

TRIAL COURT FACT SHEET

Florida's Trial Court Filings

Table I

The State of Florida has a two-tier trial court system of circuit and county courts. All 20 of the state's judicial circuits consist of one circuit court, but may encompass more than one of the 67 county courts. During fiscal year 2001-02, Florida had 509 circuit court judges (an increase of approximately 21 percent from fiscal year 1991-92) and 280 county court judges (an increase of approximately 16 percent from fiscal year 1991-92). Florida's population has risen approximately 23 percent since fiscal year 1991-92.

Circuit courts are the highest trial courts in the state's judicial system and are courts of general jurisdiction. Cases include matters relating to major criminal offenses (felonies) which can result in imprisonment in a state correctional institution, domestic relations cases such as dissolution of marriage (divorce), civil cases involving amounts greater than \$15,000, juvenile delinquency and dependency cases, and probate cases, such as the processing of wills and settling estates of deceased persons.

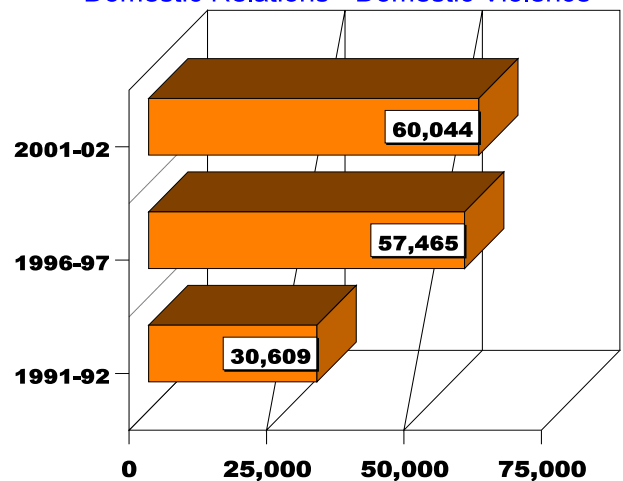
The circuit court filings, as shown in Table I, include the circuit criminal, circuit civil, domestic relations, probate, and juvenile divisions. Circuit criminal filings reflect the number of defendants against whom an information or indictment was filed by the prosecutor. Circuit civil, domestic relations, probate and juvenile filings reflect the number of petitions filed.

Overall, circuit court filings increased 20.1 percent from fiscal year 1991-92 to fiscal year 2001-02. The most dramatic change occurred in the domestic relations division, which experienced a 39.7 percent increase in the number of filings. Within the domestic relations division, the most notable change between fiscal year 1991-92 and 2001-02 was in the "domestic violence" category, displayed in Graph I. During this period domestic violence filings rose 96.2 percent. This significant increase may be due to the various statutory changes that have allowed the court system to become more accessible to domestic violence victims seeking injunctions for protection. Furthermore, domestic violence advocates have also been successful in encouraging more victims to use the court system in resolving these difficult issues.

CIRCUIT COURTS - FILINGS						
Fiscal Years 1991-92, 1996-97 and 2001-02						
Division	FY 91-92	FY 96-97	FY 01-02	% Change 91-92 to 96-97	% Change 96-97 to 01-02	% Change 91-92 to 01-02
Circuit Criminal	168,122	184,674	179,757	9.8	-2.7	6.9
Circuit Civil	169,200	149,298	186,218	-11.8	24.7	10.1
Domestic Relations	200,782	237,170	280,457	18.1	18.3	39.7
Probate	75,868	88,723	96,712	16.9	9.0	27.5
Juvenile	81,171	96,290	91,504	18.6	-5.0	12.7
Total	695,143	756,155	834,648	8.8	10.4	20.1

Graph I

Circuit Court Filings Domestic Relations - Domestic Violence



County courts, which are courts of limited jurisdiction, handle county and city ordinance violations, traffic infractions, minor criminal offenses (misdemeanors), and civil cases involving amounts of \$15,000 or less, such as landlord-tenant and small claims disputes. The county court filings, as displayed in Table II, include county criminal and county civil divisions. County criminal filings reflect the number of defendants against whom a sworn complaint, notice to appear, information or indictment is filed. County civil filings reflect the number of complaints or petitions filed.

County court filings increased 20.0 percent from fiscal year 1991-92 to 2001-02. The county civil division experienced a 40.4 percent increase in the number of filings between fiscal year 1991-92 and 2001-02. Within the county civil division, a notable change between fiscal year 1991-92 and 2001-02 occurred in the “small claims” category. This filing category experienced a 58.3 percent increase. In January 1997, the jurisdictional amount associated with small claims cases was increased from an upper limit of \$2,500 to a new limit of \$5,000, resulting in the increase in the number of small claims cases filed, thereafter.

Table II

COUNTY COURTS - FILINGS*						
Fiscal Years 1991-92, 1996-97 and 2001-02						
Division	FY 91-92	FY 96-97	FY 01-02	% Change 91-92 to 96-97	% Change 96-97 to 01-02	% Change 91-92 to 01-02
County Criminal	469,864	503,395	499,339	7.1	-0.8	6.3
County Civil	316,662	338,359	444,703	6.9	31.4	40.4
Total	786,526	841,754	944,042	7.0	12.2	20.0

*Data does not include criminal traffic and civil traffic violations.

For Further Information

This Fact Sheet is based on the *Statistical Reference Guide to Florida's Trial Courts* (fiscal year 2001-02). To learn more about trial court caseload, visit OSCA's website at www.flcourts.org.

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