

Traffic/Violations Caseloads

The adjacent table illustrates each state's contribution to the 55 million incoming traffic, parking, and ordinance violations cases reported by state trial courts for 2005. Yet despite its staggering size, this total under-represents the true traffic/violations caseload due to incomplete or outdated reporting from many states. For example, California's total is incomplete because parking violations are not included in its total, and neither Oklahoma nor Wyoming updated their data for 2005. The purpose of the tables and graphics that follow is to illustrate not only what is known about the traffic caseload, but also the challenges and complexities in reporting and interpreting caseload data in general.

Incoming Traffic/Violations Caseloads and Rates, 2005

State	Total	Per 100,000 Population
States Reporting Complete Caseloads		
New Jersey	5,673,995	65,084
Hawaii	413,696	32,442
Michigan	2,665,581	26,337
Arizona	1,476,497	24,860
Illinois	3,013,682	23,612
Arkansas	654,541	23,552
Utah	545,079	22,072
Vermont	137,356	22,046
South Dakota	142,605	18,379
Indiana	795,463	12,683
Florida	1,336,603	7,513
New Hampshire	72,504	5,535
Puerto Rico	10,945	280
States Reporting Incomplete Caseloads		
Texas	9,429,882	41,251
Nevada	659,099	27,294
Minnesota	1,363,157	26,558
Delaware	213,161	25,270
Kansas	691,094	25,179
Washington	1,582,770	25,172
Maryland	1,406,510	25,115
Iowa	725,036	24,442
Missouri	1,382,514	23,835
Louisiana	983,483	21,741
North Dakota	132,224	20,768
Montana	194,120	20,747
Virginia	1,503,333	19,866
Pennsylvania	2,341,068	18,835
Alabama	807,966	17,727
Wyoming ¹	87,948	17,269
Ohio	1,920,002	16,748
California	5,810,121	16,080
Idaho	215,883	15,106
South Carolina	633,238	14,882
Georgia	1,300,806	14,338
Maine	150,946	11,422
Rhode Island	117,046	10,876
Alaska	68,551	10,329
Wisconsin	540,974	9,772
Nebraska	169,851	9,657
New Mexico	185,017	9,594
Colorado	421,475	9,034
Kentucky	364,239	8,728
North Carolina	754,351	8,687
West Virginia	155,447	8,556
Oregon	270,891	7,440
New York	1,179,195	6,124
Oklahoma ²	185,419	5,226
Massachusetts	280,084	4,377
Connecticut	112,259	3,198
District of Columbia	16,524	3,002
Mississippi	—	—
Tennessee	—	—
Grand Total	55,294,231	

Statistical Guide



National Center for State Courts
Traffic, Parking, and Local
Ordinance Case Type Definitions



¹ Wyoming's last reported data are from 2004.

² Oklahoma's last reported data are from 1997.

"—" = No data reported in any year.

NCSA Resource

National Center for State Courts
Traffic Resource Center

The variations revealed in these data probably reflect differences in driving behavior, local traffic and parking enforcement practices, and data reporting practices, but without more consistent data reporting across states, it is difficult to know the source of the differences. For example, Florida has a large population and yet a very low per capita rate of these cases, while for Hawaii the converse is true; a definitive explanation is not possible without more information.

A more meaningful comparison can be made using the subset of states that reported complete data from all courts (general and limited jurisdiction, or unified courts) having jurisdiction over one particular component of the total traffic/violations caseloads reported in the previous table. Nine states were able to distinguish non-criminal traffic cases (such as moving violations, expired registrations, or expired inspections) from **parking and ordinance violations**. The differences in per capita rates can be reasonably interpreted as reflecting variations in driving behavior, geography (i.e., the prevalence of major roads and highways within

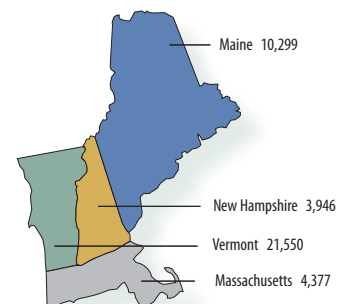
Incoming Non-Criminal Traffic Caseloads in 9 States, 2005

State	Total	Per 100,000 Population
New Jersey	2,532,300	29,047
Illinois	2,820,106	22,095
Arizona	1,300,767	21,901
Washington	973,014	15,475
California	5,519,452	15,276
Idaho	215,883	15,106
Maine	136,104	10,299
Massachusetts	280,084	4,377
New Hampshire	51,690	3,946

a state, which generate the “opportunity” for a traffic case), and how the law is interpreted and applied in these states. It is not therefore surprising that New Jersey, the most densely populated state and one through which a major north-south interstate (I-95) runs, has the highest per capita rate.

