

INTRODUCTION

The *Court Statistics Report (CSR)* is published annually by the Judicial Council of California. The CSR combines 10-year statewide summaries of superior court filings and dispositions with similar workload indicators for the California Supreme Court and Courts of Appeal. The appendixes to this report provide detailed information on filings and dispositions in the superior courts for the most recent fiscal year, 2014–2015.

The CSR is designed to fulfill the provisions of article VI, section 6 of the California Constitution, which requires the Judicial Council to survey the condition and business of the California courts.

The CSR is published on the California Courts website at <http://www.courts.ca.gov/12941.htm>.

Snapshot of Court Caseload

The *Court Statistics Report* contains essential information about the annual caseload of the California judicial branch, with a particular emphasis on the number and types of cases that are filed and disposed of in the courts. This information is submitted to the California Legislature and used in numerous judicial branch reports. As with any published data, the numbers in this report represent a snapshot of the most complete and reliable information available at the time of compilation.

To ensure that the statistics used for making policy decisions are as accurate as possible, courts may amend the data they submit to the Judicial Council should new, more detailed or more complete information become available. For this reason, the data in this report may change slightly over time as courts revise their calculations and submit new caseload estimates.

Weighted Caseload and Court Workload

In the judicial branch the most reliable and consistent measure of workload is the number of case filings. Because different types of cases require different amounts of judicial and staff resources, a weighted caseload approach is the standard method, nationwide, to estimate the workload and resource needs of the courts. Accordingly, the Judicial Council has adopted a weighted caseload methodology to measure judicial and court staff resource needs in California. Weighted caseload distinguishes between different categories of filings so that the resources required to process a felony case, for example, are recognized as being much greater than the resources required to process a traffic infraction. Individual caseweights have been assigned to the many different types of cases filed in the courts. Caseweights are used along with the data published in the Court Statistics Report to estimate the number of judicial officers and court staff needed to fully adjudicate each case filed in the 58 superior courts.

The Judicial Council has adopted caseweights for two workload models used by the judicial branch—the Judicial Workload Assessment and the Resource Assessment Study (RAS) model. The Judicial Workload Assessment model was originally developed and adopted by the Judicial Council in 2001, and the Judicial Council adopted updated caseweights or judicial workload standards in 2012. The Resource Assessment Study (RAS) model was originally developed and adopted by the Judicial Council in 2005, and the RAS model was updated and adopted by the Judicial Council in 2013.

With the introduction of a new budget development and allocation process for the trial courts in 2013, the data published in the Court Statistics Report is being used by the judicial branch for a critically important new purpose. The Judicial Council adopted the Workload-based Allocation and Funding Methodology, or WAFM, which uses the Resource Assessment Model (RAS) and other workload factors in a new budget development process that alters baseline funding for most trial courts based on court workload. WAFM is consistent with Goal II, Independence and Accountability, of Justice in Focus: The Strategic Plan for California Judicial Branch 2006-2012, in that the methodology strives to “allocate resources in a transparent and fair manner that promotes efficiency and effectiveness in the administration of justice, supports the strategic goals of the judicial branch, promotes innovation, and provides for effective and consistent court operations” (Goal II.B.3).

Variations in Data Totals

Statewide trends in filings and dispositions may be influenced by a number of factors. For example, changes in the number of filings and dispositions may reflect shifting needs or behavior of residents of a court’s service area as well as new policy emphases in the work of justice system partners. The following are some of the more common causes of statistical variations.

Missing Data

Statewide totals in the *CSR* may be influenced by missing data for certain courts. Typically, when courts do not report data to the Judicial Council, it is because they have encountered difficulties generating automated reports from their case management systems. Filings data submitted by the courts tend to be more complete than disposition data.

Incomplete Data

The reporting of incomplete data typically occurs when courts transmit partial data totals for a particular case type because of the limits of their case management systems. It should be noted that incomplete data are more difficult to spot in the tables that follow, but in general they will cause downward shifts in the number of filings and dispositions. (Incomplete data for FY 2014–2015 are also detailed in Appendix A.)

