

INTRODUCTION

The *Court Statistics Report (CSR)* is published annually by the Judicial Council, Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). The CSR combines 10-year statewide summaries of superior court filings and dispositions with similar caseload data 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, 2007–2008.

The *Court Statistics Report* and the Judicial Council's *Annual Report* are 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 provides the statistical basis for many of the workload trends identified and interpreted in the annual report, which furnishes an overview of the major activities and projects undertaken by the judicial branch in the previous year to improve court administration, as well as analysis and interpretation of trends in the workload of the courts during that year.

The CSR is published on the California Courts Web site at www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference_3stats.htm.

SNAPSHOT OF COURT CASELOAD

The *Court Statistics Report* contains essential information about the branch's annual caseload—specifically, the numbers 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 contained 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 AOC as new, more detailed or more complete information becomes available. For this reason the data contained in this report may change slightly over time as courts revise their numbers and submit new caseload estimates.

VARIATIONS IN DATA TOTALS

Missing Data

Statewide trends in filings and dispositions may be influenced by numerous factors. For example, changes in the numbers of filings and dispositions may reflect shifts in the needs or behavior of residents of a court's service area, as well as new policy emphases in the work of justice system partners. Statewide totals in the CSR also may be influenced by missing data for certain courts.

Typically, when courts do not report data to the AOC, it is because they have difficulties generating automated reports from their case management systems. Generally, filings data submitted by the courts tend to be more complete than disposition data. (See Appendix A for a list of courts that have not submitted data to the AOC for FY 2007–2008.)

Incomplete Data

A second influence on the totals of filings and disposition statistics in this report is 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 2007–2008 are also detailed in Appendix A.)

Changes in Reporting Categories

When a court reviews its case management practices and the data that are reported to the AOC, it may determine that filings or disposition data should be categorized differently. While this process reflects a quality control system that is working to improve the accuracy of data submitted to the AOC, it also will create a shift in the number of filings or dispositions from one case type to another. On that basis, caution is advised in the interpretation of data when workload in related cases appears to have shifted but overall totals remain relatively stable.

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 component of JBSIS is the extraction of court data through different transmission methods—manual reports, automated JBSIS reports, and increasingly, the California Court Case Management System (CCMS)—and 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 the case management system to the AOC, 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 AOC. 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.

STATISTICAL OVERVIEW

Following are summaries of filings and dispositions for the Supreme Court, the Courts of Appeal, and the superior courts for fiscal year 2007–2008.

Supreme Court

- The court issued 116 written opinions.
- Filings for the California Supreme Court totaled 10,521, and dispositions totaled 10,440.
- Automatic appeals arising out of judgments of death totaled 17 cases, and dispositions of automatic appeals numbered 26.
- Habeas corpus filings arising out of related automatic appeals totaled 38, and dispositions of such matters totaled 26.
- Petitions seeking review following Court of Appeal decisions in appeals and writs totaled 5,903, while dispositions of such petitions totaled 5,989.
- Original proceedings for writ relief filed in the Supreme Court totaled 3,981, while dispositions of this type totaled 3,833.
- Within the category of original petitions for writ relief, 3,616 criminal, noncapital, habeas corpus petitions were filed and 3,476 criminal, noncapital, habeas corpus petitions were disposed.
- The Supreme Court ordered 14 Court of Appeal opinions depublished in this fiscal year.

Courts of Appeal

- Filings for the Courts of Appeal totaled 25,199. This figure is composed of 15,494 notices of appeal and 9,705 original proceedings.
- Filings of notices of appeal included 6,681 criminal cases, 5,913 civil cases, and 2,900 juvenile cases. Filings of original proceedings included 6,701 criminal matters, 2,444 civil matters, and 560 juvenile matters.¹
- Dispositions in the Courts of Appeal totaled 26,004. Of these dispositions, 16,098 were appeals, and 9,906 were original proceedings.
- Dispositions of appeals by written opinion totaled 11,191, and appeals disposed without written opinion totaled 4,907. Dispositions of original proceedings by written opinion totaled 631, and original proceedings disposed without written opinion totaled 9,275.
- Of the cases disposed by written opinion, 9,470 were affirmed, 1,099 were reversed, and 311 were dismissed.
- Statewide, 9 percent of Court of Appeal majority opinions were published in this fiscal year.

