. The dollar amount jurisdiction is shown when there is an upper or a lower limit to the cases that can be filed in a court. A dollar limit is not listed if a court does not have a minimum or maximum dollar amount jurisdiction for general civil cases. In criminal cases, jurisdiction is distinguished between “felony,” which means the court can try a felony case to verdict and sentencing, and “preliminary hearings,” which applies to those limited jurisdiction courts that can conduct preliminary hearings that bind a defendant over for trial in a higher court.

Trial courts can have what is termed incidental appellate jurisdiction. The presence of such jurisdiction over the decisions of other courts is noted in the list of case types as either “civil appeals,” “criminal appeals,” or “administrative agency appeals.” A trial court that hears appeals directly from an administrative agency has an “A” in the upper-right corner of the rectangle.

For each trial court, the chart states the authorized number of judges and whether the court can impanel a jury. The rectangle representing the court also indicates the number of districts, divisions, or circuits into which the court system is divided. These subdivisions are stated using the court system’s own terminology. The descriptions, therefore, are not standardized across states or court systems.

Some trial courts are totally funded from local sources; others receive some form of state funds. Locally funded court systems are drawn with broken lines. A solid line indicates that some or all of the funding is derived from state funds.

Symbols and Abbreviations

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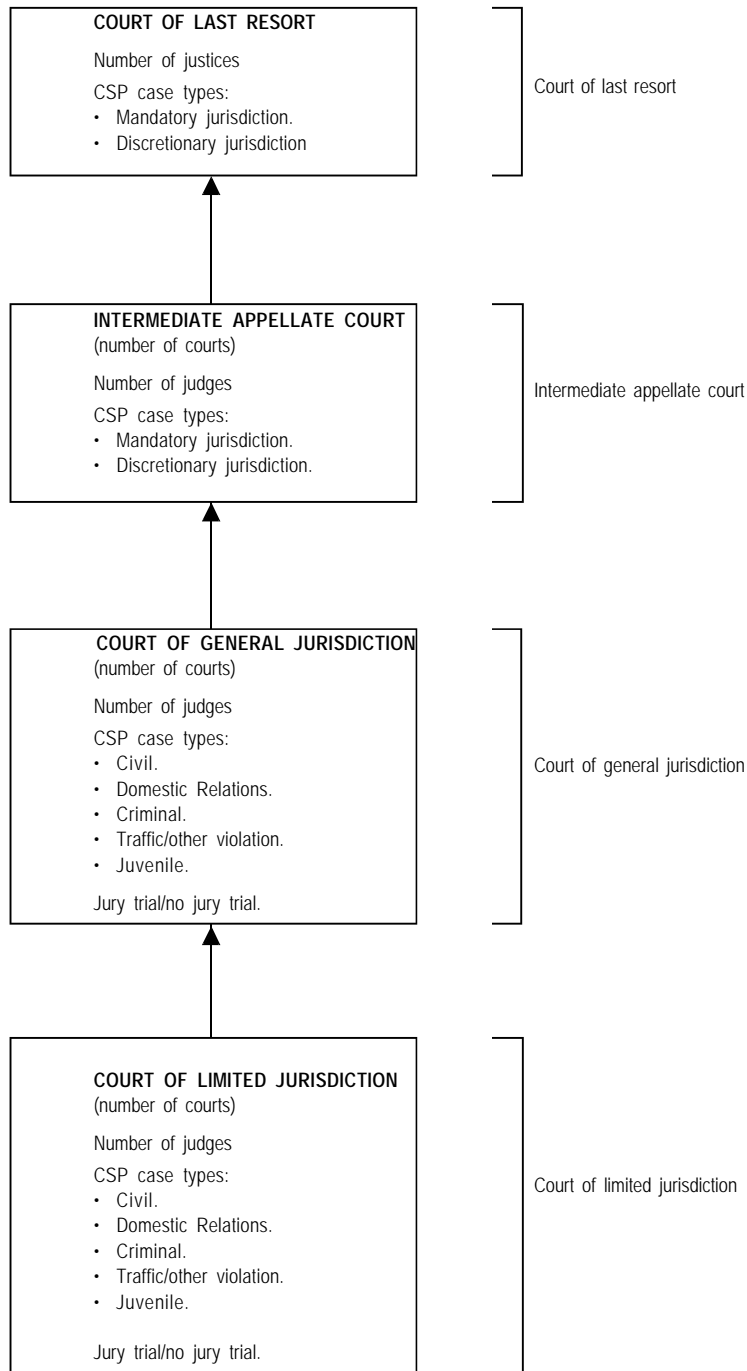
An “A” in the upper-right corner of a rectangle, representing either an appellate court or a trial court, indicates that the court receives appeals directly from the decision of an administrative agency. If “administrative agency appeals” is listed as a case type, the court hears appeals from decisions of another court on an administrative agency’s actions. It is possible for a court to have both an “A” designation and to have “administrative agency appeals” listed as a case type. Such a court hears appeals directly from an administrative agency (“A”) and has appellate jurisdiction over the decision of a lower court that has already reviewed the decision of the administrative agency.

The number of justices or judges is sometimes stated as “FTE.” This represents “full-time equivalent” authorized judicial positions. “DWI/DUI” stands for “driving while intoxicated/driving under the influence.” The “SC” abbreviation stands for “small claims.” The dollar amount jurisdiction for civil cases is indicated in parentheses with a dollar sign. Where the small claims dollar amount jurisdiction is different, it is noted.

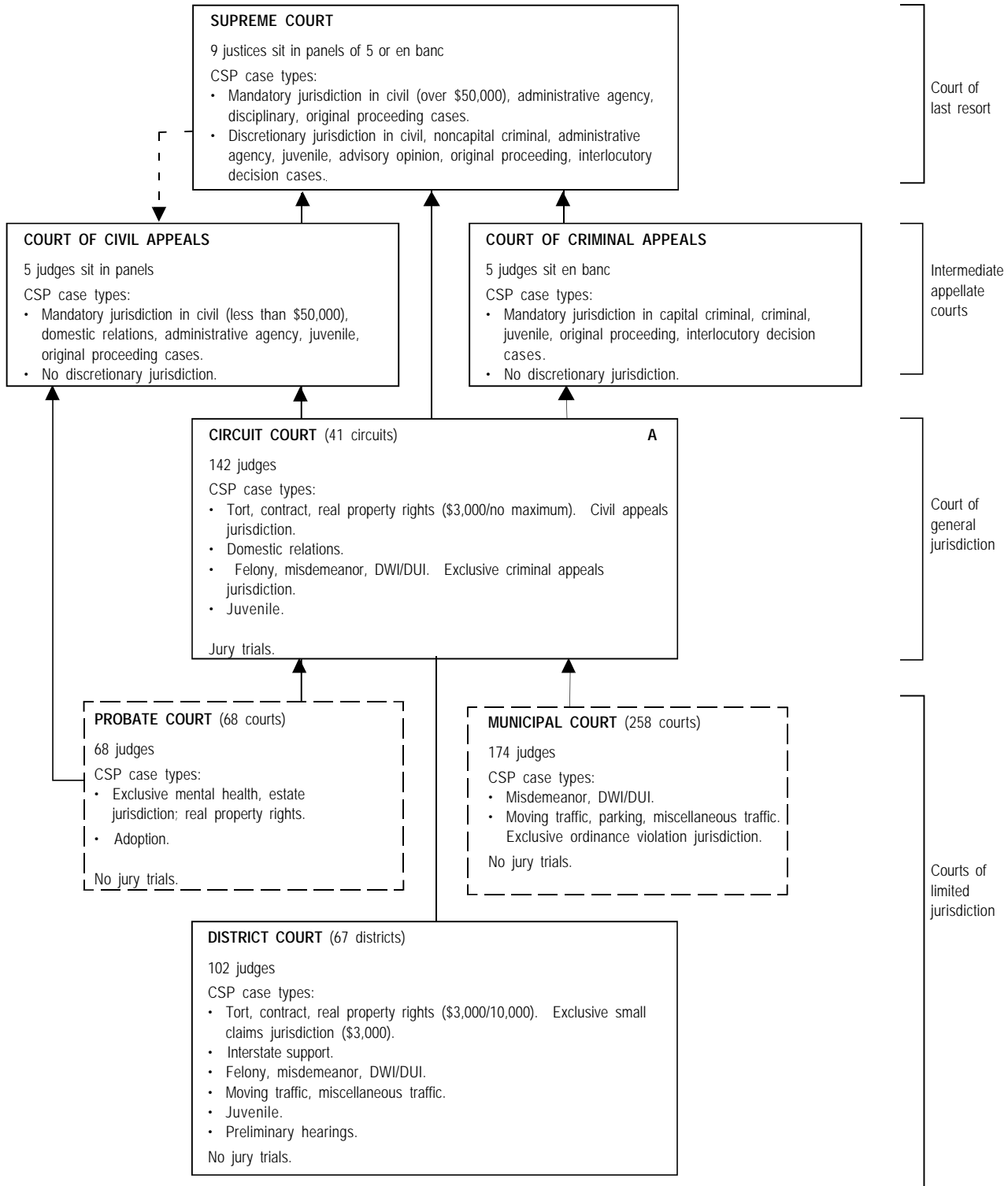
The court structure charts are convenient summaries. They do not substitute for the detailed descriptive material contained in the tables of *State Court Organization, 1998*. Moreover, they are based on the Court Statistics Project’s terminology and categories. This means that a state may have established courts that are not included in these charts. Some states have courts of special jurisdiction to receive complaints on matters that are more typically directed to administrative boards and agencies. Since these courts adjudicate matters that do not fall within the Court Statistics Project case types, they are not included in the charts. The existence of such courts, however, is recognized in a footnote to the state’s court structure chart.

