

# TEXAS COURT ACTIVITY

## OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITY FOR YEAR ENDED AUGUST 31, 1994

### APPELLATE COURTS

#### SUPREME COURT

The 1,054 applications for writs of error filed during fiscal year 1994 represented a 10.0 percent decrease from the 1,171 applications filed in fiscal year 1993, and was 4.5 percent higher than the 10-year average of 1,009.

The Court "passed on" (disposed of or otherwise acted upon) a total of 3,299 matters during fiscal year 1994, a decrease of 4.1 percent from the 3,441 matters passed on in fiscal year 1993.

During the fiscal year 1994, the justices of the Supreme Court wrote 229 opinions (or an average of 25.4 opinions each), 22.4 percent less than the 295 opinions written in fiscal year 1993 and 8.0 percent more than the 10-year average of 212.

#### COURT OF CRIMINAL APPEALS

The 342 cases added to the docket of the Court of Criminal Appeals in fiscal year 1994 represent a decrease of 16.2 percent from the 408 cases added during fiscal year 1993, which ended August 31, 1993.

Judges of the Court of Criminal Appeals wrote 468 opinions during fiscal year 1994, of which 342 (73.0 percent) were "deciding" opinions disposing of cases. The remainder were dissents, concurrences, and opinions on rehearings. Of the deciding opinions, 156 were signed and 186 were per curiam. During 1993, members of the Court wrote 679 opinions, 76.0 percent of which were deciding opinions.

#### COURTS OF APPEALS

The Courts of Appeals disposed of 9,543 total cases during the year, an average of 119 dispositions (68 criminal and 51 civil) per justice. The pending caseload increased from 9,080 at the beginning of the fiscal year to 9,127 at the end of the year.

A total of 9,297 cases was filed in the Courts of Appeals during the fiscal year, which included 5,071 criminal cases and 4,226 civil cases. This was a decrease of 1.3 percent from the 9,420 total new cases filed in fiscal year 1993. New criminal cases decreased 5.5 percent from the 5,364 filed in fiscal year 1993 and civil cases increased 4.2 percent from the 4,056 filed in fiscal year 1993.

The average lapse of time between the filing of a civil case in a Court of Appeals and its disposition ranged from 4.5 months in the Sixth Court of Appeals in Texarkana to 10.0 months in the Thirteenth Court of Appeals in Corpus Christi. The average lapse of time in the 14 courts for civil cases was 8.3 months.

The average lapse of time between the filing of a criminal case in a Court of Appeals and its disposition ranged from 6.5 months in the Sixth Court of Appeals in Texarkana to 17.9 months in the Fifth Court of Appeals in Dallas. The average lapse of time for the 14 courts was 11.5 months.

In fiscal year 1994, the justices of the Courts of Appeals wrote 9,301 opinions, 1.0 percent less than the 9,379 written in 1993.

### TRIAL COURTS

#### DISTRICT COURTS

Forty-three death sentences (compared to 30 in 1993) and 505 life sentences were assessed in the district courts during the year. Of the 200,457 criminal cases disposed by the district courts of Texas, 33.4 percent were disposed of in a period of less than two months from the date of indictment or information, 10.2 percent took two to three months, 8.8 percent took three to four months, and 47.6 percent took over four months.

Cases added to the criminal docket decreased 3.0 percent in the ten urban counties during fiscal year 1994 as compared to 1993. This compares to a decrease of 0.9 percent in criminal filings for all other counties of the State. Criminal filings increased in five of the ten urban counties: Tarrant (6.1 percent), Travis (13.0 percent), Hidalgo (15.3 percent) Nueces (15.2 percent), and Collin (9.1 percent). Counties reporting a decrease in criminal cases added to the docket were Harris (3.4 percent), Dallas (8.0 percent), Bexar (2.6 percent), El Paso (8.9 percent), and Denton (5.1 percent).

Civil cases accounted for 68.1 percent of all new cases filed during the fiscal year. The largest segment of civil cases filed (32.7 percent of new civil filings) were divorce actions.

During the fiscal year, the district courts disposed of 97.3 percent of the total civil and criminal cases added to their dockets, compared to 99.6 percent in 1993.

District courts handled 1.5 percent fewer divorce actions during 1994 than during 1993. During the fiscal year, 118,983 divorce cases, or 27.1 percent of all disposed civil (non-juvenile) cases, were handled by district courts. Some 15.1 percent of divorce cases were dismissed.

The total number of civil cases pending in the district courts on August 31, 1994, was 523,835 or slightly more than the 517,136 pending on September 1, 1993. Criminal cases pending increased 5.1 percent, from 160,286 to 168,467.

#### COUNTY-LEVEL COURTS

During the twelve-month reporting period, the county-level courts of the State disposed of 45.6 percent of the 1,312,937 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 74.2 percent (464,289) of the 625,718 new cases filed or appealed from lower courts. Civil cases accounted for 12.9 percent (80,666), probate cases represented 8.8 percent (54,898), and mental health cases represented 3.4 percent (21,174). New juvenile cases filed were 0.7 percent (4,691) of the total.

Total cases pending on the dockets of the county-level courts increased by 1.3 percent from 703,570 on September 1, 1993, to 712,539 on August 31, 1994.