Variation in Local Business Practices

Data reported in the *CSR* are compiled in a data warehouse, the Judicial Branch Statistical Information System (JBSIS). Because many different case management systems are used in the courts, data must be “mapped” from local systems into the standard categories used for reporting purposes. One essential function of JBSIS is to standardize the basic definitions of case types and case events across all courts in California. Another important aspect of JBSIS is its role in the extraction of court data through different transmission methods that include manual reports, web-based reports through the JBSIS Portal, and automated JBSIS reports. Through this process JBSIS contributes to the warehousing of this data in a structure that is comparable from one court to another.

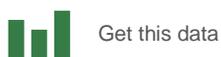
Maintaining quality control over the data contained in the JBSIS data warehouse involves:

- Training court staff on the standards for the classification, entry, and reporting of data;
- Providing information to the courts for resolving technical questions associated with data definitions, processing, and aggregation;
- Developing and adopting a new case management system infrastructure in the courts; and
- Documenting and disseminating information related to changes in the ways that courts define or report data.

Although a growing number of courts now transmit their data electronically from their case management system to the Judicial Council, there continue to be differences among superior courts' case processing and other business practices that reflect the histories of individual courts and the unique needs of the communities they serve. These differences may influence the ways in which superior courts report data to the Judicial Council. On that basis, while the filings and disposition data reported by any one court are largely comparable to data from other courts, some local variations in the classification and reporting of cases still occur.

Changes to 2016 Court Statistics Report

The 2016 *Court Statistics Report* reflects several design improvements and organizational changes to make the document more user-friendly—primarily a more graphical presentation of the material and more accurate organization of the work of the branch by case type and subject matter. The electronic PDF version of the 2016 CSR also offers access to the raw data underlying many of the graphical charts by clicking the data icon:



The major organizational change in the 2016 CSR is to distinguish descriptive caseload indicators such as filings and dispositions, and basic standards and measures of judicial administration. These measures, such as time to disposition and caseload clearance rate, allow the courts to assess case-processing practices and ensure efficient allocation of resources. Engaging in an ongoing assessment of performance measurement furthers many of the branchwide strategic goals—such as access to justice, accountability, and quality of justice and service to the public—that are vital to the effective administration of justice in California.

Judicial Administration Standards and Measures

Government Code section 77001.5 (Sen. Bill 56 [Dunn]; Stats. 2006, ch. 390) requires the Judicial Council to adopt and annually report on “judicial administration standards and measures that promote the fair and efficient administration of justice, including, but not limited to, the following subjects: (1) providing equal access to courts and respectful treatment for all court participants; (2) case processing, including the efficient use of judicial resources; and (3) general court administration.” The judicial administration standards and measures included in the 2016 CSR further the branch’s commitment to the goals and measures outlined in Government Code section 77001.5.

CalCourTools

CalCourTools is a set of judicial administration standards and measures linked to technical assistance available from the Judicial Council. The CalCourTools program builds on the CourTools measures developed by the National Center for State Courts and endorsed by the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators

Statistical Overview

This section contains summaries of filings and dispositions for the California Supreme Court, Courts of Appeal, and superior courts for fiscal year 2014–2015.

Supreme Court

- The Supreme Court issued 76 written opinions during the year.

- 7,868 matters were filed with the court, with 7,560 matters disposed of during the same period.
- The court received 4,038 petitions seeking review from a Court of Appeal decision in an appeal or an original writ proceeding and disposed of 3,874 such petitions.
 - 1,158 of these petitions for review arose from civil matters, and 2,880 from criminal matters.
 - The court disposed of 1,104 civil petitions and 2,770 criminal petitions.
- The court received 2,727 petitions seeking original writ relief and disposed of 2,632 of such petitions.
 - Of the petitions seeking original writ relief, 327 arose out of civil matters and 2,400 arose out of criminal matters.
 - The court disposed of 296 civil and 2,336 criminal petitions.
- A total of 18 automatic appeals were filed with the court following a judgment of death, and the court disposed of 19 automatic appeals by written opinion.
- The court received 47 habeas corpus petitions related to automatic appeals and disposed of 17 such petitions.
- A total of 1,027 State Bar matters were filed with the court, and 1,011 such matters were disposed of during the year.
- The Supreme Court ordered 21 Court of Appeal opinions depublished in this fiscal year.

