



NEWS RELEASE

Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts

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Caseload Remains High In Federal Courts In Fiscal Year 2000

The caseload of the federal court system remained high in fiscal year 2000 (October 1, 1999 – September 30, 2000) according to the report *Judicial Business of the United States Courts*, released today. Filings in the appellate courts continued at record levels, and criminal filings in the district courts reached their highest totals since Prohibition. Civil filings stabilized, following a 1 percent rise in FY 1999 with a drop of less than three-tenths of 1 percent in FY 2000. Although overall filings were down, bankruptcy filings in FY 2000 continued well above the million mark for the fifth consecutive year. The report and its statistical tables are available on the Judiciary's website at www.uscourts.gov.

Courts of Appeals

An increase of 4 appeals cases was sufficient to break caseload records in the 12 regional courts of appeals for the fifth consecutive year. Since 1996, filings of appeals have climbed 5 percent. Cases filed in fiscal year 2000 totaled 54,697.

Downturns in filings of bankruptcy appeals (down 9 percent), civil appeals (down 2 percent) and administrative agency appeals (down 1 percent) were offset by an 18 percent increase in original proceedings and a 4 percent increase in criminal appeals. Original proceedings grew primarily because of a 38 percent jump in petitions by persons requesting authority to file second or successive habeas corpus petitions. Those petitions constituted 62 percent of original proceedings in 2000. The increase in criminal appeals was largely due to a 45 percent rise in appeals related to immigration laws. Most of this growth occurred in the Fifth Circuit, where immigration appeals surged 121 percent in fiscal year 2000.

Civil appeals fell 2 percent in 2000, with the most significant drops occurring in prisoner petition appeals involving motions to vacate sentence (down 685), in prisoner civil rights appeals (down 211), and in appeals related to employment civil rights (down 234). Meanwhile, increases were seen in appeals unrelated to employment civil rights (up 80), habeas

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corpus prisoner petition appeals (up 816), and prison condition prisoner petitions (up 132). Since 1996, prisoner petition appeals filings have grown 9 percent overall, despite legislation that sought to reduce filings of prisoner petitions in federal courts.

District Courts

Criminal Filings

In fiscal year 2000, filings of criminal cases rose 5 percent to 62,745, and the number of defendants increased 4 percent to 83,963. These are the highest totals since 1933 when the Prohibition Amendment was repealed. As a result, criminal cases per authorized district judgeship grew from 93 to 96.

The rise in filings of criminal cases consisted largely of immigration and firearms cases. Immigration filings increased 14 percent to 12,150. The district courts in the five southwestern border districts received 63 percent of total immigration cases. Immigration filings were up 6 percent in the District of Arizona, 8 percent in the Western District of Texas, 13 percent in the Southern District of Texas, 24 percent in the Southern District of California, and 41 percent in the District of New Mexico. Across the nation, firearms filings surged 23 percent to 5,387—the highest level ever recorded. This was the fourth consecutive year firearms filings have risen.

Filings of fraud cases rose 2 percent, and drug case filings remained stable.

Civil Filings

Civil filings remained essentially stable in FY 2000, declining by three-tenths of one percent to 259,517. Reductions occurred in cases involving federal question jurisdiction (i.e. actions under the Constitution, laws, or treaties of the U.S.), which were down 4 percent, and in cases involving diversity of citizenship, which dropped 2 percent. This reduction was nearly offset by a 9 percent growth in civil filings with the U.S. as plaintiff or defendant.

The drop in federal question jurisdiction filings was due to a 40 percent overall decline in personal injury cases, mostly in asbestos filings and breast implant cases. The 2 percent reduction in diversity of citizenship filings to 48,626 largely resulted from drops in personal injury/product liability filings.

Filings with the U.S. as plaintiff climbed 10 percent, largely due to a 12 percent increase in student loan recovery filings to 24,329. Filings with the U.S. as defendant grew as a result

of a 14 percent increase in social security filings and a 9 percent rise in prisoner petitions. The higher number of prisoner petitions stemmed from a 10 percent rise in motions to vacate sentence filed by federal prisoners and an 8 percent rise in federal habeas corpus petitions.

Weighted Filings per Authorized Judgeship

In fiscal year 2000, the total number of weighted filings per authorized judgeship was 479, up from 472 during 1999. The total number of weighted criminal felony defendants per judgeship increased 4 percent to 167. This was 25 percent higher than the number of weighted felony defendants in 1996. The total number of weighted civil filings in 2000 was 311, the same total as for 1999. Weighted filings per authorized judgeship account for the different amounts of time judges require to resolve various types of civil and criminal actions. The current system, developed by the Federal Judicial Center in 1993, assigns weights to civil cases and to criminal defendants. Average civil cases or criminal defendants each receive a weight of approximately 1.0; for more time-consuming cases, higher weights are assessed. A death penalty habeas corpus case has a weight of 5.99. Less time consuming cases, such as defaulted student loan cases, are assigned a weight of 0.031. Weighted filings per authorized judgeship do not address whether judgeships are filled or vacant.

