

# Overview Of Activity For Year Ended August 31, 1999

## Appellate Courts

### Supreme Court

The 1012 Petitions for Review filed during fiscal year 1999 was a less than 1 percent increase from the 1,004 applications filed in fiscal year 1998 and a less than 1 percent increase from the 10-year average of 1,007 applications.

The Court "passed on" (disposed of or otherwise acted upon) a total of 3,064 matters during fiscal year 1999, a decrease of 4 percent from the 3,204 matters passed on in fiscal year 1998.

During fiscal year 1999, the justices of the Supreme Court wrote 165 opinions (or an average of 18 opinions each), 26 percent less than the 222 opinions written in fiscal year 1998 and 22 percent less than the 10-year average of 211. About 72 percent, or 118, of the opinions written in 1999 were deciding opinions that disposed of causes.

### Court of Criminal Appeals

The 363 direct appeals added to the docket of the Court of Criminal Appeals in fiscal year 1999 represented an increase of 22 percent from the 298 direct appeals added during fiscal year 1998.

Judges of the Court of Criminal Appeals wrote 798 opinions during fiscal year 1999, of which 568, or 71 percent, were "deciding" opinions disposing of cases. The remainder were dissents, concurrences, and opinions on rehearings. Of the deciding opinions, 193 were signed and 375 were per curiam. During 1998, members of the Court wrote 652 opinions, 64 percent of which were deciding opinions.

### Courts of Appeals

The courts disposed of 13,150 total cases during the year, an average of approximately 165 dispositions (99 criminal and 66 civil) per justice. The pending caseload decreased from 11,582 at the beginning of the fiscal year 1999 to 10,723 at the end of the fiscal year.

A total of 12,291 cases were added to the dockets of the Courts of Appeals during the fiscal year, which included 7,081 criminal cases and 5,210 civil cases. As compared to the previous fiscal year, criminal cases decreased by 1 percent and civil cases decreased by 3 percent. In total, there was a decrease of 2 percent from the 12,502 total cases added in fiscal year 1998.

The average lapse of time between the filing of a civil case in a Court of Appeals and its disposition ranged from 6.0 months in the Sixth Court of Appeals in Texarkana to 12.7 months in the Fifth Court of Appeals in Dallas. The average lapse of time in the 14 courts for civil cases was 9.1 months.

The average lapse of time between the filing of a criminal case in a Court of Appeals and its disposition ranged from 8.9 months in the Seventh Court of Appeals in Amarillo to 21.6 months in the Fourteenth Court of Appeals in Houston. The average lapse of time in the 14 courts for criminal cases was 12.5 months.

In fiscal year 1999, the justices of the Courts of Appeals wrote 12,787 opinions, 12 percent more than the 11,457 written in 1998.

## Trial Courts

### District Courts\*

Thirty-six death sentences (the same as in fiscal year 1998) and 329 life sentences were assessed in the district courts during the year. Of the 206,746 criminal cases disposed by the district courts, 32 percent were disposed of in a period of less than two months from the date of indictment or information, 11 percent took two to three months, 9 percent took three to four months, and slightly over 48 percent took over four months.

Criminal cases constituted 210,494, or 30 percent, of the total cases added during the year. Of the criminal cases, 33 percent involved drug sales, manufacturing or possession, 20 percent were felony cases (other than DWI), 12 percent involved a charge of theft (including auto theft), 9 percent involved burglary, 4 percent robbery, 1 percent homicide (including capital murder), 11 percent assault (including sexual assault of a child and of an adult), 6 percent felony DWI, and 3 percent were misdemeanors cases.

Civil cases accounted for 454,175, or 65 percent, of all cases added during the fiscal year. Family law matters (other than divorce actions) comprised the largest segment of civil cases added, constituting 40 percent of civil case additions.

During the fiscal year, the district courts disposed of 96 percent of the total criminal and civil cases added to their dockets, compared to 100 percent in 1998.

Of the 434,335 civil dispositions during the year, the courts disposed of 27 percent of the cases in under 3 months, 20 percent in 3 to 6 months, 10 percent in twelve to eighteen months, and 23 percent in over eighteen months.

### County-Level Courts

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).

From the number of cases reported, criminal cases constituted 74 percent (570,985) of the 774,252 total cases added to the dockets of the county courts. The 774,252 total cases includes all criminal, civil, and juvenile cases added to the dockets, as well as cases filed under probate and mental health. 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.

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.