STATE COURT STRUCTURE PROTOTYPE, 2002

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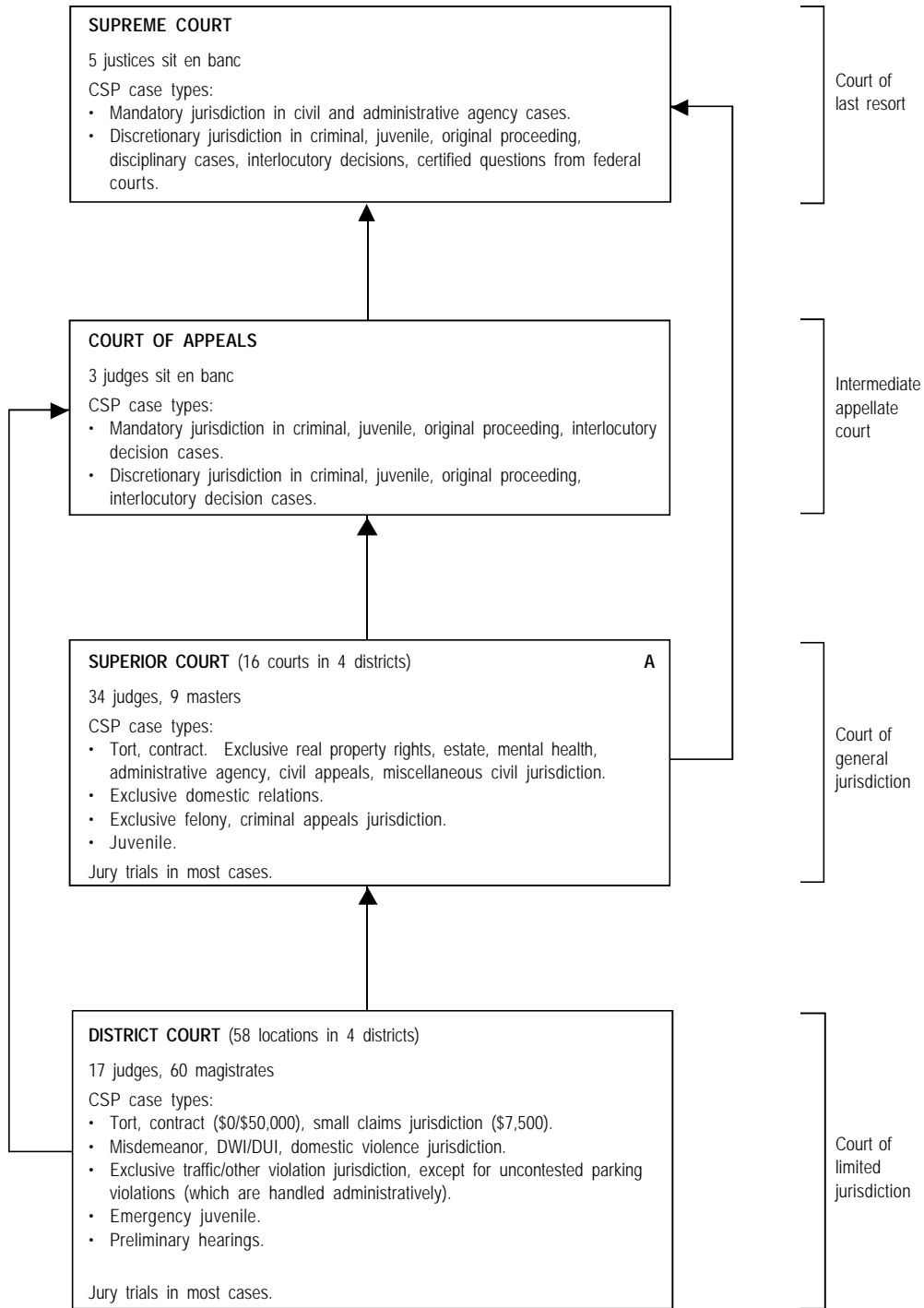


ALABAMA COURT STRUCTURE, 2002

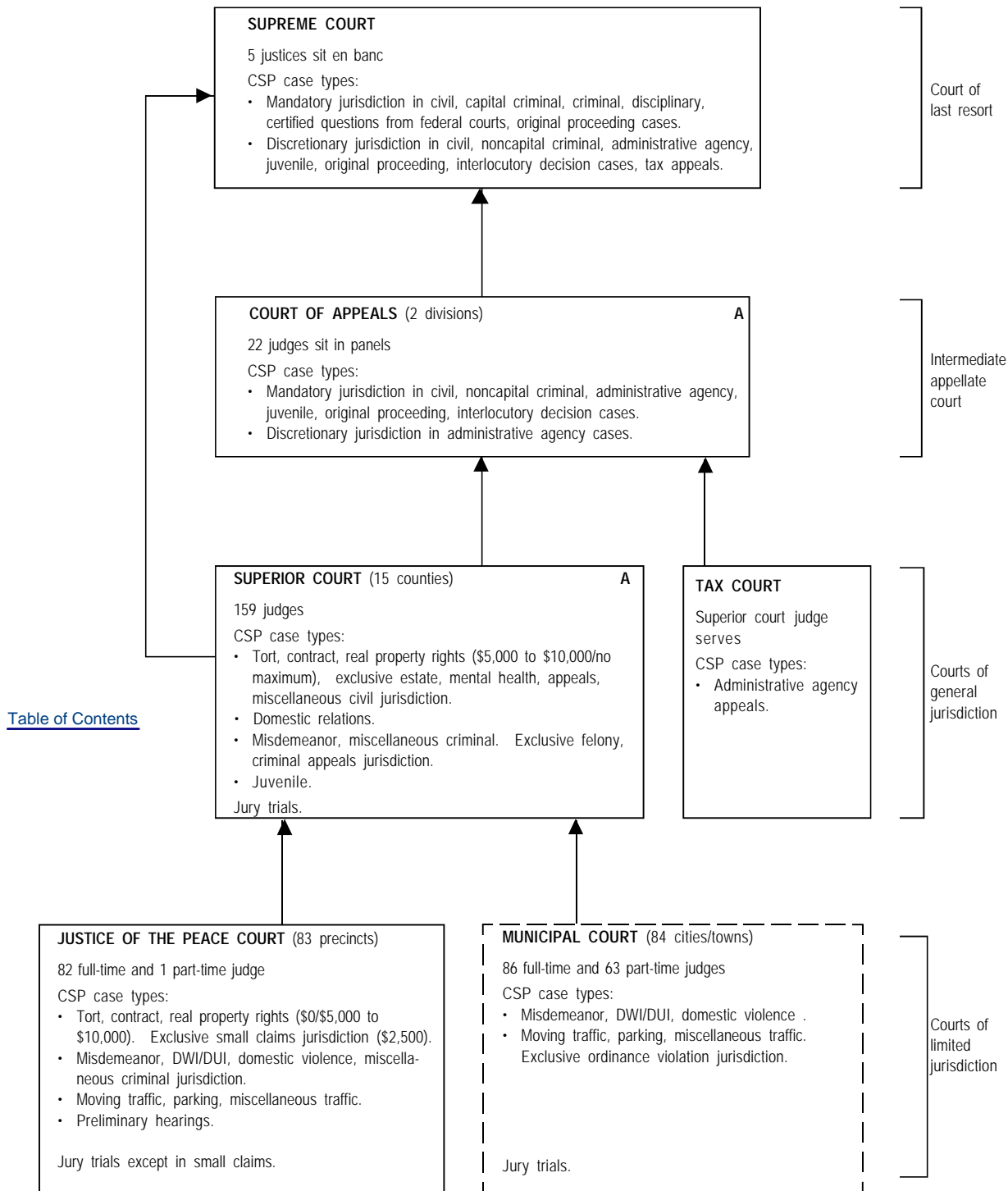


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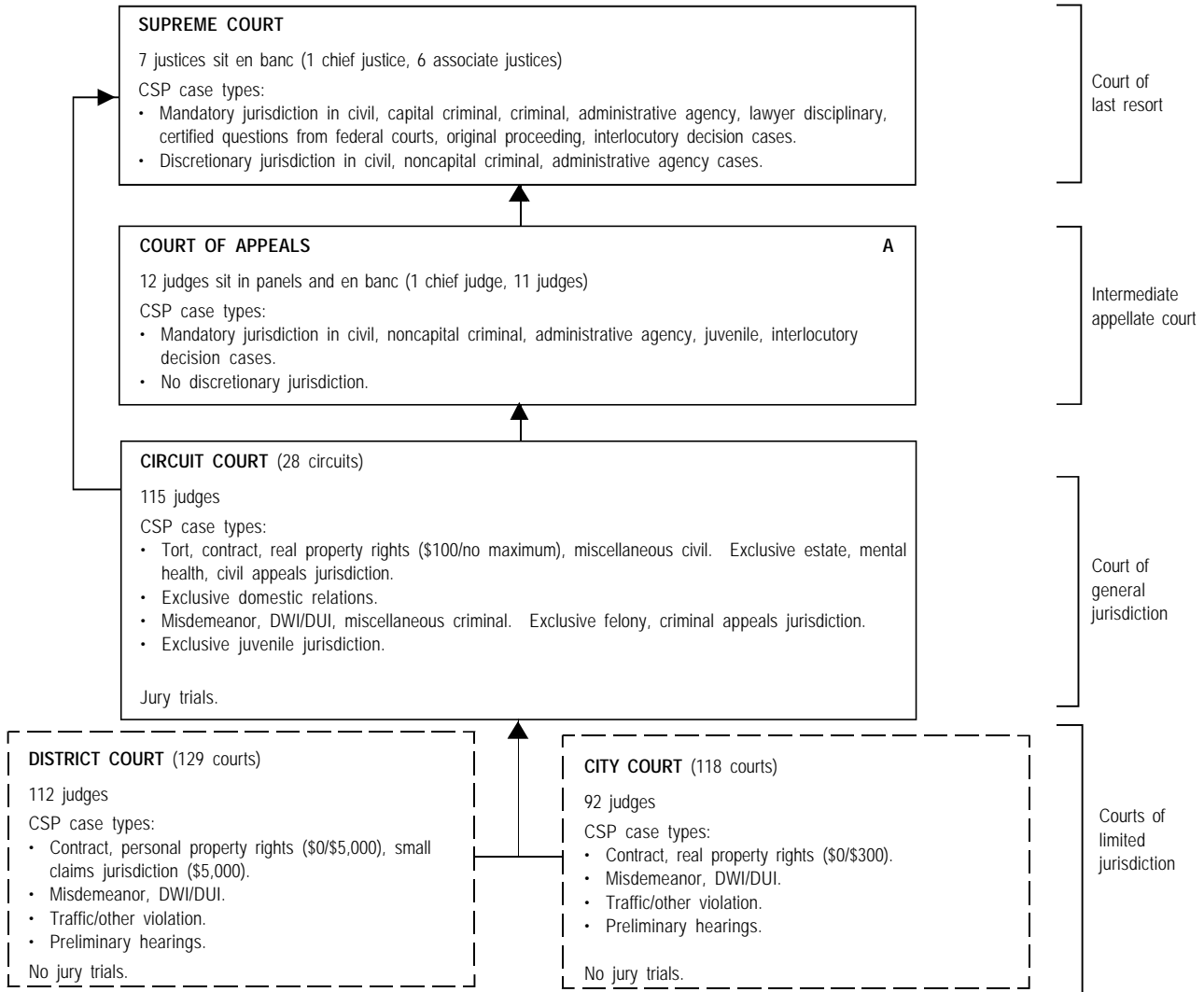
ALASKA COURT STRUCTURE, 2002



