

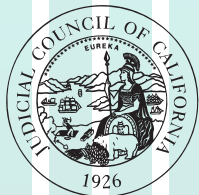


CIVIL FILINGS FUEL CONTINUED GROWTH IN TRIAL COURT CASELOAD

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DataPoints is produced by the AOC Office of Court Research to inform the court community about empirical trends in the California judicial branch.

For additional information on California court research and statistics: www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/resandstats.htm



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Strong growth in civil filings more than compensated for modest declines in criminal filings, resulting in a net increase of 1 percent in the total number of filings in the superior courts last year. In fiscal year 2007–2008, the most recent year for which complete data are available, more than 9.5 million cases were filed, as reported in the recently released 2009 Court Statistics Report (CSR) (www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/3_stats.htm).

The growing number of civil filings reverses a long-term trend of declining civil filings. Steadily falling since fiscal year 2000–2001, total civil filings reached a 10-year low of 1.42 million in fiscal year 2005–2006. Two consecutive years of strong growth now place the total number of civil filings at 1.58 million statewide, just below where it stood 10 years ago. In fiscal year 2007–2008, total civil filings increased by more than 7 percent (figure 1).

Figure 1. Statewide Filings of Civil Cases: FY 1998–99 to 2007–08

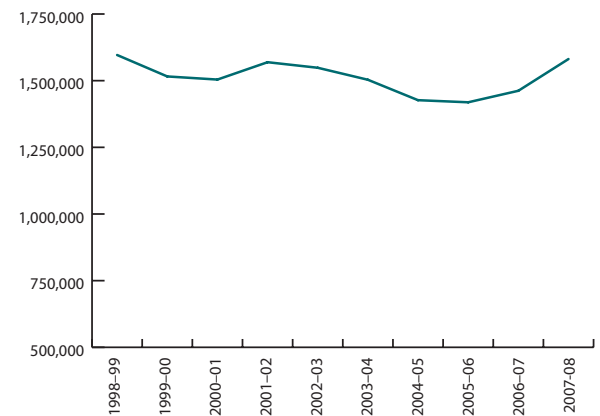
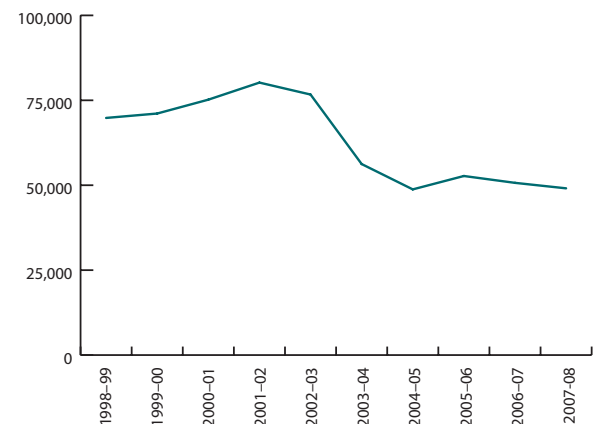


Figure 2. Statewide Filings of Unlimited Civil Torts: FY 1998–99 to 2007–08



The increase in civil filings is driven by non-tort cases, classified as other civil complaints, and includes cases such as contract, employment, real property, and unlawful detainer. This can be seen in unlimited civil filings—civil cases with a value in excess of \$25,000—where tort filings actually fell slightly in fiscal year 2007–2008 (figure 2). Despite this decline, total unlimited civil filings grew by 10 percent on the strength of a 17 percent jump in the number of other civil complaints (figure 3).

Limited civil filings—those cases with a value between \$5,000 and \$25,000—increased even more sharply, growing by more than 20 percent in fiscal year 2007–2008. Although data on subcategories of limited civil filings are not available for all superior courts, 23 of the 58 courts have reported more detailed data on this case type for a long enough period to evaluate trends.

Looking at the more detailed limited civil data, the same pattern found in unlimited civil appears but with even more clarity: while tort filings in the limited civil category were stagnant or declined slightly last year, filings of limited civil contract cases in the sample courts grew by 33 percent last year, and unlawful detainer cases grew by 17 percent (figures 4 and 5).

The growth in civil filings was driven by non-tort filings, especially contract and unlawful detainer cases.

While civil case filings reversed their decline, criminal case filings retreated from the sustained increase that they had exhibited in recent years. Fiscal year 2007–2008 marks only the second year since fiscal year 2000–2001 that criminal filings have not increased (figure 6).

The drop in the number of criminal filings was produced by a combination of falling felony, nontraffic misdemeanor, and traffic infraction filings. Felony filings declined by almost 6 percent (figure 7), nontraffic misdemeanors fell by 4 percent, and traffic infractions declined by 0.5 percent. Nontraffic infraction and traffic misdemeanor filings both increased but not enough to offset the falling numbers of filings in the other criminal categories.

