

Analysis of Activity for the Year Ended August 31, 1999

Overview

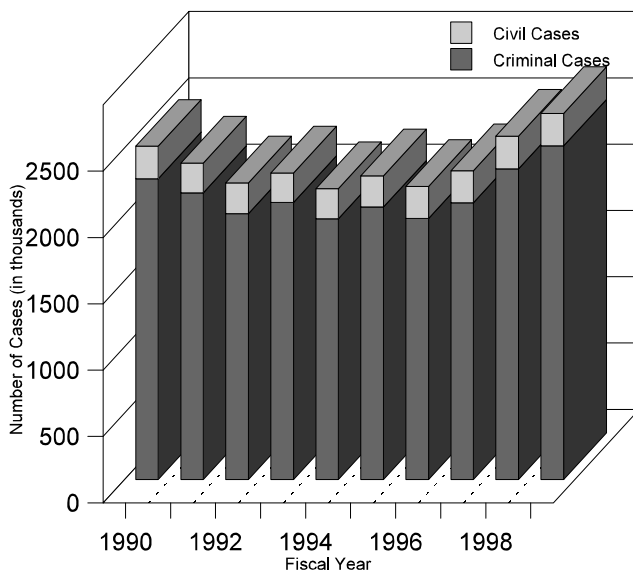
Approximately 838 justice of the peace courts were in operation in the State during fiscal year 1999. Each court was requested to submit a one-page report on activity of that court each month. Statewide, a total of 9,169 reports were submitted, out of a possible 10,056 for the year (91 percent reporting rate).

Revenue collected by the reporting courts during the year totaled \$189,244,308, a nine percent increase over the previous fiscal year. The average amount of revenue per disposition, excluding dismissals, was \$130.42. This revenue is deposited in the treasury of the county where the court has jurisdiction; however, certain court costs on each case are remitted to special funds of the State.

Criminal Cases Continue To Dominate Dockets

Criminal misdemeanor cases accounted for 91 percent of the total cases filed in the reporting courts; civil cases accounted for the remaining 9 percent of new cases filed. As Figure 1 below indicates, although there has been a steady increase in total number of cases filed in recent years, the docket composition for the justice of the peace courts has remained basically unchanged for the last ten years.

Figure 1: Statewide Total Cases Filed



HIGHLIGHTS

- The state had an average clearance rate (total cases disposed / total cases added) of 87 percent, an increase of 15 from the previous year.
- Less than four percent of the case dispositions at trial resulted in appeals.
- Sixty-five percent of all dispositions occurred prior to trial. Most of these, 72 percent, were resolved by payment of fine.
- Of the 327,502 cases that went to trial and were not dismissed, 98 percent were tried before a judge alone.
- Of criminal cases receiving final judgment at trial (excluding cases dismissed at trial), 94 percent received a guilty verdict.
- In their capacity as a state magistrate, the reporting justices of the peace accepted 75,824 complaints within the jurisdiction of the county courts and 47,311 within the jurisdiction of the district courts (felonies).
- Justices of the peace reported holding 32,619 conferences prior to any legal action being filed in their courts. Of these conferences, 48 percent resulted in cases not being filed as formal cases.

Cases Filed

The 2,513,467 criminal cases filed during the year marked an increase of approximately seven percent over criminal filings in the previous fiscal year. Traffic cases comprised 74 percent of criminal filings, with the remaining 16 percent for non-traffic misdemeanors. Traffic cases accounted for 68 percent of all cases filed.

The number of civil cases filed in fiscal year 1999 declined slightly as compared to 1998 filings. Forcible entry and detainer suits made up 48 percent of the 245,868 civil cases filed, with small claims and other civil actions comprising of 25 and 27 percent, respectively.