ARIZONA COURT STRUCTURE, 2002



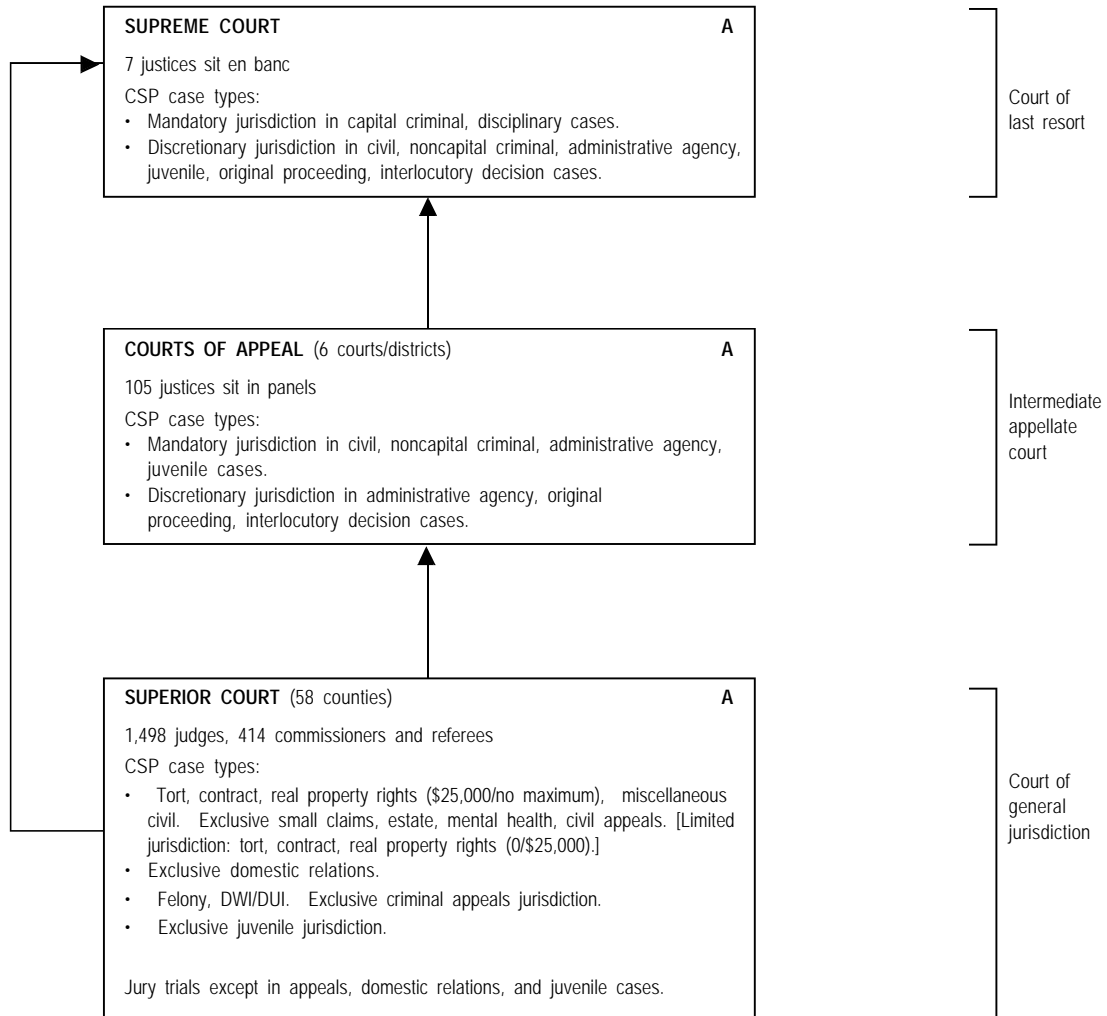
ARKANSAS COURT STRUCTURE, 2002



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Note: In 2001, Arkansas combined the Chancery and Probate Court with the Circuit Court and reduced the number of limited jurisdiction courts from six to two by combining the County, Police, Common Pleas, and Justice of the Peace Courts into the Municipal Court which was renamed and is now the District Court.

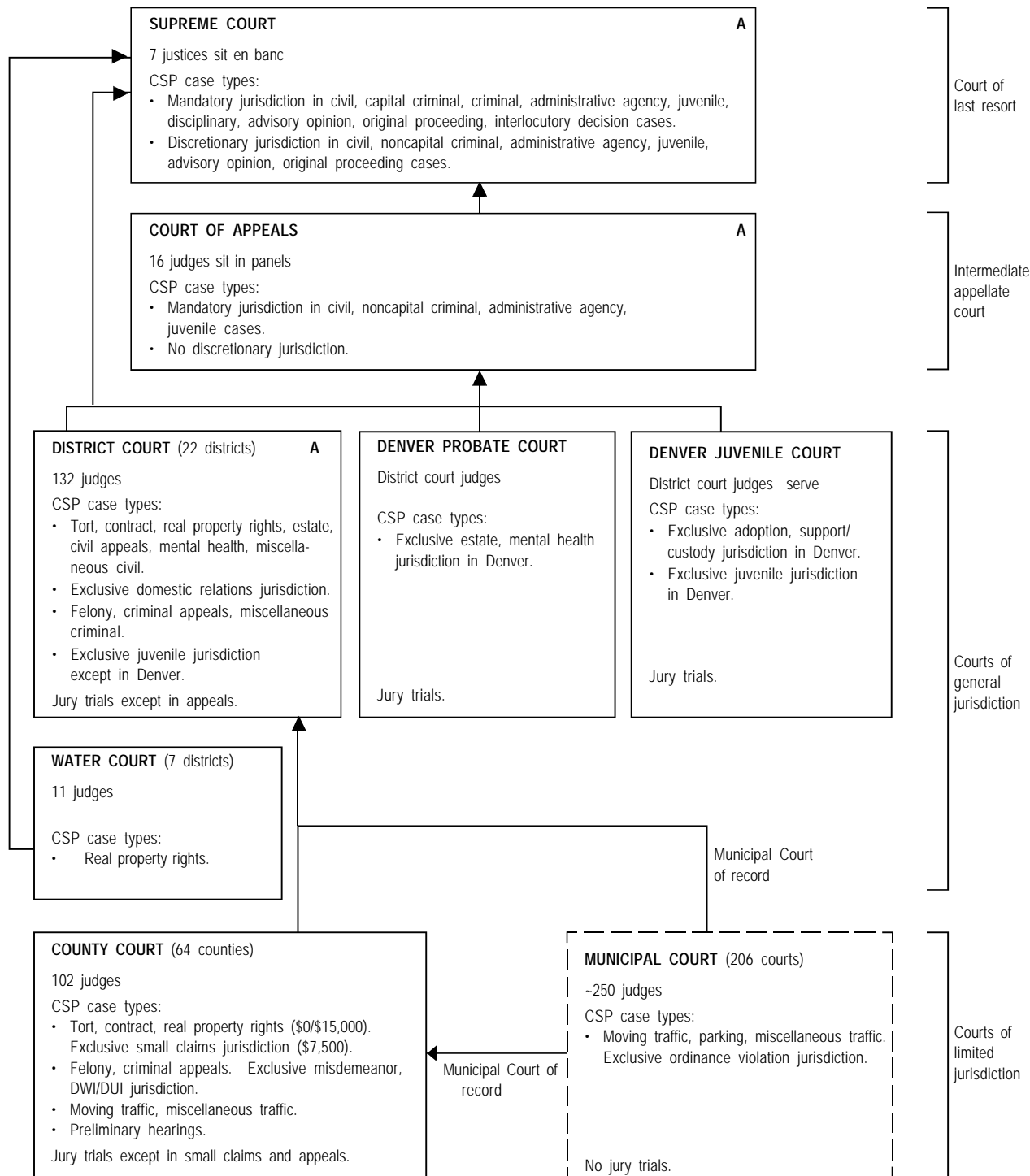
CALIFORNIA COURT STRUCTURE, 2002



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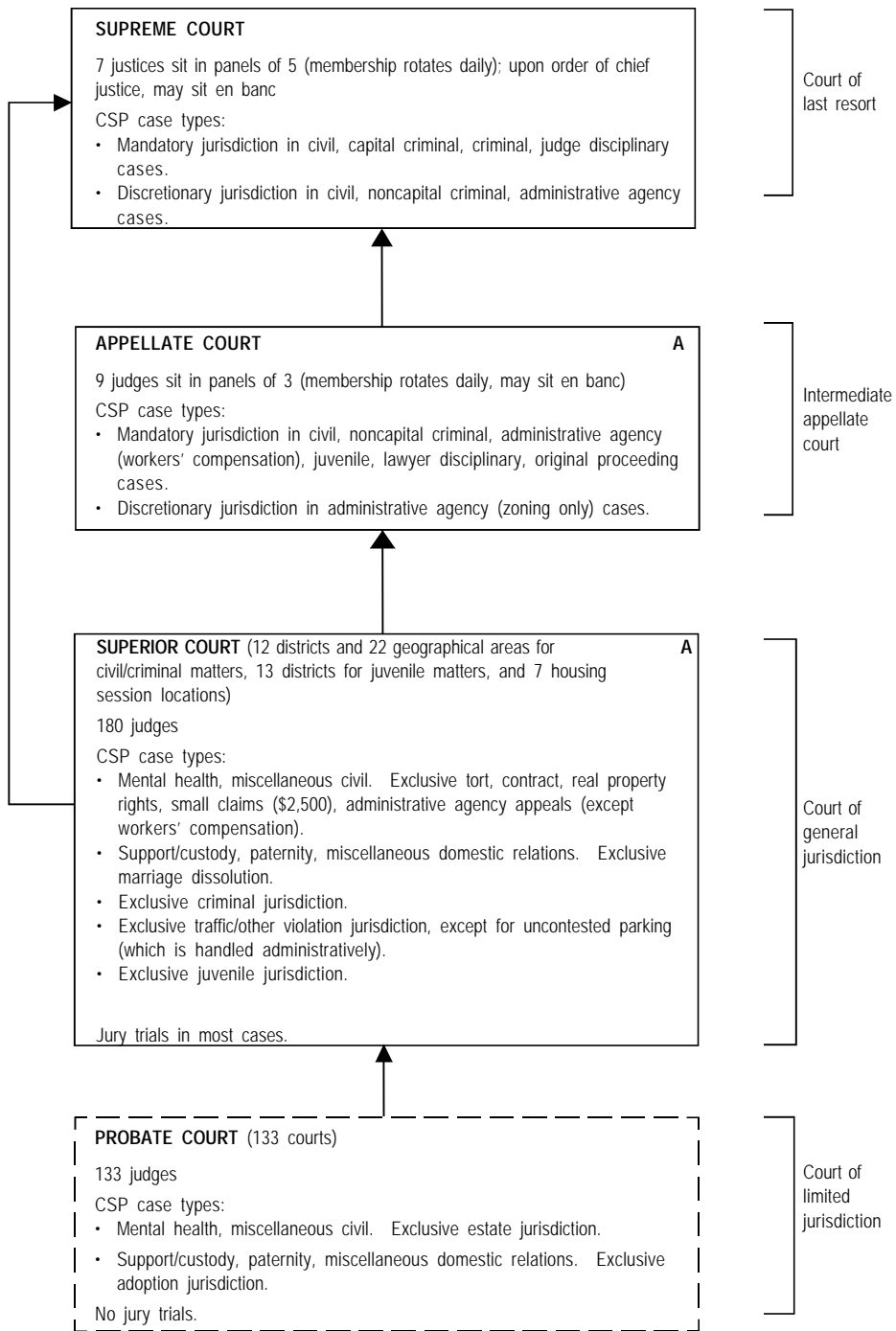
Note: All trial courts were unified as of 7/1/00.