Figure 3. Statewide Filings of Unlimited Civil Other Civil Complaints: FY 1998–99 to 2007–08

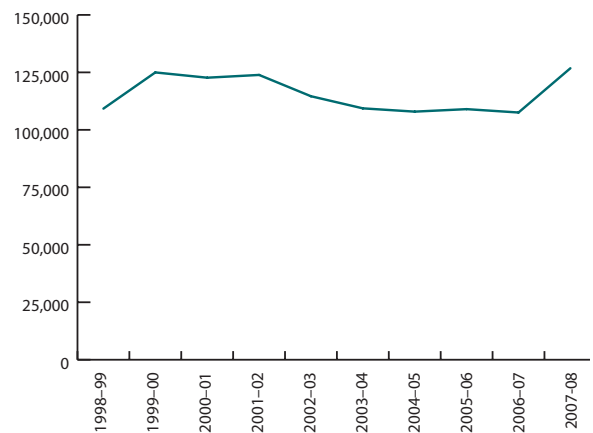


Figure 4. Sample of Limited Civil Contract Filings: FY 2003–04 to 2007–08

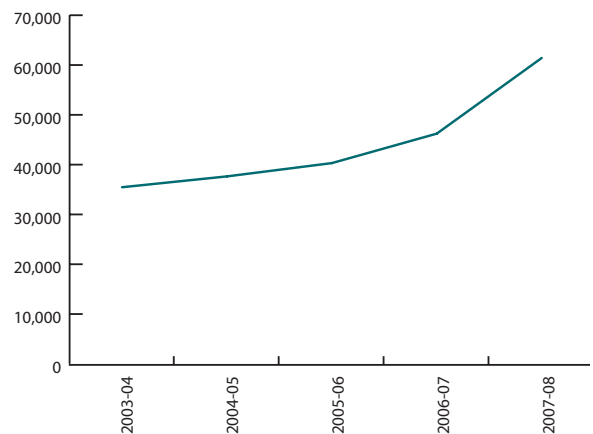
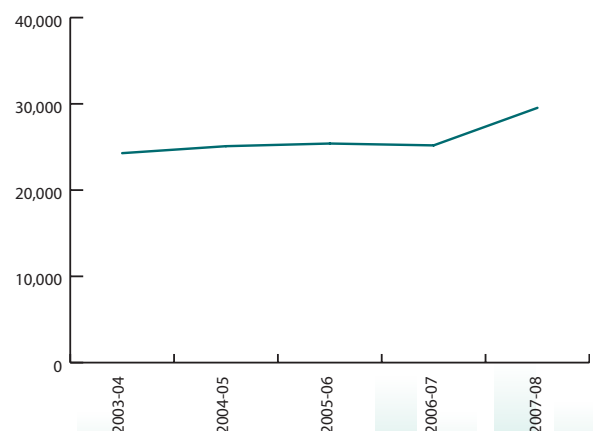


Figure 5. Sample of Limited Civil Unlawful Detainer Filings: FY 2003–04 to 2007–08



Fiscal year 2007–2008 marks only the second year since fiscal year 2000–2001 that criminal filings have not increased.

The numbers of juvenile delinquency and juvenile dependency filings went in opposite directions in fiscal year 2007–2008. Delinquency filings continued climbing for the fifth consecutive year, rising by almost 3 percent to more than 107,000, an increase of 15 percent in the last five years (figure 8).

Juvenile dependency filings fell by almost 8 percent in fiscal year 2007–2008. However, given the three years of sustained growth before that year, juvenile dependency filings are still 2 percent above their level five years ago (figure 9).

Both major categories of family law filings were also down in the last fiscal year. After fluctuating for a number of years, petitions for divorce and other forms of dissolution declined by a little more than 1 percent to 152,000 in fiscal year 2007–2008 (figure 10). The category of other family law petitions—which includes Department of Child Support Services petitions for the enforcement of child support orders, domestic violence restraining orders, and adoption and paternity petitions—fell by almost 5 percent in fiscal year 2007–2008 and is now 8.7 percent below where it stood five years ago, at just over 290,000 filings (figure 11).

