

District Court Performance Measures

In 2001, the 77th Legislature attached a rider to Senate Bill 1 (the General Appropriations Act) to provide for district court performance measures. This rider provides:

- 9. District Court Performance Measures.** It is the intent of the Legislature that the Office of Court Administration report data for the district courts on a countywide basis and that the data measure countywide clearance rates for criminal, civil and juvenile cases and measure age of cases disposed and the backlog index for criminal and civil cases...

The *clearance rate* (i.e., number of cases disposed/number of cases added to the docket) is a measure of how effectively a court is disposing the cases added to its docket. A clearance rate of 100 percent indicates that the court disposed of the same number of cases during the year as were added to the docket during the year, resulting in no changes to the court's case backlog.

The *backlog index* is a calculation used to measure the size of a court's backlog. The backlog index:

...measures the pending caseload against the court's capacity to dispose of the caseload during a given time period. Specifically, it is the number of cases (of a given case type) *pending* at the beginning of the year, divided by the total number of cases (of the given case type) *disposed* during the year. For example, if a court had 1,000 pending felony cases at the beginning of the year and disposed of 2,000 felony cases that year, it would have a backlog index of .5, which is a good backlog index for most courts. This index can be interpreted to mean that the court 'turned over' or disposed the equivalent of the pending caseload within six months (0.5 equals a half-year).^{*} A backlog index of 1.0 means that the court disposed of the equivalent of the pending caseload in one year. A court should have a minimum goal of achieving a civil backlog index of 1.0 or less. On average, criminal cases should be disposed more quickly than major civil cases, so courts should maintain a lower backlog index for criminal cases than civil cases.¹

The *age of disposed cases* allows a court to measure how quickly it is disposing of cases.

The data for the three district court performance measures are reported on pages 164 to 169.

^{*} We refer to the "equivalent of the pending caseload" because some of the cases pending at the beginning of the year may still be pending at the end of the year; we mean that the court simply disposed of an equivalent *number* of cases as were pending at the beginning of the year.

¹ Daniel C. Steelman et al, *Caseflow Management: The Heart of Court Management in the New Millenium*, (National Center for State Courts, 2000), p. 133-34.