COLORADO COURT STRUCTURE, 2002



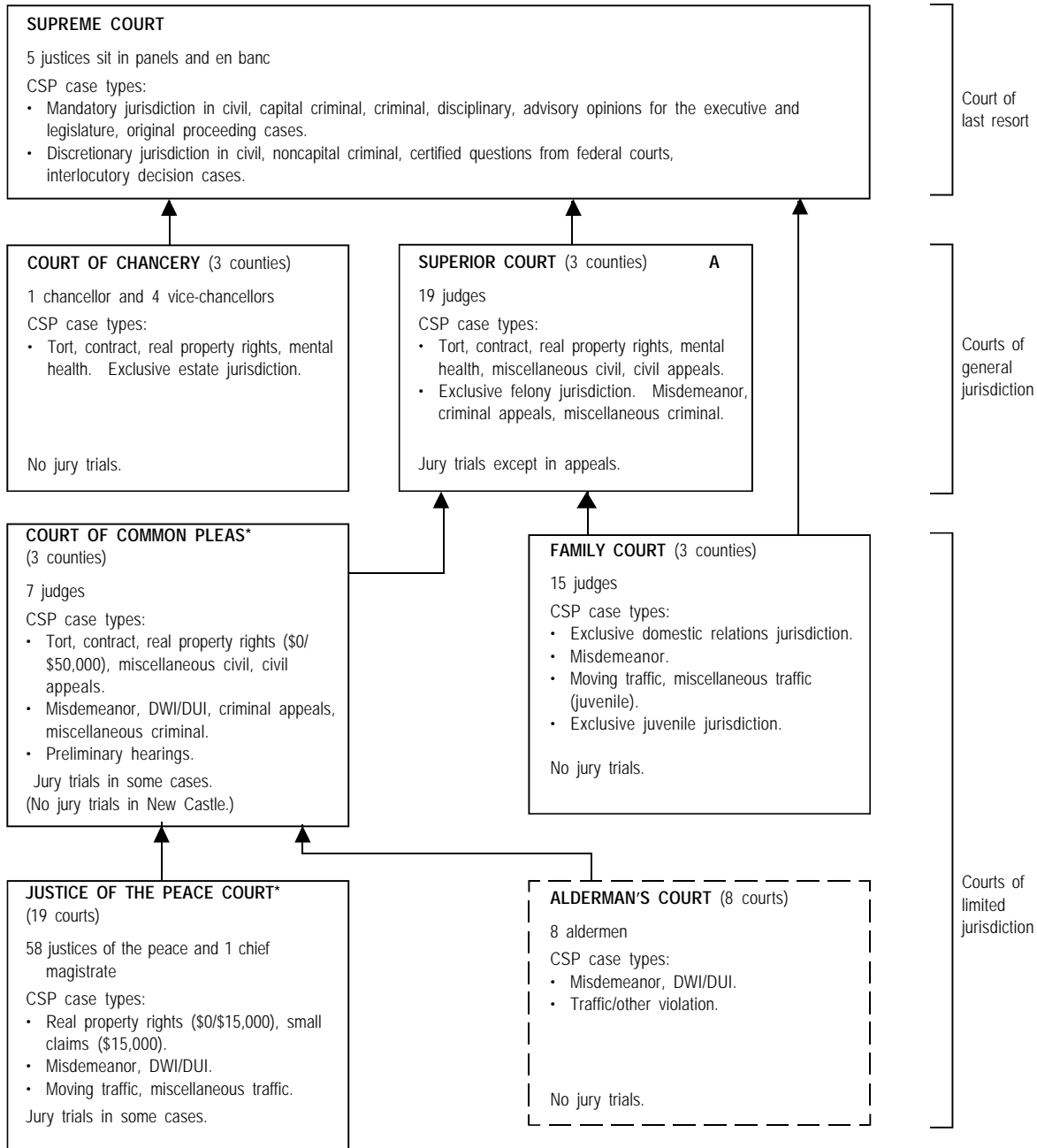
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CONNECTICUT COURT STRUCTURE, 2002



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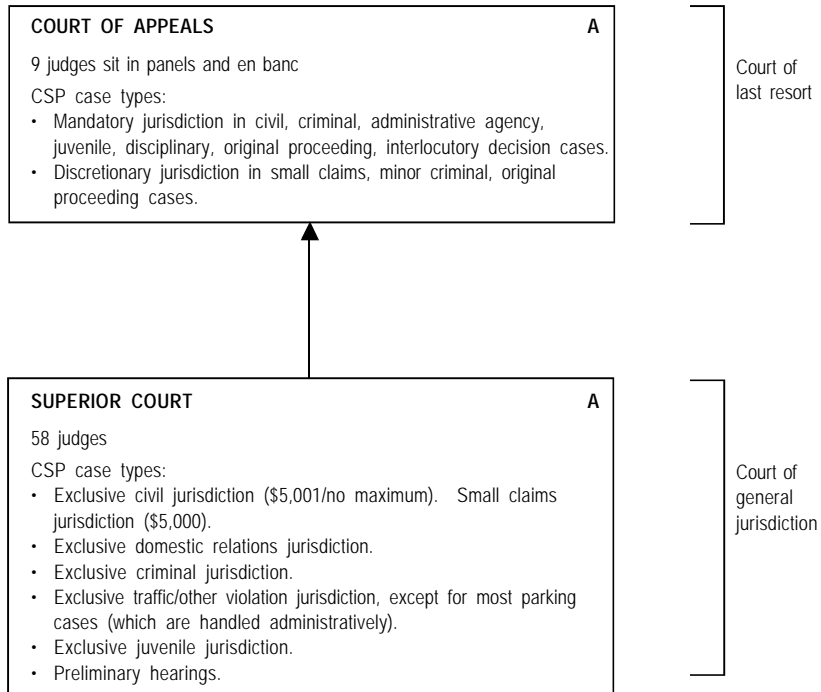
DELAWARE COURT STRUCTURE, 2002



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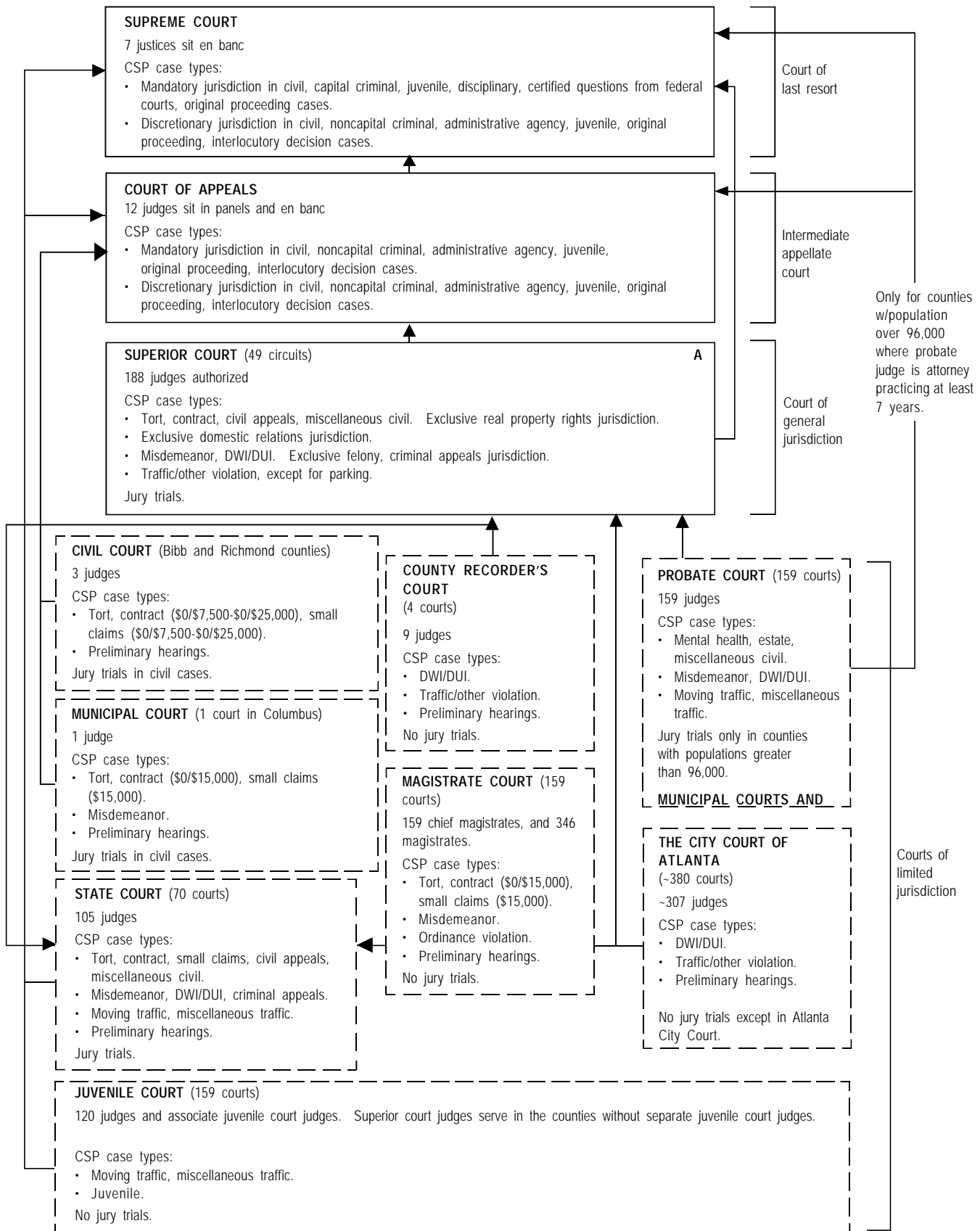
* The Municipal Court of Wilmington was eliminated effective May 1, 1998, and a new Justice of the Peace Court was created in Wilmington.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COURT STRUCTURE, 2002

