

# Analysis of Activity for the Year Ended August 31, 1999

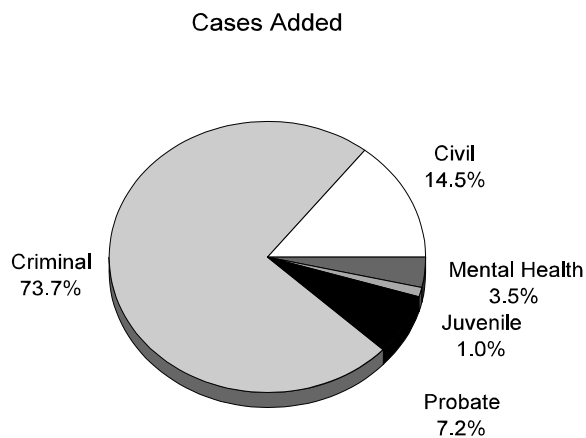
## Overview

This section contains the court activity of the 254 constitutional county courts, the 187 statutory county courts-at-law, and the 16 statutory probate courts.

## Cases Added

From the number of cases reported in fiscal year 1999, criminal cases constituted 74 percent (570,985) of the 774,252 total cases added to the dockets of the county courts. In this case, total cases added includes all criminal, civil, and juvenile cases added to the dockets, as well as cases filed under probate and mental health. Of the remaining cases, civil cases accounted for 15 percent (111,909), probate cases represented 7 percent (56,110), mental health cases represented 4 percent (27,154), and juvenile cases represented 1 percent (8,094) of the total. Figure 1 below shows the breakdown of total cases added to the dockets of the county courts.

Figure 1: Total Cases Added (774,252)



## Civil Docket

Of the civil cases filed or appealed to the county-level courts during the year ended August 31, 1999, 34 percent were classified as suits on debt, 17 percent concerned personal injury/damage suits, 7 percent were divorce suits, five percent concerned other family matters, 35 percent were other civil cases, and the remaining cases were tax suits.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Criminal cases constituted 74 percent of the 774,252 new cases added or appealed from the lower courts.
- Of the civil cases filed or appealed, 34 percent were classified as suits on debt, 17 percent concerned personal injury/damage suits, 7 percent were divorce suits, five percent concerned other family matters, 35 percent were other civil cases, and the remaining cases were tax suits.
- The county-level courts disposed of 47 percent of the 1,447,483 total criminal, civil, and juvenile cases on their dockets (added during the year or carried over from the previous year.
- Of the 266,211 total convictions in criminal cases during the year, in 99 percent of the cases the defendants entered a guilty plea.

## Criminal Docket

Considering only criminal cases, 24 percent of the cases filed in or appealed to the county-level courts were for theft or worthless check, 18 percent were for driving while intoxicated or under the influence of drugs (DWI/DUID), 10 percent were for simple assault, 10 percent for violations of drug laws, 9 percent for traffic offenses, and 28 percent were for other criminal offenses.

In fiscal year 1999, 27,851 cases on the county-level criminal court dockets came by way of appeal from justice of the peace or municipal courts rather than being originally filed at the county-level courts or added in another manner.

## Dispositions

During the twelve-month reporting period, the county-level courts of the State disposed of 47 percent of the 1,447,483 total criminal, civil, and juvenile cases on their dockets (added during the year or carried over from

the previous year). No statistics on the disposition of probate or mental health cases are recorded. The disposition rate was highest for juvenile cases, with 66 percent. Forty-eight percent of the criminal cases and 42 percent of the civil cases on the docket were disposed.

Of the criminal cases on the docket, the county-level courts disposed of 60 percent of the drug charges, 49 percent of the DWI/DUID charges, 34 percent of theft charges, 57 percent of assault charges, 54 percent of traffic cases, and 57 percent of other criminal cases. Of criminal dispositions during the year resolved by conviction, in 99 percent of the 266,211 cases the defendants pleaded guilty. In the remaining 3,318 cases, the defendants entered not guilty pleas and were found guilty by jury or non-jury verdicts. DWI convictions were the most frequent at 26 percent of the total cases ending in convictions.

Deferred adjudication accounted for 12 percent of the total criminal dispositions. Of the case categories where the defendant was placed on deferred adjudication, theft or worthless check cases was the most frequent at 24 percent, and DWI/DUID was the least frequent at 1 percent.

In fiscal year 1999, there were 6,231 total acquittals in criminal cases. Of the acquittals, 74 percent occurred in non-jury trials, and 22 percent were from jury verdicts.

Twenty-seven percent of all criminal dispositions were by dismissal. Within each case category, dismissals accounted for 9 percent of the DWI/DUID cases, 35 percent of the theft cases, 6

percent of the drug cases, 12 percent of the assault cases, 14 percent of the traffic cases, and 24 of the other criminal case dispositions. Seven percent, or 10,275, of the cases were dismissed due to insufficient evidence against the defendant, and 2 percent, or 3,048, of cases were dismissed due to Speedy Trial Act limitations.

With regard to civil cases, only 1 percent, or 876, of the cases were determined by jury verdicts. Sixteen percent of the cases were determined by judgements after trial without a jury, and 37 percent of the disposition were by dismissals. The remaining 44 percent were default judgements, agreed judgements, show causes or other dispositions.

### Total Pending Caseload Increases Slightly

Total cases pending on the dockets of the county-level courts increased by 1 percent--from 762,028 on September 1, 1998, to 765,344 on August 31, 1999. This does not include probate or mental health cases. See Figure 2 below for the ten-year trend.

Of the pending caseload, 79 percent were criminal cases, 20 percent were civil cases, and one percent were from the juvenile docket. While the number of civil cases pending decrease during fiscal year 1999 from 165,398 to 159,773, criminal cases pending increased from 592,840 to 601,544.

Figure 2: Cases Added, Disposed, and Pending

