

# Analysis of Activity for the Year Ended August 31, 2000

## Overview

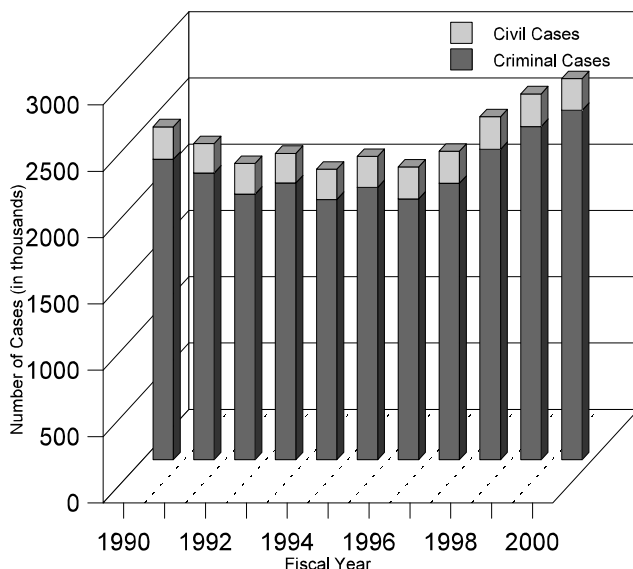
There were 836 justice of the peace courts in operation in the State during fiscal year 2000. Each court was requested to submit a one-page report on activity of that court each month. Statewide, a total of 9,122 reports were submitted, out of a possible 10,032 for the year (91 percent reporting rate).

Revenue collected by the reporting courts during the year totaled \$207,204,013 dollars, a nine percent increase over the previous fiscal year. The average amount of revenue per disposition was approximately \$83 dollars. 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 justice of the peace courts had an average clearance rate (total cases disposed / total cases added) of 87 percent.
- Less than five percent of the case dispositions at trial resulted in appeals.
- Sixty-six percent of all dispositions occurred prior to trial. Most of these, 73 percent, were resolved by payment of fine.
- Of the 330,159 cases that went to trial and were not dismissed, 96 percent were tried before a judge alone.
- Of criminal cases receiving final judgment at trial, 79 percent were awarded a guilty verdict.
- In their capacity as a state magistrate, the reporting justices of the peace accepted 78,288 complaints within the jurisdiction of the county courts and 47,516 within the jurisdiction of the district courts (felonies).
- Justices of the peace reported holding 39,031 conferences prior to any legal action being filed in their courts. Of these conferences, 49 percent resulted in cases not being filed as formal cases.

## Cases Filed

The 2,635,459 criminal cases filed during the year marked an increase of approximately 5 percent over criminal filings in the previous fiscal year. Traffic cases comprised 76 percent of criminal filings, with the remaining 24 percent for non-traffic misdemeanors. Traffic cases accounted for 70 percent of all cases filed.

The number of civil cases filed in fiscal year 2000 declined by 4 percent in comparison to 1999 filings. Forcible entry and detainer suits made up 50 percent of the 238,417 civil cases filed, with small claims and other civil actions comprising of 25 percent each.

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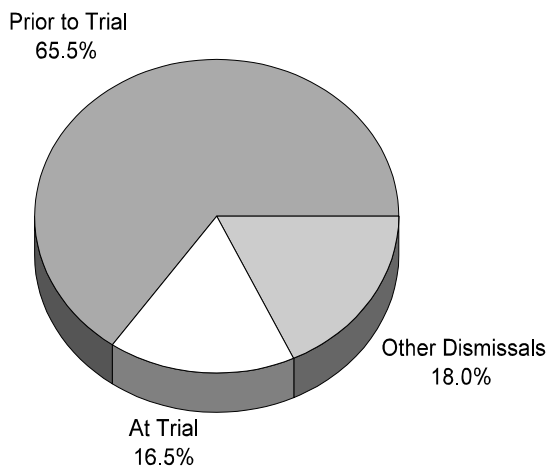
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## Dispositions

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 4 percent from 2,397,177 in fiscal year 1999 to 2,495,782 for the fiscal year ended August 31, 2000.

As Figure 2 below indicates, the majority of fiscal year 2000 case dispositions, 66 percent, occurred prior to trial. Most of these dispositions, 73 percent were by payment of fine. Of the 330,159 cases that went to trial and were not dismissed, 96 percent were tried before a judge alone. Jury trials disposed of 12,509 cases. Seventy-nine percent of criminal cases receiving a final judgment at trial were awarded a guilty verdict.

Figure 2: Case Dispositions



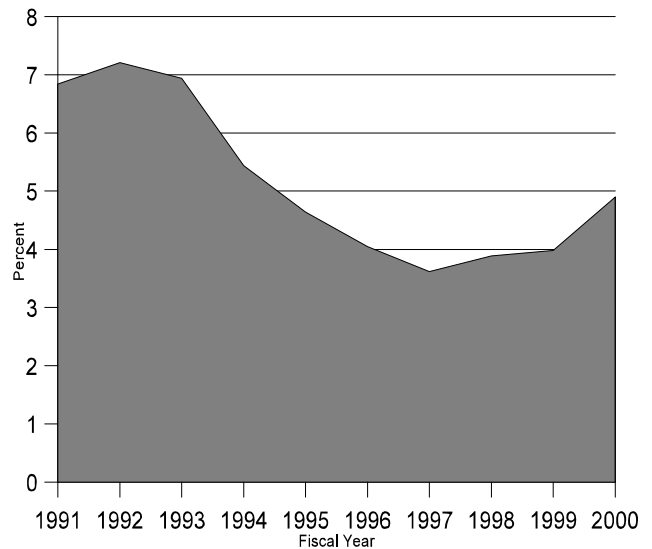
## Percentage of Appeals to Dispositions Increases Slightly

The number of appeals filed as a percentage of all cases disposed at trial was slightly under 5 percent in fiscal year 2000-- a slight increase as compared to fiscal year 1999. Criminal appeals for 2000 decreased approximately 4 percent as compared to fiscal year 1999 appeals, and civil appeals declined approximately 8 percent.

Figure 3 shows the trend of appeals filed as a percent of dispositions at trial for the last ten years. While fiscal year 2000 did not reveal a 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 appeals per

disposition. As the chart indicates, the percentage of cases appealed has gone down by nearly 30 percent since 1991.

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



## Other Activity

### Conferences Held Prior to Legal Action

During the state fiscal year 2000, the reporting justices of the peace held 39,031 conferences prior to legal action. Of these conferences, 49 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 78,288 complaints within the jurisdiction of the county courts and 47,516 within the jurisdiction of the district courts (felonies). The number of county court complaints accepted in fiscal year 2000 increased by approximately 3 percent in comparison to fiscal year 1999, while the number of district court complaints accepted remained virtually the same.