Figure 6. Statewide Filings of Criminal Cases: FY 1998–99 to 2007–08

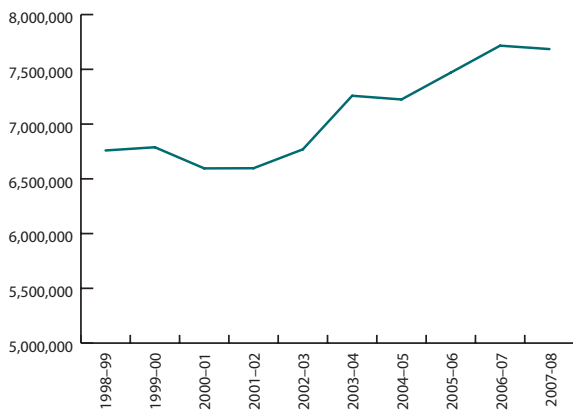


Figure 7. Statewide Filings of Felony Cases: FY 1998–99 to 2007–08

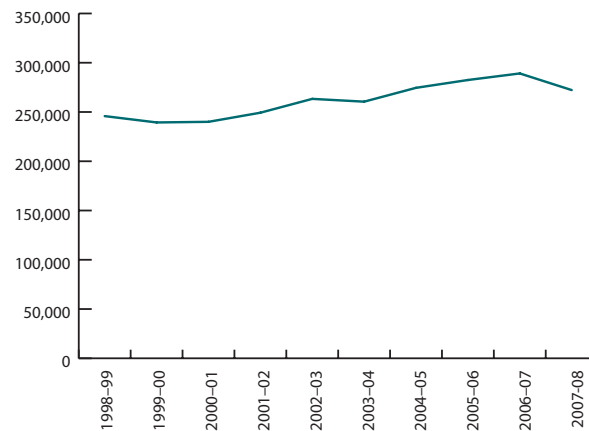


Figure 8. Statewide Filings of Juvenile Delinquency Cases: FY 1998–99 to 2007–08

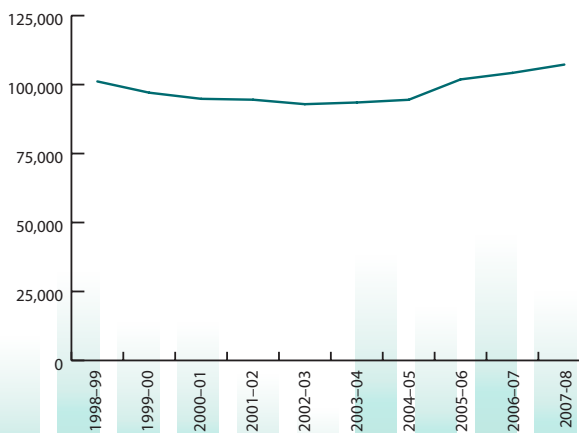


Figure 9. Statewide Filings of Juvenile Dependency Cases: FY 1998–99 to 2007–08

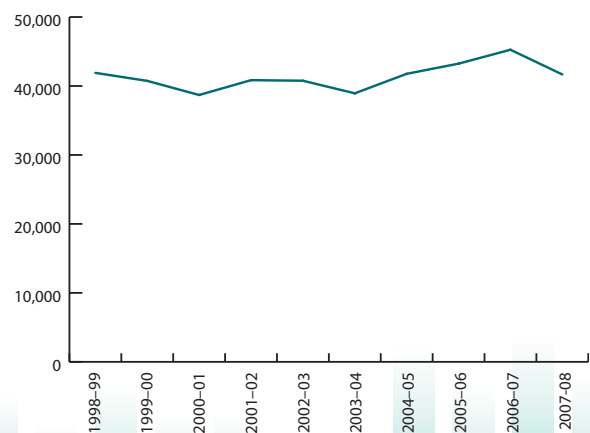


Figure 10. Statewide Filings of Marital Dissolution Cases: FY 1998–99 to 2007–08

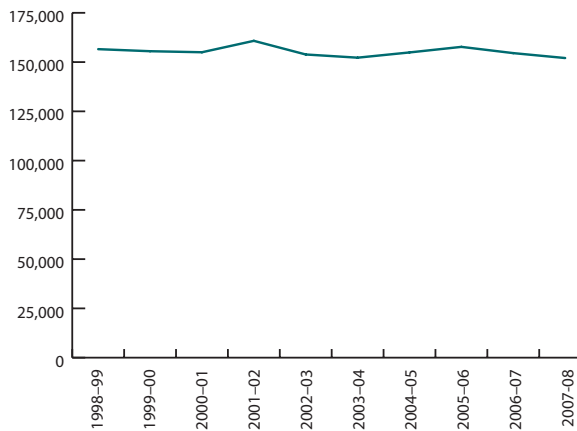
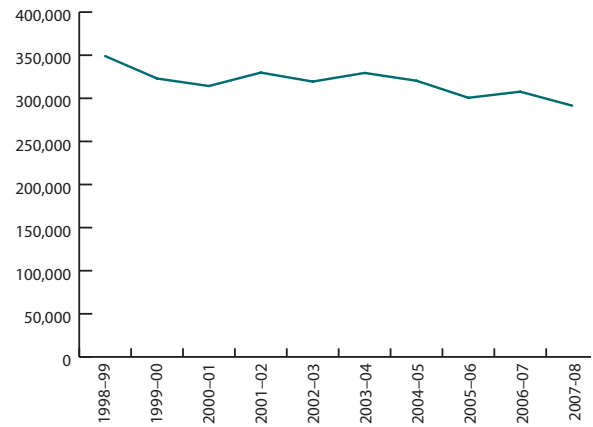


Figure 11. Statewide Filings of Family Law Petitions: FY 1998–99 to 2007–08



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