Bankruptcy Filings

For the second consecutive year, bankruptcy filings declined, falling 7 percent in FY 2000 to 1,262,102. However, this amount was 14 percent greater than the number of bankruptcy filings in 1996, when filings first exceeded one million.

The dip in FY 2000 bankruptcy filings was due to a 7 percent drop in non-business and business filings. In FY 2000, non-business filings constituted 97 percent of total bankruptcy filings.

In fiscal year 2000, total filings under Chapter 7, the largest bankruptcy chapter category, fell 9.2 percent to 870,805, down from 959,291 in 1999. Filings under the next largest category, Chapter 13, fell 1.1 percent to 380,880, down from 385,262 in FY 1999.

Chapter 12 filings also fell to 551, down from 811 in 1999. Filings under this chapter dropped in large part because of the expiration of the statutory provisions for Chapter 12 on July 1, 2000. Chapter 11 filings rose 9.5 percent from 8,982 in 1999 to 9,835 in 2000. This increase stemmed primarily from a large number of filings in the District of Delaware.

Probation and Pretrial Services

On September 30, 2000, the total number of persons under supervision of the federal probation system was 100,395, a 3 percent increase over the number reported as of September 30, 1999. Persons serving terms of supervised release following their release from prison climbed 7 percent to 63,793. Cases involving probation imposed by district judges declined one percent, and those involving probation imposed by magistrate judges decreased 3 percent. Growth in the number of persons under supervision along the southwestern border accounted for 33 percent of the national increase, despite the region having only 12 percent of persons under supervision. Probation officers prepared 203,845 investigative reports in FY 2000, a rise of 6 percent over last year. Federal probation offices spent \$22,450,634 on federally funded substance abuse treatment in FY 2000. Across the nation, 54 percent of offenders with conditions indicating substance abuse received federally funded substance abuse treatment.

The number of defendants in cases opened in the pretrial services system rose 7 percent to 85,617, somewhat higher than the increase in criminal filings in the district courts in 2000. During 2000, pretrial services officers interviewed 63,059 defendants (up 6 percent) and prepared 82,115 pretrial services reports (up 7 percent). Prebail reports constituted 92 percent of the pretrial services reports prepared. In conjunction with all pretrial services cases closed during the year, 194,092 pretrial hearings of all types were held (up 8 percent.) The number of defendants released following hearings increased 5 percent to 37,933, of which 93 percent were released with restrictive conditions. The most frequently ordered restrictive conditions involved substance abuse testing and substance abuse treatment and were imposed on 22 percent, or 18,752, of defendants whose cases were opened in 2000. House arrest and electronic monitoring were ordered for 8 percent, or 6,452, of defendants.

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Judicial Caseload Indicators

Fiscal Years 1996, 1999, and 2000

Judicial Caseload	1996	1999	2000	Percent Change Since 1996	Percent Change Since 1999
U.S. Courts of Appeals¹					
Cases Filed	51,991	54,693	54,697	5.2	0.0
Cases Terminated	50,413	54,088	56,512	12.1	4.5
Cases Pending	38,774	42,225 ²	40,410	4.2	-4.3
U.S. District Courts					
Criminal (Includes Transfers)					
Cases Filed	47,889	59,923	62,745	31.0	4.7
Defendants Filed	67,700	80,822	83,963	24.0	3.9
Cases Terminated	45,499	56,511	58,102	27.7	2.8
Cases Pending	32,156	42,966 ²	47,609	48.1	10.8
Civil					
Cases Filed	269,132	260,271	259,517	-3.6	-0.3
Cases Terminated	250,387	272,526	259,637	3.7	-4.7
Cases Pending	250,934	249,381 ²	249,261	-0.7	-0.1
U.S. Bankruptcy Courts					
Cases Filed	1,111,964	1,354,376	1,262,102	13.5	-6.8
Cases Terminated	1,005,025	1,356,026	1,256,874	25.1	-7.3
Cases Pending	1,189,213	1,377,985 ²	1,383,213	16.3	0.4
Federal Probation System					
Persons Under Supervision	88,966	97,190	100,395	12.8	3.3
Presentence Reports	51,662	61,207	63,666	23.2	4.0
Pretrial Services					
Pretrial Services Cases					
Activated	63,497	80,154	85,617	34.8	6.8
Total Released on Supervision	26,498 ²	30,262 ²	32,388	22.2	7.0

¹Excludes the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit.

²Revised.

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