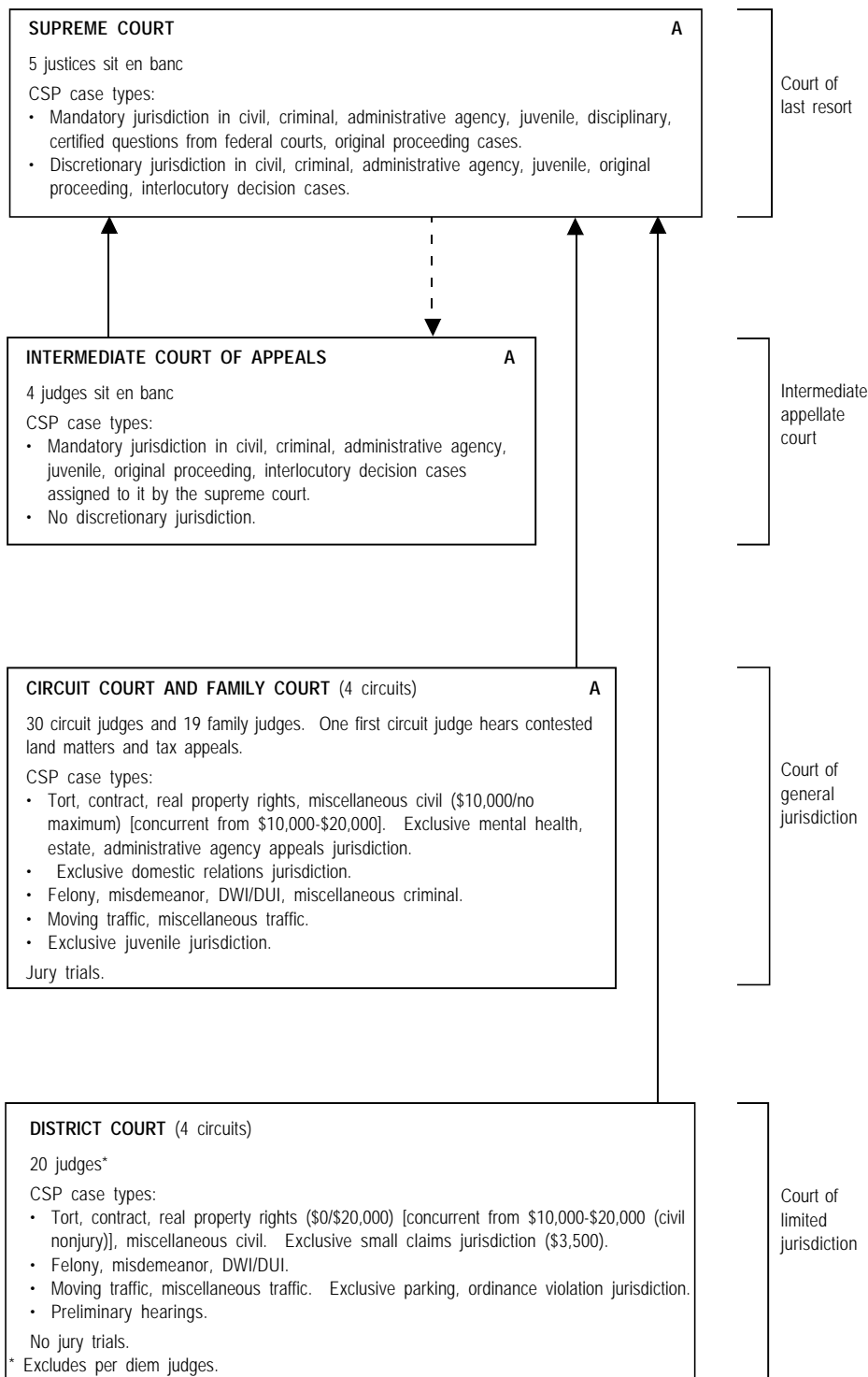


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GEORGIA COURT STRUCTURE, 2002

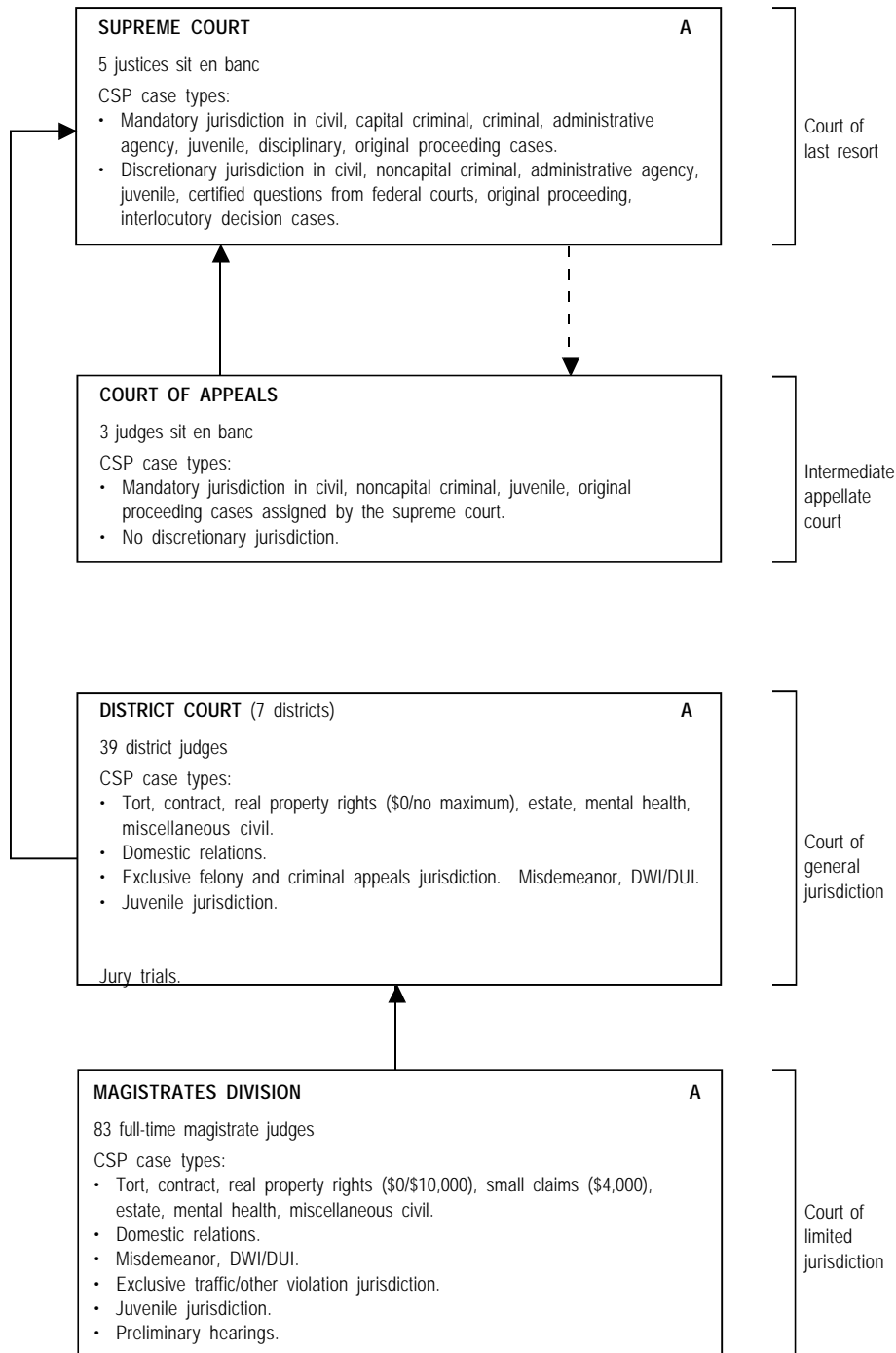


HAWAII COURT STRUCTURE, 2002



— — Indicates assignment of cases.

IDAHO COURT STRUCTURE, 2002

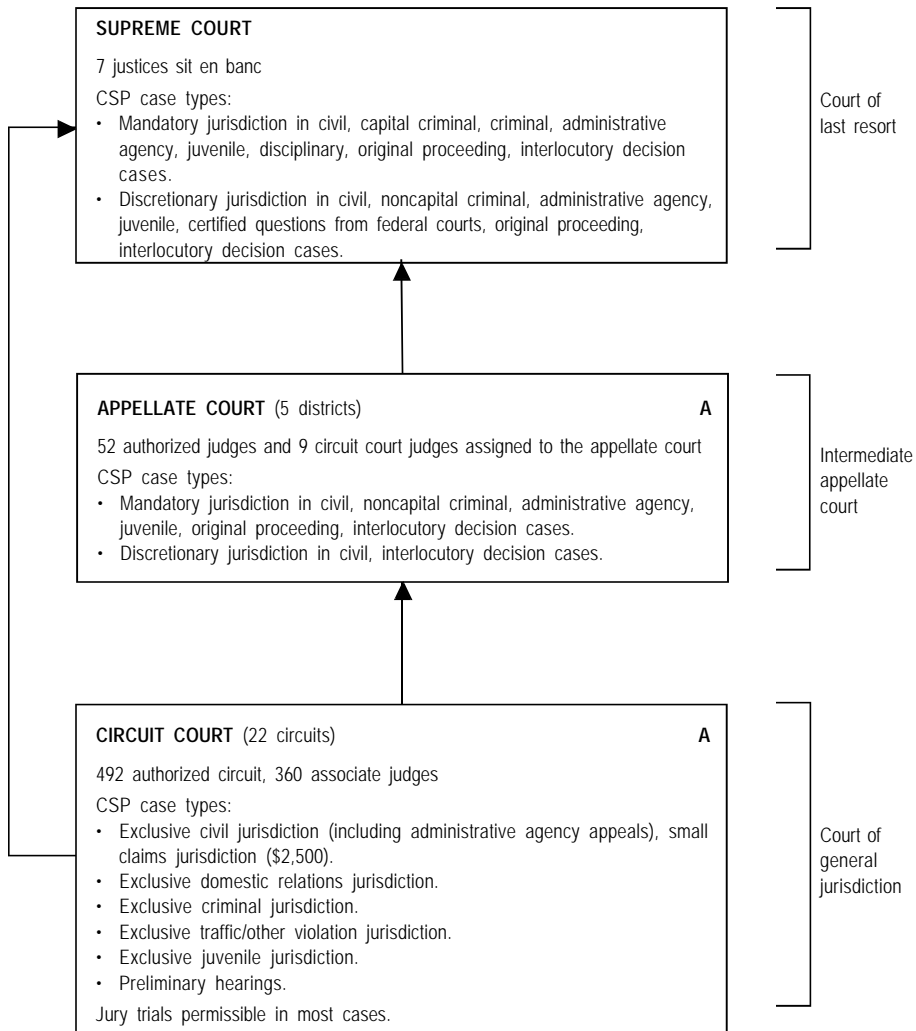


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— — Indicates assignment of cases.