Courts of Appeal

- Contested matters for the Courts of Appeal totaled 20,661, and dispositions totaled 22,084.
- Contested matters included 13,607 records of appeal and 7,054 original proceedings.
- The 13,607 filings of records of appeal comprised 4,275 civil cases, 6,463 criminal cases, and 2,869 juvenile cases. The 7,054 filings of original proceedings included 1,834 civil, 4,803 criminal, and 417 juvenile cases.
- Filings of notices of appeal in the superior court totaled 16,211: 6,062 civil cases, 7,113 criminal cases, and 3,036 juvenile cases.
- Disposition of notices of appeal totaled 15,283 and included 6,101 civil, 6,232 criminal, and 2,950 juvenile cases.
 - Dispositions of notices of appeal by written opinion totaled 9,417: 3,106 civil cases, 4,729 criminal cases, and 1,582 juvenile cases.
 - Dispositions without written opinion totaled 3,906 cases: 1,444 civil, 1,191 criminal, and 1,271 juvenile.
 - Dispositions of notices of appeal with no record filed totaled 1,960 cases: 1,551 civil, 312 criminal, and 97 juvenile.
- Disposition of filings of original proceedings is composed of 1,769 civil, 4,788 criminal, and 314 juvenile cases.
 - Disposition of original proceedings decided with written opinion totaled 442 cases: 131 civil cases, 124 criminal cases, and 187 juvenile cases.
 - Disposition of original proceedings without written opinion totaled 6,429 cases: 1,638 civil, 4,664 criminal, and 127 juvenile.
- Of the cases disposed of by written opinion, 7,939 were affirmed, 924 were reversed, and 263 were dismissed.

- Of those cases affirmed by the Courts of Appeal, 6,383 received full affirmance, while 1,556 received affirmance with modification.
- Statewide, 9 percent of Court of Appeal majority opinions were published in this fiscal year.

Superior Court

Superior court case filings across all case categories totaled 6,832,710 cases, while dispositions numbered 6,342,662. Within these aggregate numbers, the following totals by major case category and case type were recorded:

Civil Cases. Civil filings totaled 718,321 and civil dispositions totaled 747,353, with a caseload clearance rate of 104% attained over all civil case types in this fiscal year.

- **UNLIMITED:** Civil unlimited filings totaled 192,761 cases, while civil unlimited dispositions numbered 179,509.
 - Method of disposition for civil unlimited cases: 140,124 cases disposed of before trial and 39,385 after trial.
 - Caseload clearance rate for civil unlimited cases: 93%.
 - Case processing time for civil unlimited cases was 64% within 12 months, 76% in 18 months, and 83% in 24 months.
- **LIMITED:** Civil limited filings totaled 375,178 cases, while civil limited dispositions numbered 409,944.
 - Method of disposition for civil limited trials: 377,764 cases were disposed of before trial and 32,180 after trial.
 - The caseload clearance rate for civil limited cases was 109%.
 - Case processing time for civil limited was as follows: 83% in 12 months, 91% in 18 months, and 94% in 24 months.
- **SMALL CLAIMS:** Small claims filings reached a total of 150,382 cases, while small claims dispositions numbered 157,900.
 - Method of disposition for small claims cases: 67,327 cases were disposed of before trial and 90,573 after trial.
 - The caseload clearance rate for small claims cases was 105%.
 - Case processing time in small claims cases was as follows: 58% in 70 days, 71% in 90 days.

Criminal Cases. Criminal filings totaled 5,561,688 and criminal dispositions numbered 5,119,511, with a caseload clearance rate of 92% attained over all criminal case types in this fiscal year.

- **FELONIES:** Felony filings reached a total of 214,088 cases, while felony dispositions numbered 223,339.
 - Method of disposition: 218,285 felony cases were disposed of before trial and 5,054 after trial.
 - Caseload clearance rate for felony cases was 104%.
 - Case processing time in felony cases resulting in bindovers or certified pleas: 45% in 30 days, 55% in 45 days, 71% in 90 days—with 88% of all felonies disposed of in less than 12 months.