Superior Courts

- Superior court case filings across all case categories totaled 9,552,781 and dispositions totaled 7,957,969.

Within these aggregate numbers, the following totals in major case categories were recorded.

- Civil filings totaled 1,581,117, and civil dispositions totaled 1,278,753.
- Criminal filings totaled 7,793,181, and criminal dispositions totaled 6,522,402.

¹Note that, while family law filings are reported as a separate category in the superior courts, these cases are grouped under the general heading of civil law in the appellate courts.

- Juvenile filings totaled 148,920, and juvenile dispositions totaled 128,650.
- Family filings totaled 443,531, and family dispositions totaled 341,294.
- Appeal filings in the superior courts totaled 4,471, and appeal dispositions in these courts totaled 4,634.
- Civil unlimited cases reached disposition at the following pace in FY 2007–2008: 70 percent were disposed within 12 months, 86 percent within 18 months, and 93 percent within 24 months. Civil limited cases reached disposition at a somewhat faster pace, with 94 percent disposed within 12 months, 97 percent within 18 months, and 98 percent within 24 months.
- Criminal cases involving felonies reached disposition at the following pace: 54 percent were disposed in less than 30 days, 63 percent in less than 45 days, 78 percent in less than 90 days, and 89 percent in less than 12 months.
- A total of 11,218 jury trials were conducted across the state during the past fiscal year. This represents about 5.2 trials per judicial position equivalent.

THE CALIFORNIA COURT SYSTEM

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 facilities in more than 450 locations, these courts hear both civil and criminal cases, as well as family, probate, and juvenile cases. The equivalent of more than 2,000 judicial positions addresses the full range of cases heard each year by the superior courts. The trial courts report summaries of their case filing counts to the AOC. Those counts are reported here in aggregate form.

The next level of 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 compiled at the AOC and summarized in the tables that follow.

The Supreme Court sits at the apex of authority in the state’s judicial system, and as such it may review decisions of the Courts of Appeal in order to settle important questions of law and ensure that the law is applied uniformly. The Supreme Court has considerable discretion in deciding which decisions to review, but it must review any case in which a trial court has imposed the death penalty. The Supreme Court sends the AOC its annual case filing figures, which are reported here in summary form.

CSR TERMINOLOGY AND COUNTING RULES FOR FILINGS

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

Supreme Court and Courts of Appeal

APPEAL. An appeal is a proceeding undertaken to have a decision reconsidered by bringing it from a lower to a higher court of authority. A notice of appeal is a written notification that is filed with a superior court and is intended to initiate the appeal of a judgment to a higher court. 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. A notice of appeal is counted as a new filing.

RECORD OF APPEAL. A record of appeal is the compilation of documents and transcripts associated with a given trial court case that is 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.

AUTOMATIC APPEAL. An automatic appeal is the appeal of a judgment of guilt in a case involving the death penalty. This type of appeal is unique because it moves directly from a trial court to the Supreme Court without first being reviewed by a Court of Appeal. Like other types of appeals, an automatic appeal is counted as a new filing.

ORIGINAL PROCEEDING. An original proceeding is an action 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 may be issued to bring a party before the court. An original proceeding is counted as a single 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. A single habeas corpus petition may be filed simultaneously in any superior court and any appellate court. This writ is counted as a new filing.

WRITTEN OPINION. A written opinion is a statement explaining an appellate court's final judgment in a case. The written opinion includes a statement of the legal facts in the case, relevant points of law, and the rationale for the decision. Written opinions may or may not accompany final judgments and are not counted separately from case filings in tracking workload.

CASE REVERSAL. A reversal is the overturning of a lower court's decision by an appellate court. For purposes of tracking workload, case reversals are not counted separately from dispositions because a reversal is simply descriptive of the outcome of the appeal.

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. The rules for counting filings are 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 criminal case in which different charges have been brought against the same defendant. However, only the single most severe charge against a criminal 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 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.