The challenges associated with accurate compilation and comparison of caseload data are illustrated in a regional comparison of per capita incoming non-criminal traffic case rates shown in the map below. The data appear to say that Vermont has a rate much higher than its neighboring states, each of which is comparable both geographically and demographically. However, Vermont’s non-criminal traffic caseload is overinclusive because it contains

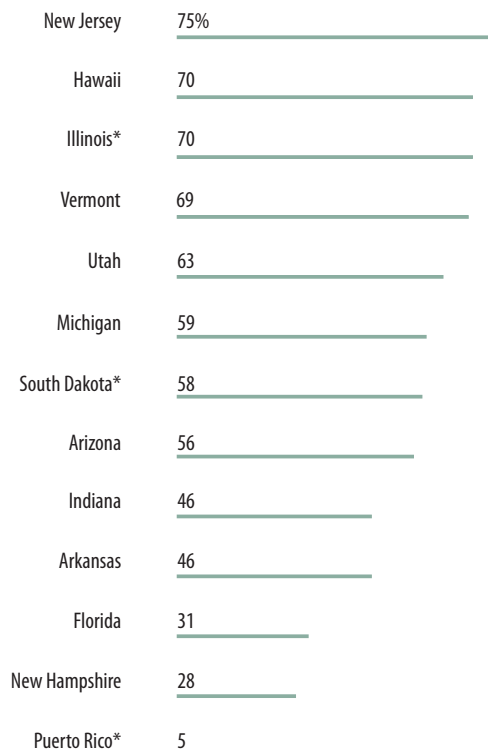
Incoming Non-Criminal Traffic Rates per 100,000 Population in 4 States, 2005



both contested and uncontested parking violations. Maine's total is overinclusive because it too includes these same violations. Massachusetts handles parking violations as an administrative matter outside of the court, and thus its per capita rate is a more accurate measure of the non-criminal traffic caseload. Finally, New Hampshire's caseload includes contested parking, making it overinclusive, but slightly less so than its other overinclusive neighbors. This example illustrates the value of states that are able to report in the framework defined by the *State Court Guide to Statistical Reporting* in order to make valid comparisons. Details of these counting practices are documented in the annual companion volume, *State Court Caseload Statistics, 2006*.

The 13 states listed below that reported complete traffic/violations caseloads vary substantially in terms of the share that those cases represent of their total incoming caseloads. New Jersey had the highest per capita incoming rate (shown on the first table in this section) as well as the highest proportion of traffic/violations cases among their total incoming caseload. Puerto Rico, despite being a close second in population density, produced rates and percentages that are a fraction of those reported by New Jersey, ranking it last on both charts. Puerto Rico's island geography and absence of interstate highways no doubt contribute to its unusually low traffic filing rates.

Traffic/Violations Cases as a Percentage of All Incoming Cases in 13 States, 2005



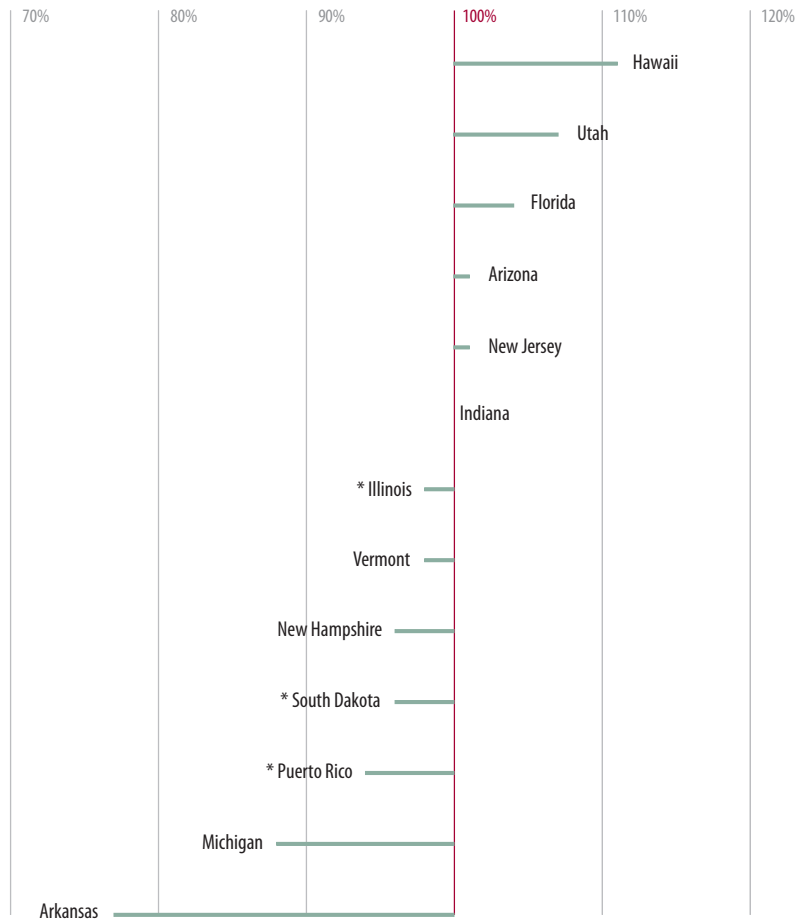
*These states have unified court systems.



Given the high volume of traffic/violations cases, clearance rates for these cases can be greatly affected by case processing efficiency. Last year, for example, Michigan reported a 100 percent clearance rate for traffic/violations cases; this year that rate is 88 percent. The difference is almost entirely attributable to the processing of

parking violations, which fell by half. Many of Michigan's parking violations cases were not yet disposed at year end, resulting in a clearance rate of only 50 percent for parking violations cases, which represent a large portion of the total traffic, parking, and ordinance violations caseload.

Clearance Rates for Traffic/Violations Cases in 13 States, 2005



* These states have unified court systems.