- **MISDEMEANORS:** Misdemeanor filings reached a total of 922,730 cases, while misdemeanor dispositions numbered 757,286.
 - Method of disposition: 750,264 misdemeanor cases were disposed of before trial and 7,039 after trial.
 - Caseload clearance rate for misdemeanor cases ranged from 84% for traffic misdemeanors to 80% for nontraffic misdemeanors.
 - Case processing time for misdemeanors: 61% in 30 days, 77% in 90 days, and 83% in 120 days.
- **INFRACTIONS:** Infraction filings reached a total of 4,424,870 cases, while infraction dispositions numbered 4,138,886.
 - Method of disposition: 3,761,011 infraction cases were disposed of before trial and 377,876 after trial.
 - The caseload clearance rate for infraction cases ranged from 73% for nontraffic infractions to 95% for traffic infractions.

Family Law. Family law filings totaled 380,160, and family law dispositions numbered 340,777, with a caseload clearance rate of 90% attained over all family law case types in this fiscal year.

- **FAMILY LAW (MARITAL):** Family law (marital) filings reached a total of 138,121 cases, while this type of family law dispositions numbered 135,812.
 - Method of disposition: 134,393 family law (marital) cases were disposed of before trial and 1,419 after trial.
 - The caseload clearance rate for family law (marital) cases was 98%.
- **FAMILY LAW PETITIONS:** Family law petition filings reached a total of 242,039 cases, while this type of family law dispositions numbered 204,965.
 - Method of disposition: 203,156 family law petition cases were disposed of before trial and 1,809 after trial.
 - The caseload clearance rate for family law petition cases was 85%.

Juvenile Law. Juvenile filings totaled 85,405, and juvenile dispositions numbered 70,566.

- **JUVENILE DELINQUENCY:** Juvenile delinquency filings reached a total of 40,726 cases, while juvenile delinquency dispositions numbered 38,376.
 - Method of disposition: 6,886 juvenile delinquency cases were disposed of before hearing and 31,490 after hearing.
 - The caseload clearance rate for juvenile delinquency cases ranged from 97% for original petitions to 87% for subsequent petitions, with an average of 94% for this case type.
- **JUVENILE DEPENDENCY:** Juvenile dependency filings reached a total of 44,679 cases, while juvenile dependency dispositions numbered 32,190.
 - Method of disposition: 1,493 juvenile dependency cases were disposed of before hearing and 30,697 after hearing.
 - The caseload clearance rate for juvenile dependency cases ranged from 79% for original petitions to 27% for subsequent petitions, with an average of 72% for this case type.

Probate and Mental Health Cases.

- PROBATE: Probate (estate, guardianship, and conservatorship) filings reached a total of 44,456 cases, while probate dispositions numbered 27,701.
 - Method of disposition: 15,571 probate cases were disposed of before hearing and 12,132 after hearing.
 - The caseload clearance rate for all types of probate cases was 62%.
- MENTAL HEALTH: Mental health filings reached a total of 29,718 cases, while mental health dispositions numbered 24,557.
 - Method of disposition: 5,656 mental health cases were disposed of before hearing and 18,901 after hearing.
 - The caseload clearance rate for all types of mental health cases was 83%.

Trials, By Type of Proceeding

- JURY TRIALS: A total of 9,450 jury trials were recorded across all case types. Jury trials held in the superior courts in fiscal year 2014–2015 included 4,778 felony, 2,901 misdemeanor, 1,235 civil unlimited, 491 civil limited, and 45 probate and mental health cases.
- ALL COURT TRIALS: A total of 479,719 court trials were recorded across all the case types detailed above (excluding small claims). These included 276 felony, 382,014 misdemeanor and infractions, 34,752 civil unlimited, 31,689 civil limited, and 30,988 probate and mental health cases.
- SMALL CLAIMS TRIALS: A total of 90,573 small claims court trials were recorded, which may be distinguished from criminal and civil court trials for their tendency to be resolved in a single hearing.

Trial Court Workload and Judicial Resources

- Authorized judicial positions in the California courts in fiscal year 2014–2015 totaled 2,013: 1,715 judges and 298 subordinate judicial officers.
- The 50 new judgeships authorized by Assembly Bill 159, effective January 2008, are still unfunded but are included in the statewide number of judgeships.
- While the number of authorized judicial positions for the year was 2,013, the assessed number of judges needed (AJN) was 2,171 based on the 2014 assessment presented to the Judicial Council at the December 2014 meeting.