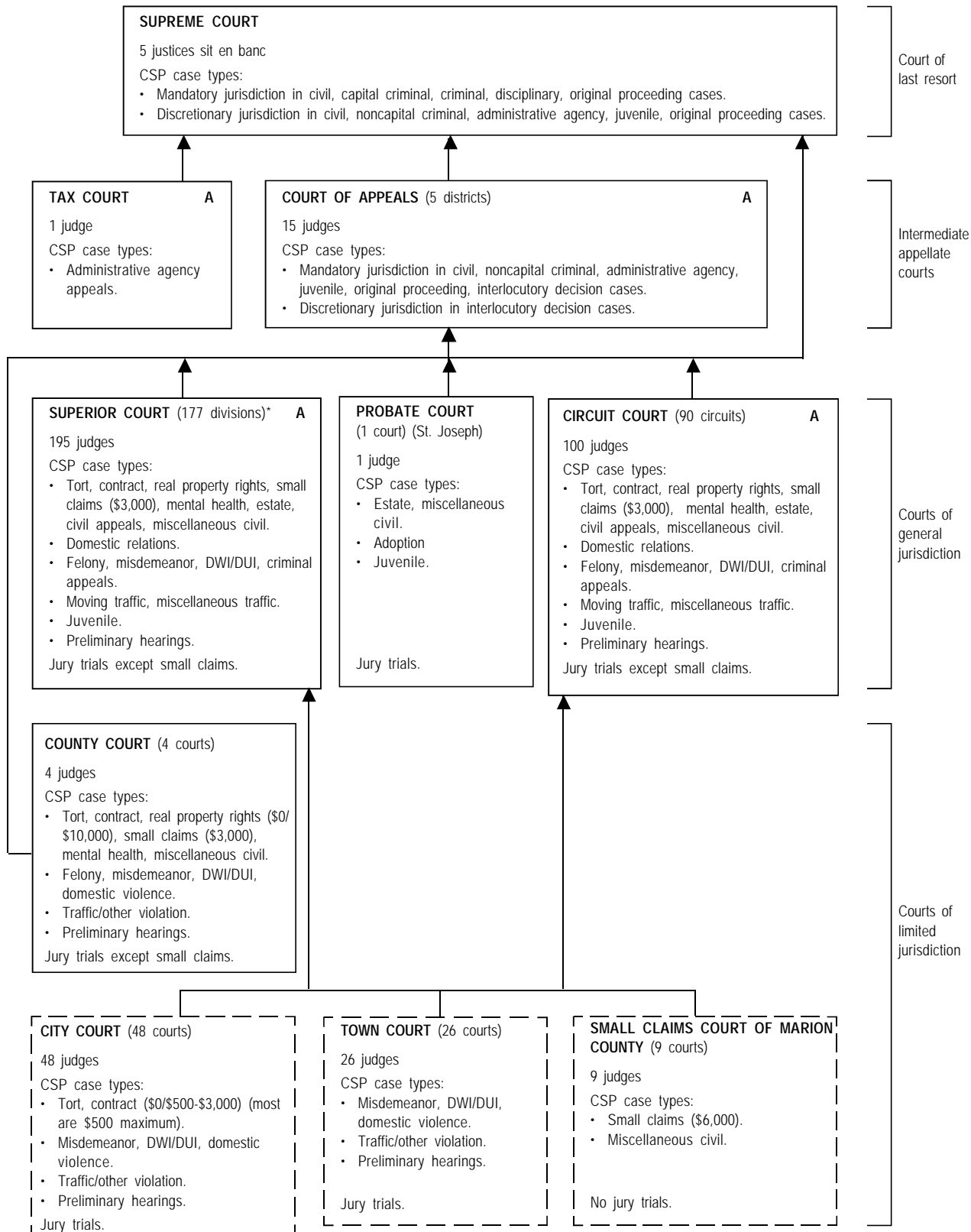
Note: The Magistrates Division of the District Court functions as a limited jurisdiction court.

ILLINOIS COURT STRUCTURE, 2002



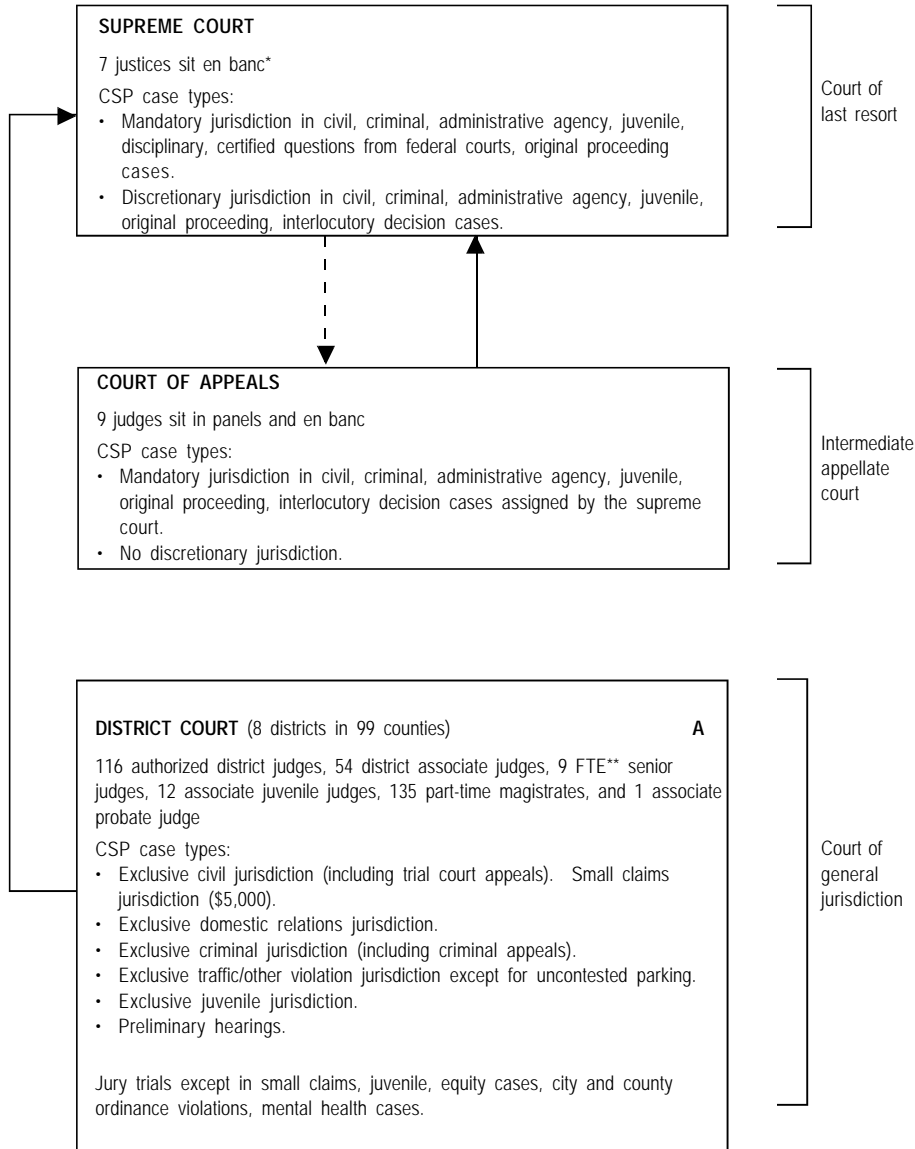
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INDIANA COURT STRUCTURE, 2002



* Effective January 1, 1996, all Municipal Courts became Superior Courts.

IOWA COURT STRUCTURE, 2002



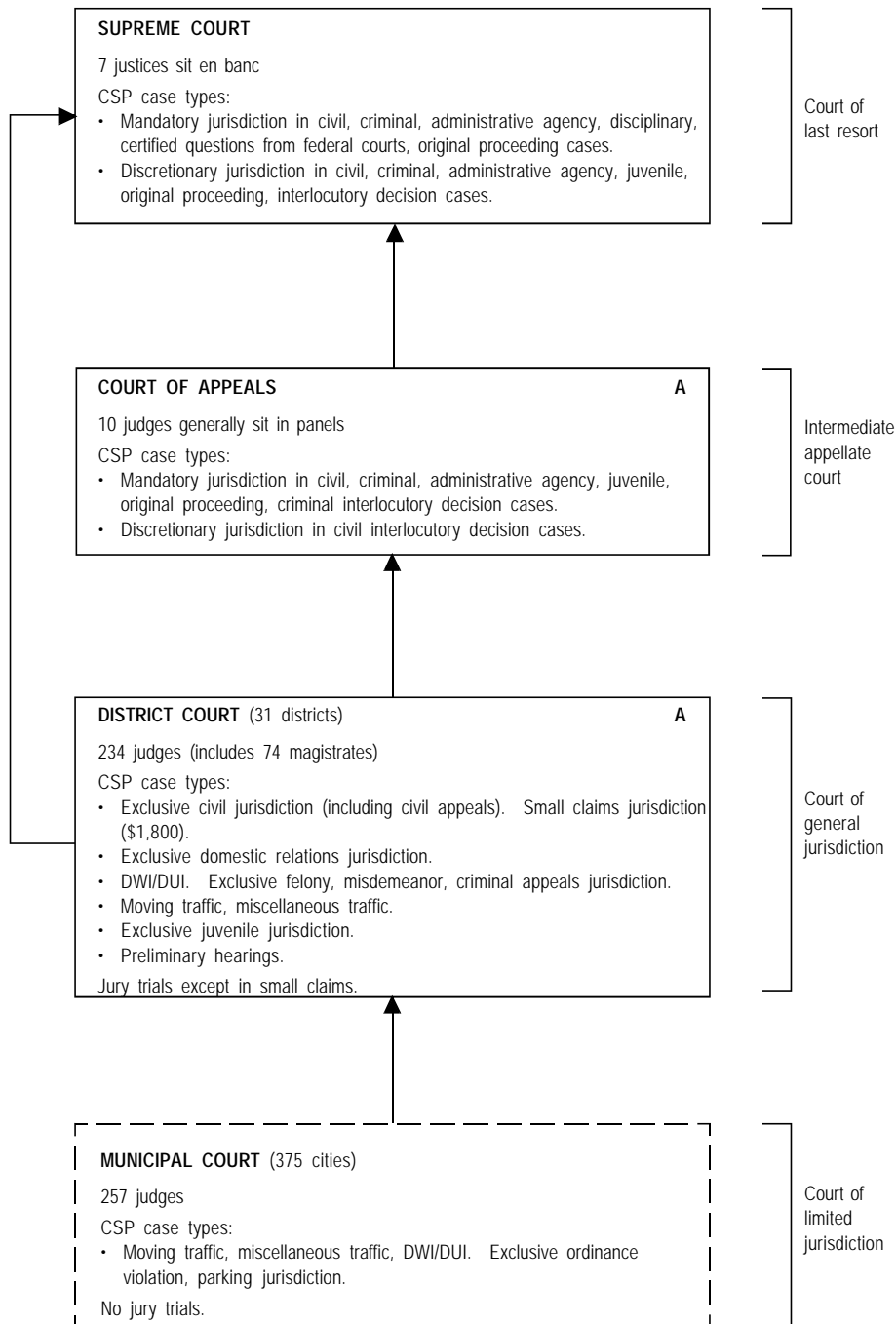
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* As of January, 2000 the court no longer sits in panels; it decides en banc.