Analysis of Activity for the Year Ended August 31, 1999

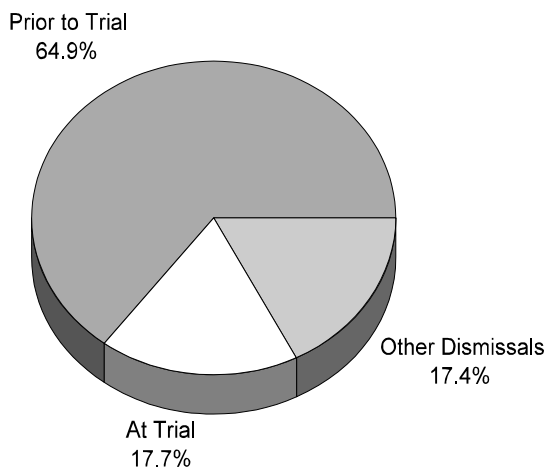
(Continued)

Dispositions

The reporting justices of the peace achieved a clearance rate (total cases disposed / total cases added) of 87 percent. Total dispositions for civil and criminal cases increased seven percent to 2,392,919 for the year ended August 31, 1999, compared to the 2,227,572 total dispositions in fiscal year 1998.

As Figure 2 below indicates, the majority of fiscal year 1999 case dispositions, 65 percent, occurred prior to trial. Most of these dispositions, 72 percent were by payment of fine. Of the remaining 327,502 cases that went to trial and were not dismissed, 98 percent were tried before a judge alone. Jury trials disposed of 5,823 cases. Ninety-four percent of criminal cases receiving a final judgment at trial, excluding cases dismissed at trial, received a guilty verdict.

Figure 2: Case Dispositions



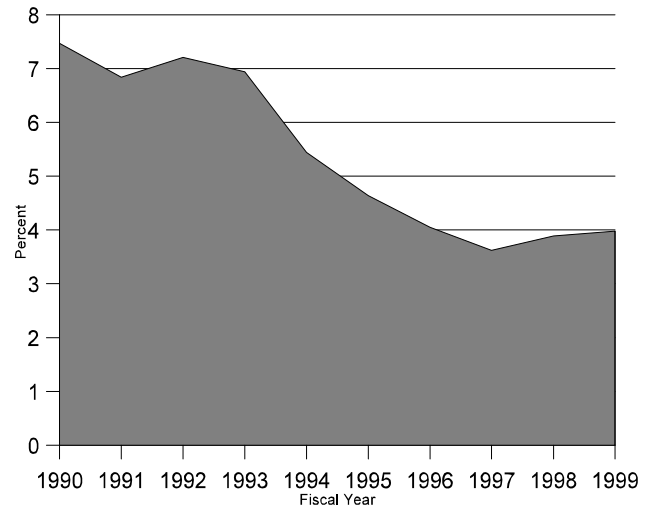
The Number of Appeals Remains Constant

The number of appeals filed as a percentage of all cases disposed at trial was slightly under 4 percent in fiscal year 1999-- virtually the same as in fiscal year 1998. Criminal appeals for 1999 increased approximately 1 percent as compared to fiscal year 1998 appeals, and civil appeals declined approximately 1 percent.

Figure 3 shows the trend of appeals

filed as a percent of dispositions at trial for the last ten years. While fiscal year 1999 did not reveal a significant decline in the number of appeals filed as a percentage of dispositions at trial, over the last 10 years there has been a significant decline in the percentage of

Figure 3: Appeals Filed as a Percent of Dispositions at Trial



appeals per disposition. As the chart indicates, the percentage of cases appealed has been reduced by nearly half.

Other Activity

Conferences Held Prior to Legal Action

During the state fiscal year 1999, the reporting justices of the peace held 32,619 conferences prior to legal action. Of these conferences, 48 percent resulted in cases not being filed as formal cases.

Magistrate Responsibilities

The reporting justices of the peace, in their capacity as a state magistrate, accepted 75,824 complaints within the jurisdiction of the county courts and 47,311 within the jurisdiction of the district courts (felonies). The number of county court complaints accepted in fiscal year 1999 remained approximately the same as in fiscal year 1998, while the number of district court complaints accepted increased by 6 percent.