The California Court System

California's court system serves a population of more than 39 million people—about 12 percent of the total U.S. population—and processed about 6.8 million cases in fiscal year 2014–2015. The judicial branch budget for the 2014–2015 fiscal year excluding infrastructure of \$3.6 billion represents about 2.4 percent of the California state budget and makes possible the case-processing activity detailed above while also providing the basis of support for approximately 2,000 judicial officers and 19,000 judicial branch employees statewide.

The vast majority of cases in the California courts begin in one of the 58 superior, or trial, courts, which reside in each of the state's 58 counties. With more than 500 court buildings throughout the state, these courts hear both civil and criminal cases as well as family, probate, mental health, and juvenile cases. The equivalent of

more than 2,000 judicial positions statewide address the full range of cases heard each year by the superior courts, as reflected in the sheer number of case filings and dispositions reported here. The superior courts report summaries of their case filing counts to the Judicial Council, and the CSR reports those figures here in aggregate form.

The next level of court authority within the state's judicial branch resides with the Courts of Appeal. Most of the cases that come before the Courts of Appeal involve the review of a superior court decision that is being contested by a party to the case. The Legislature has divided the state geographically into six appellate districts, each containing a Court of Appeal. Currently, 105 appellate justices preside in nine locations in the state to hear matters brought for review. Totals of Court of Appeal case filings are forwarded to the Judicial Council; these are summarized in the tables that follow.

The Supreme Court sits at the apex of the state's judicial system, and has discretion to review decisions of the Courts of Appeal in order to settle important questions of law and resolve conflicts among the courts of appeal. Although the Supreme Court generally has considerable discretion in determining in which cases to grant review, it must review the appeal in any case in which a trial court has imposed the death penalty. The Supreme Court sends the Judicial Council its annual case filing figures, which are reported here in summary form.

Terminology and Rules for Counting Filings

Technical definitions of most terms used in this CSR can be found in the appendixes. Some core definitions are presented here in more detail.

Appellate Courts

APPEAL. An *appeal* is a proceeding undertaken to have a decision of a lower trial court reviewed by a court with appellate authority over the matter. (Certain limited matters are reviewed by the appellate department of the superior courts.) A *notice of appeal* is a written notification filed in the superior court to initiate the appeal of a judgment to the Court of Appeal. The Courts of Appeal have appellate jurisdiction in all trial court matters, except when a judgment of death is entered, in which case the Supreme Court has appellate jurisdiction. If the matter is appealable, the court must hear the appeal. A *fully briefed* appeal is one in which all briefs have been filed with the court. *Dismissal* of an appeal involves the termination of a case for reasons other than its merit. An appeal that is awaiting a final decision is said to be *pending*. **Each notice of appeal is counted as one new filing.**

PETITION FOR REVIEW. A *petition for review* is filed in the California Supreme Court to ask that court to exercise its discretion to review a decision issued by a Court of Appeal in an appeal or an original proceeding. The Supreme Court has a total of 90 days to consider a petition for review, after which it loses jurisdiction. If a petition for review is granted by the Supreme Court then full briefing occurs on the case; if a petition is denied then the judgment of the lower court becomes final as to the case.

AUTOMATIC APPEAL. An *automatic appeal* is the appeal following a judgment of death in the trial court. This type of appeal is unique because it moves directly from a superior court to the Supreme Court without first being reviewed by a Court of Appeal. Like other types of appeals, is fully briefed before being heard. **An automatic appeal is counted as one new filing.**

ORIGINAL PROCEEDING. An *original proceeding* is an action that may be filed and heard for the first time in an appellate court. This action is not an appeal; rather, it is ordinarily a petition for a writ. Examples of original

proceedings include a writ of mandamus, which instructs a lower court to perform mandatory duties correctly; a writ of prohibition, or an order that forbids certain actions; and a writ of habeas corpus, which is described below. **Each original proceeding is counted as one new filing.**

PETITION FOR A WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS. A petition for the issuance of a *writ of habeas corpus* is typically filed to contest the legality of a party's imprisonment or conditions of confinement. **Each habeas corpus petition is counted as one new filing.**

WRITTEN OPINION. A *written opinion* is a document issued by an appellate court explaining the terms and reasoning in its disposition of a case. The written opinion includes a statement of the legal facts in the case, relevant points of law, and the court's analysis and rationale for its decision. In addition to the written majority opinion in a case, concurring and dissenting opinions also may be filed in each case. **For each case, only the majority opinion is counted as a written opinion in these tables.**

DISPOSITIONS. The appellate court may dispose of a case by affirming or reversing the action of the lower court, or it may send the case back to the lower court for further proceedings if appropriate.