** Includes 37 senior judges who work 1/4 time (13 weeks/year).

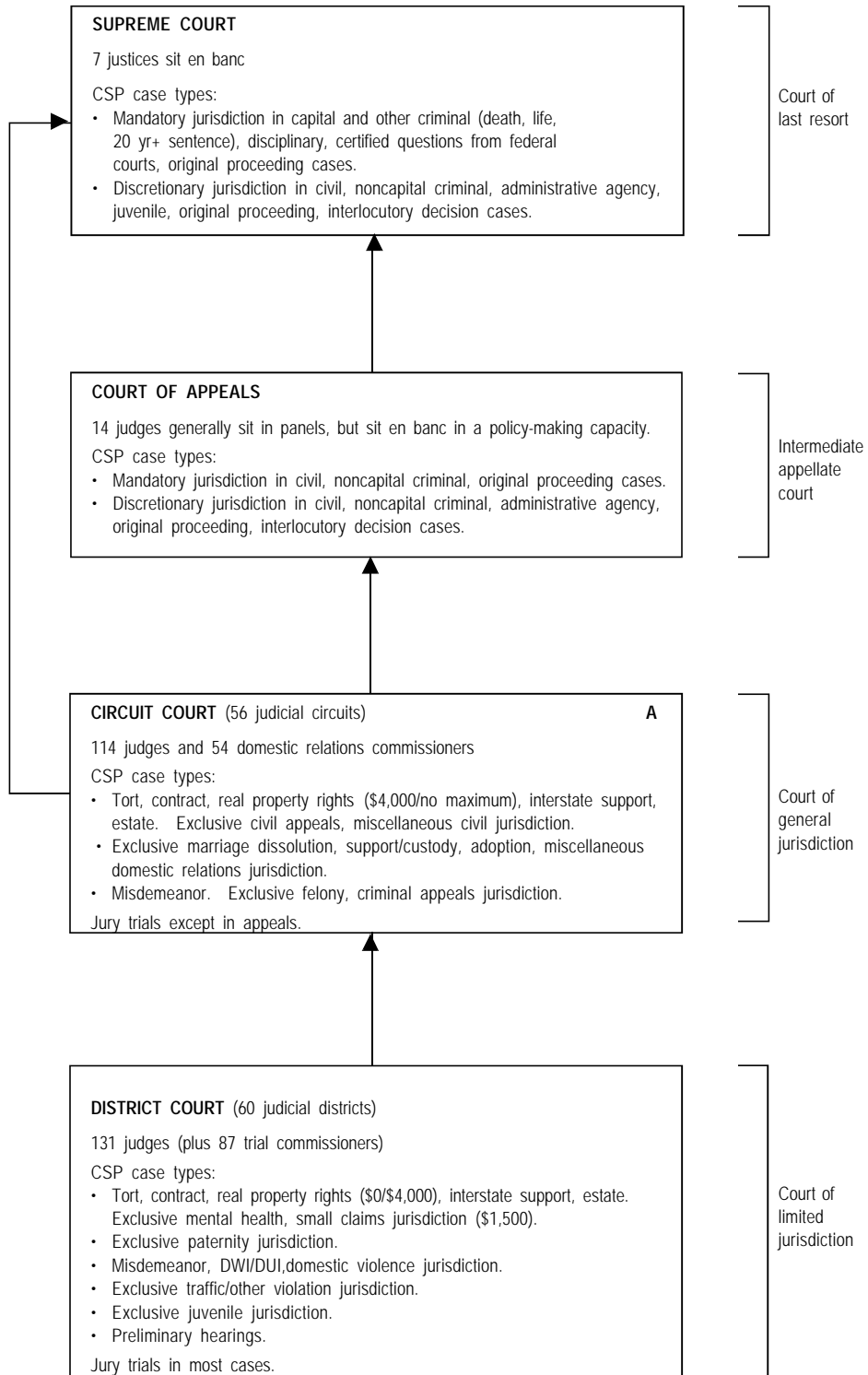
— — Indicates assignment of cases.

KANSAS COURT STRUCTURE, 2002



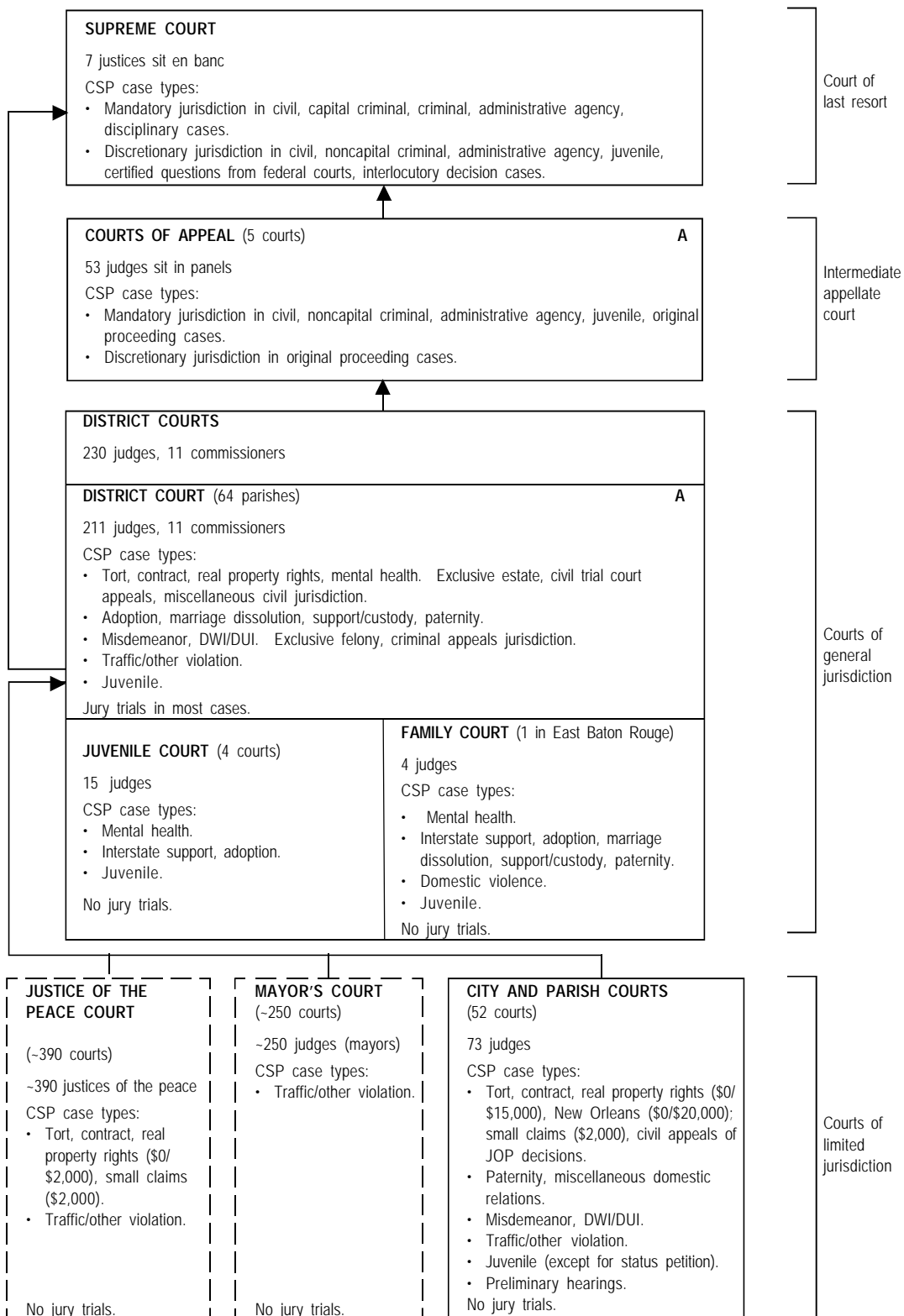
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KENTUCKY COURT STRUCTURE, 2002



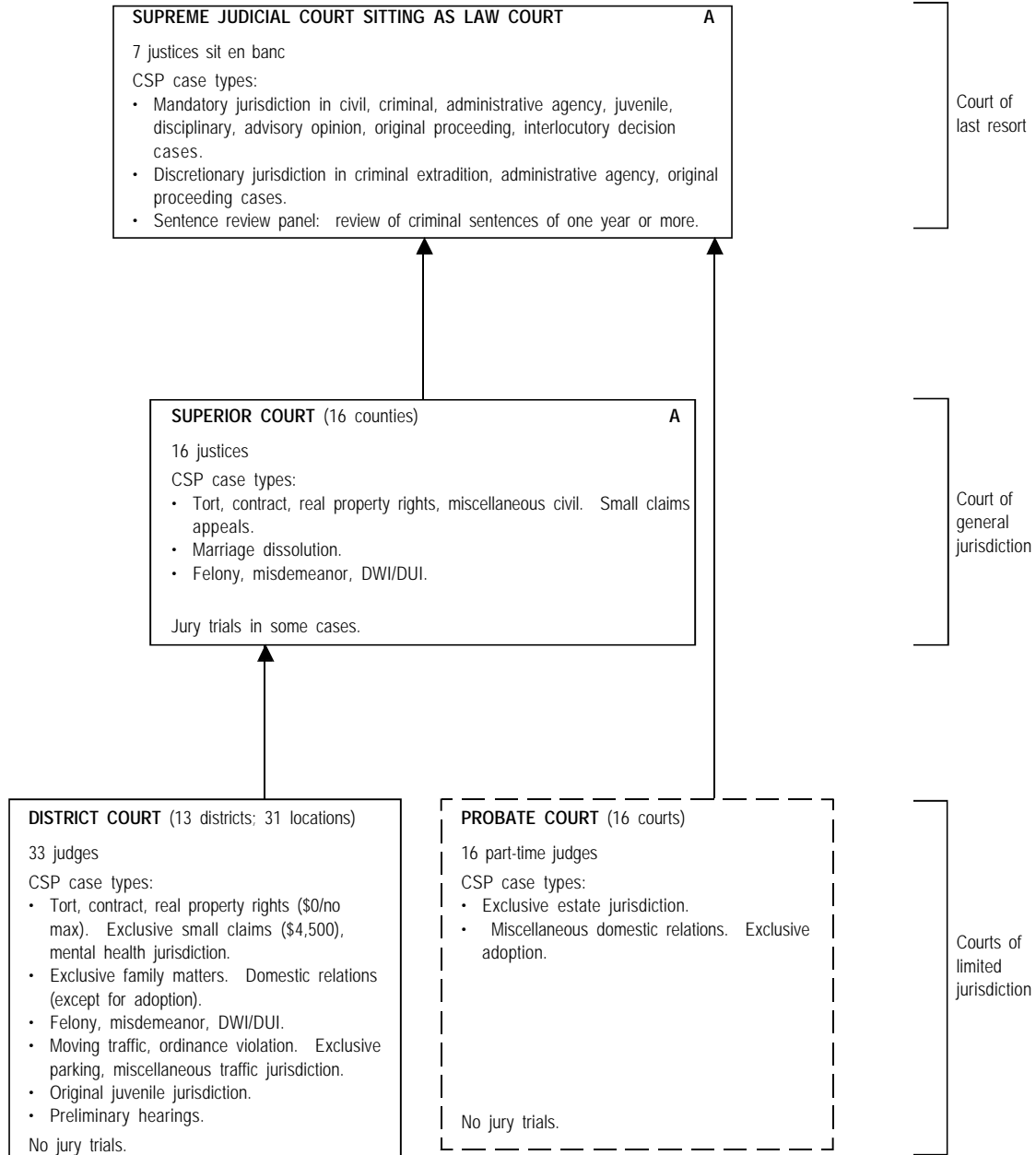
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LOUISIANA COURT STRUCTURE, 2002