RECORD OF APPEAL. A *record of appeal* is the compilation of documents and transcripts associated with a given superior court case under review by an appellate court. The record is a component of a new appellate case and as such **is not counted separately from the initial appeal.**

REVERSAL OF CASE DECISION. A *reversal* is the overturning of a lower court's decision by an appellate court.

Superior Courts

FILING. In the most general sense, a *filing* is the initiation of a legal action with the court through a carefully prescribed legal procedure.

How Filings Are Counted. The procedure used to count filings for this report follows a set of rules consistent with national standards for statistical reporting. These rules differ according to case type:

- Each filing in a *civil case* pertains to the complaint or petition that has been submitted to the court for action. A given civil complaint may name one or more individuals or groups as its object. However, **regardless of the number of parties named in a case, each civil case is reported as one filing or one disposition.**
- Each filing in a *criminal case* is associated with a single defendant against whom criminal charges have been filed. Multiple criminal charges may occur in a case where different charges have been brought against the same defendant, but **only the single most severe charge against a defendant in a given case is counted as a new criminal filing. When multiple defendants are charged with a crime, multiple filings are reported.**
- Each filing in a *juvenile case* pertains to a minor who is the subject of a petition made to the court for adjudication. A minor may have an initial filing that brought him or her to the attention of the court, and subsequent filings if new petitions or charges are filed over time. This practice continues until termination of the dependency or delinquency jurisdiction by the court or when the minor has reached the legal definition of adulthood. **In a single case involving multiple minors, each minor is counted as a separate filing.**

DISPOSITION. In a general sense, a *disposition* may be described as a final settlement or determination in a case. A disposition may occur either before or after a civil or criminal case has been scheduled for trial. A final judgment, a dismissal of a case, and the sentencing of a criminal defendant are all examples of dispositions. In

certain case types, however, a disposition may merely signal the beginning of the court's authority over a case. For example, after the petition to appoint a conservator is disposed of in conservatorship cases, the court assumes control over that case. Rules for counting and reporting dispositions mirror those for filings, although a case filed in one year may be disposed of by the court in a subsequent year.

California Judicial Branch: Structure and Duties

The Courts

CALIFORNIA SUPREME COURT

www.courts.ca.gov/supremecourt.htm

- Has discretionary authority to review decisions of the Courts of Appeal; jurisdiction to review original petitions for writ relief; direct responsibility for automatic appeals after death penalty judgments
- Hears oral arguments in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Sacramento

COURTS OF APPEAL

www.courts.ca.gov/courtsofappeal.htm

- Review the majority of appealable orders or judgments from the superior courts; jurisdiction to review original petitions for writ relief
- Six districts, 19 divisions, 9 court locations

SUPERIOR COURTS

www.courts.ca.gov/superiorcourts.htm

- Have trial jurisdiction over all criminal and civil cases filed in their respective counties; guided by state and local laws that define crimes and specify punishments, as well as defining civil duties and liabilities
- A total of 58 courts—one for each California county—each operating in 1 to 46 branches depending on county population, total local caseload, and other factors

Branch and Administration Policy

JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA

www.courts.ca.gov/policyadmin-jc.htm

The constitutionally created policymaking body of the California courts

Branch Agencies

COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS

www.courts.ca.gov/5367.htm

Confirms gubernatorial appointments to the Supreme Court and appellate courts

COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL PERFORMANCE

<http://cjp.ca.gov>

Responsible for maintaining statewide standards for administration of justice and empowered with disciplinary authority to effect the censure, removal, retirement, or private admonishment of judges and commissioners

Decisions subject to review by the California Supreme Court

HABEAS CORPUS RESOURCE CENTER

www.courts.ca.gov/5361.htm

Handles state and federal habeas corpus proceedings; provides training and support for private attorneys who take these cases

Related

STATE BAR OF CALIFORNIA

www.calbar.ca.gov

Serves the Supreme Court in administrative and disciplinary matters related to attorneys