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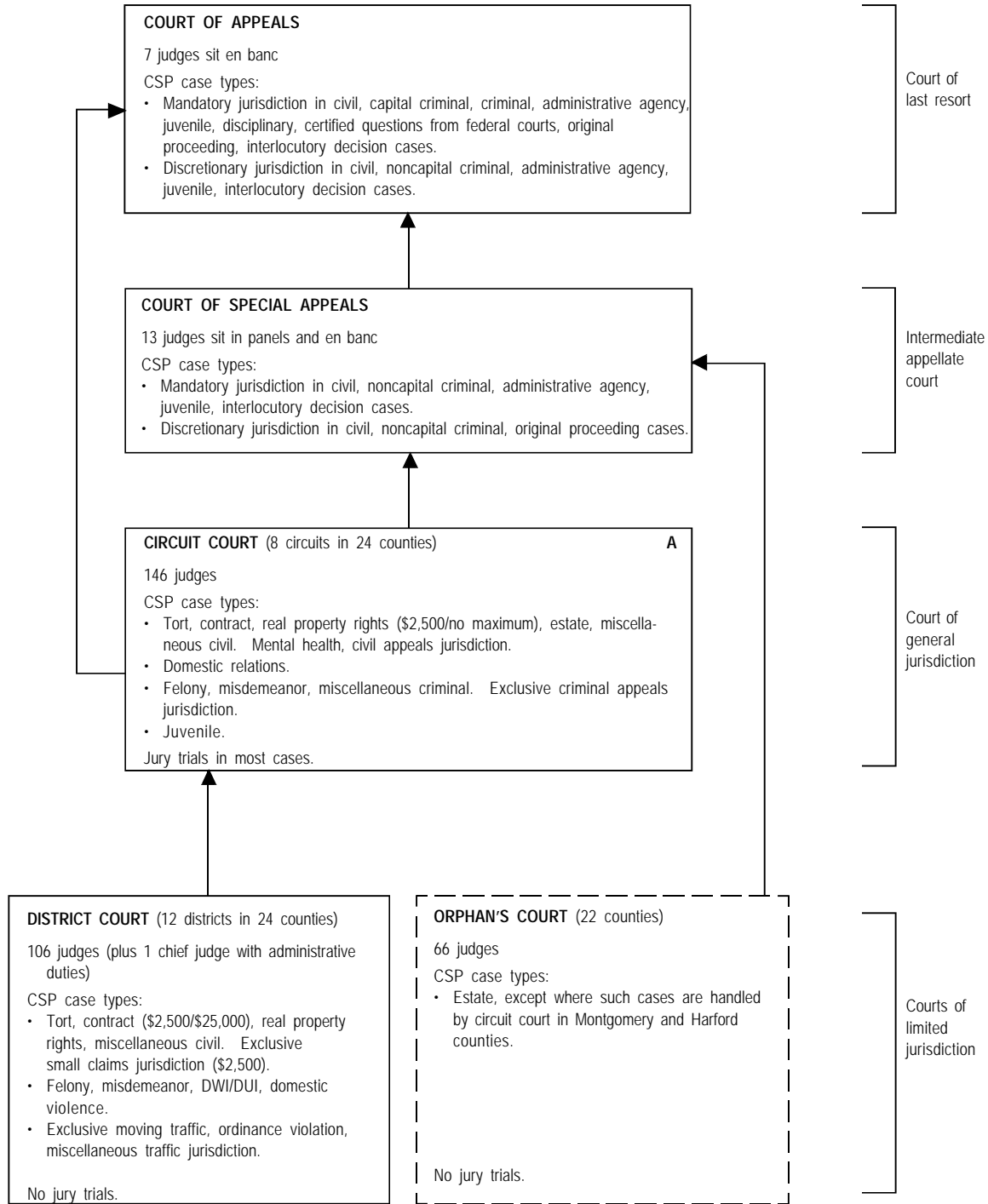
MAINE COURT STRUCTURE, 2002



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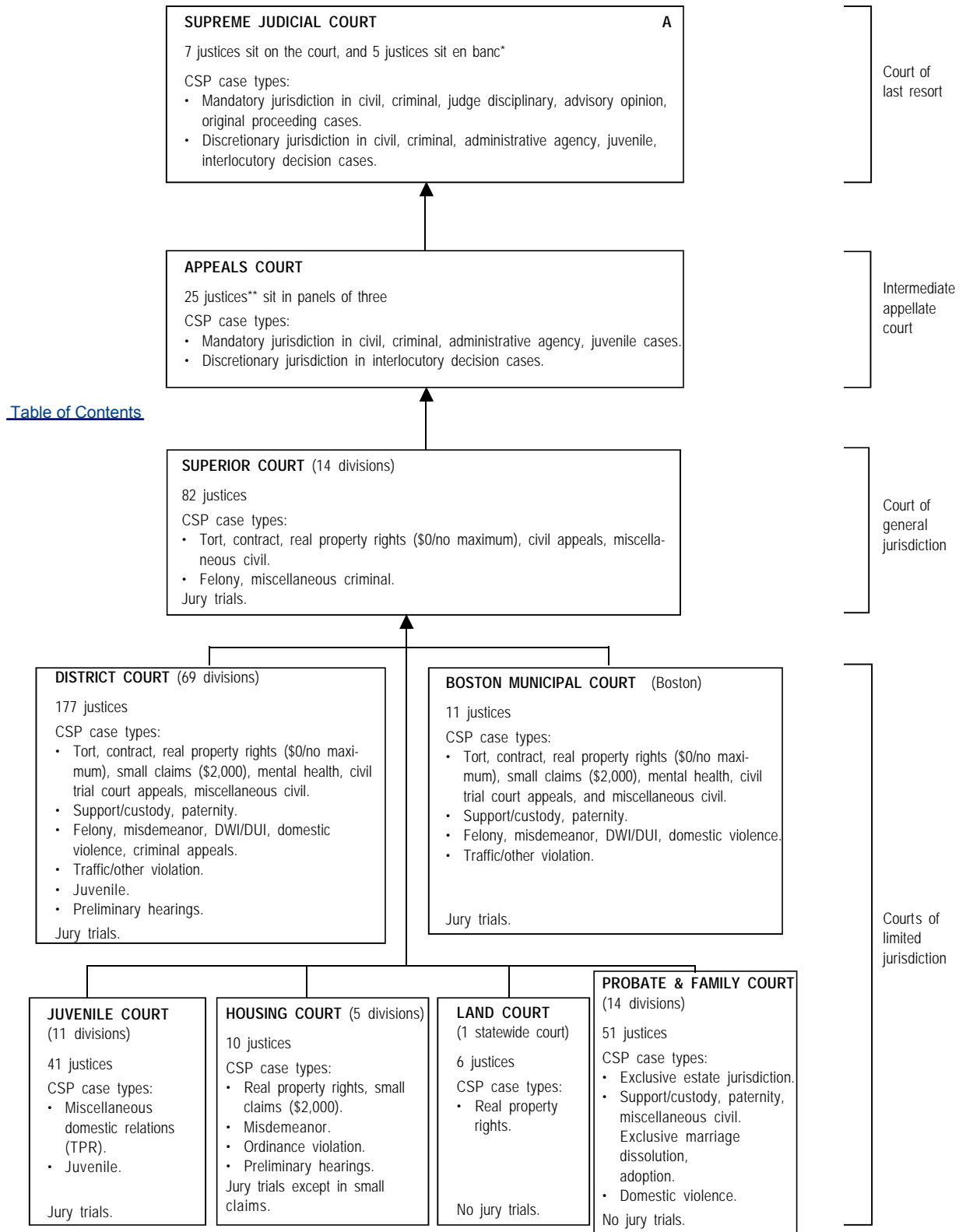
*The Administrative Court was eliminated effective March 15, 2001, with the caseload absorbed by District Court.

MARYLAND COURT STRUCTURE, 2002



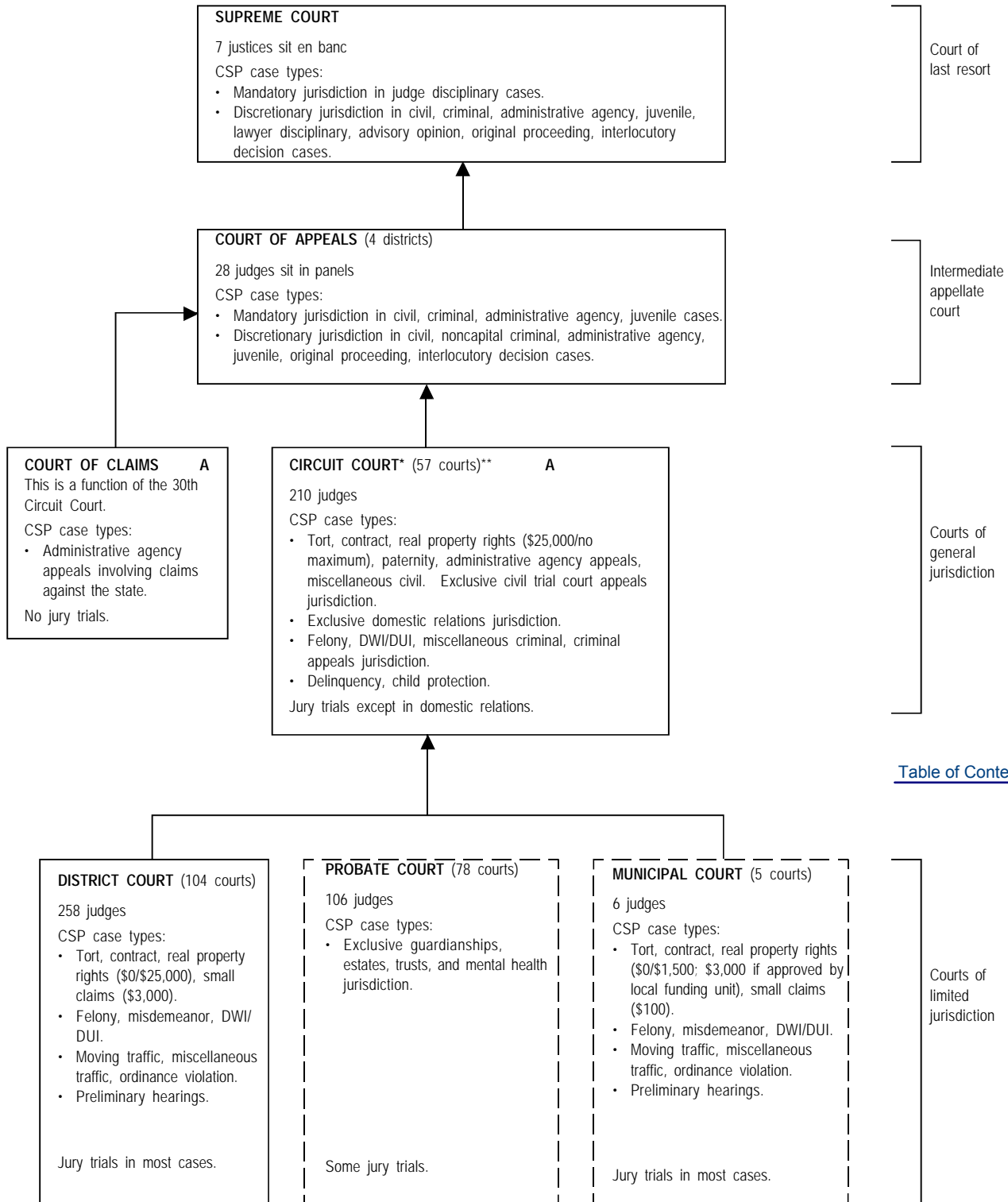
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MASSACHUSETTS COURT STRUCTURE, 2002



* The justices also sit individually in the "single justice" side of the court, on a rotating basis.

MICHIGAN COURT STRUCTURE, 2002



* The Recorder's Court of Detroit merged with the Circuit Court effective October 1, 1997.

** A Family Division of Circuit Court became operational on January 1, 1998.