

TRIAL COURT FACT SHEET

Issue #2 - March 2004

FY 2002-03 Statistical Reference Guide Published

Hot off the press this March, the *Statistical Reference Guide to Florida's Trial Courts for Fiscal Year 2002-03* was distributed to chief judges, trial court administrators, clerks of court, the Governor's Office, legislators and others around the state. In its third year of publication, the guide provides an overview of official circuit and county court filings, dispositions, and special proceedings for all trial court divisions in Florida's twenty judicial circuits and sixty-seven counties. This year marks the earliest issuance date of the guide, just in time for Florida's 2004 Legislative Session.

Circuit Probate Cases on the Rise

As courts of general jurisdiction, the circuit courts are the highest trial courts in the state. Table 1 displays statewide figures for each circuit division: criminal, civil, domestic relations, probate and juvenile. Since fiscal year 2000-01, Florida's circuit courts have experienced a 3.4% increase in total circuit court filings.

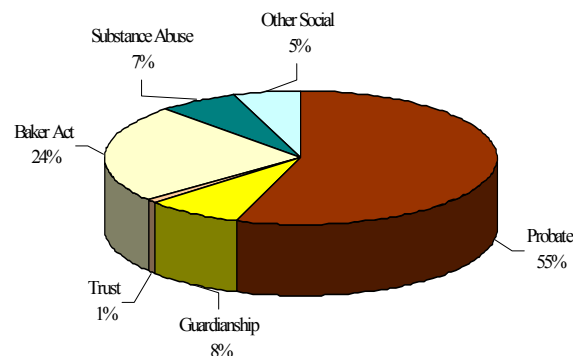
Among the five divisions, probate stands out as having consistent growth over the last three years.

Table 1

CIRCUIT COURT FILINGS Fiscal Years 2000-01, 2001-02 and 2002-03						
Division	FY 00-01	FY 01-02	FY 02-03	%Change 00-01 to 01-02	%Change 01-02 to 02-03	%Change 00-01 to 02-03
Circuit Criminal	182,581	179,757	182,893	-1.5%	1.7%	0.2%
Circuit Civil	171,775	186,218	184,858	8.4%	-0.7%	7.6%
Circuit Domestic Relations	264,178	280,457	276,966	6.2%	-1.2%	4.8%
Circuit Probate	95,020	96,712	101,736	1.8%	5.2%	7.1%
Circuit Juvenile	98,007	91,504	92,686	-6.6%	1.3%	-5.4%
Total	811,561	834,648	839,139	2.8%	0.5%	3.4%

Chart 1

CIRCUIT PROBATE FILINGS Fiscal Year 2002-03



Within the probate division, there are six categories of cases (see Chart 1): probate, guardianship, trust, Baker Act, substance abuse, and other social cases.

- *Probate* cases involve all matters relating to the disposition of a descendant's property.
- *Guardianship* cases involve all matters relating to: the determination of status; contracts and conveyances of incapacitated persons; custody of wards and their property interests; control and restoration of rights; and appointment and removal of guardians.
- *Trust* cases involve all matters relating to the management and disposition of property, real or personal, held by one party for the benefit of another.
- *Baker Act* cases involve involuntary mental health examinations or involuntary placement of an individual in a mental health facility.
- *Substance abuse* cases involve the involuntary assessment or treatment of substance abuse.
- *Other social* cases involve all other matters related to involuntary commitment such as: tuberculosis control, developmental disabilities, and incapacity determination.



As exhibited in Table 2, Baker Act, substance abuse and other social cases have experienced consistent growth since fiscal year 2000-01, with substance abuse cases experiencing the most significant increases.

Table 2

CIRCUIT PROBATE FILINGS Fiscal Years 2000-01, 2001-02 and 2002-03						
Case Type	FY 00-01	FY 01-02	FY 02-03	%Change 00-01 to 01-02	%Change 01-02 to 02-03	%Change 00-01 to 02-03
Probate	55,738	55,478	56,206	-0.5%	1.3%	0.8%
Guardianship	8,260	8,520	8,128	3.1%	-4.6%	-1.6%
Trust	1,040	871	1,049	-16.3%	20.4%	0.9%
Baker Act	20,840	21,784	23,930	4.5%	9.9%	14.8%
Substance Abuse	4,678	5,284	6,899	13.0%	30.6%	47.5%
Other Social	4,464	4,775	5,524	7.0%	15.7%	23.7%
Total Probate	95,020	96,712	101,736	1.8%	5.2%	7.1%

Although substance abuse cases in probate account for the largest percentage increase in filings over the last three years, Baker Act cases have grown the most in real terms, increasing by over 3,000 cases in three years.

County Civil Traffic Infractions Drive Growth

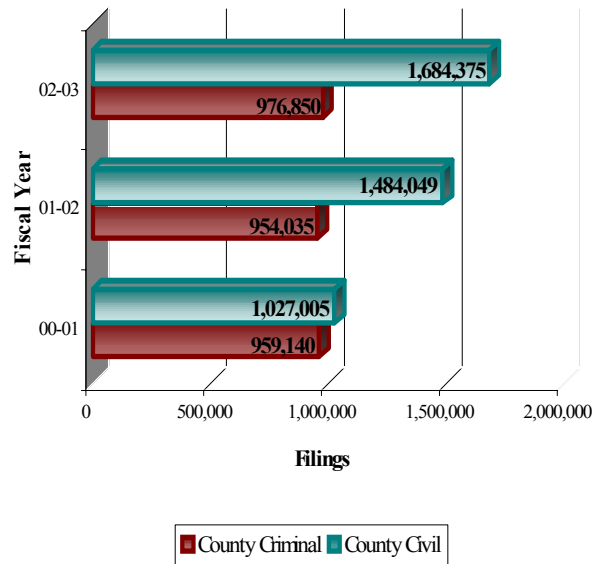
Florida's county courts are courts of limited jurisdiction handling both criminal and civil cases. County courts have also seen significant growth, due in large part to an increase in county civil cases (see Chart 2). Since fiscal year 2000-01, total county civil cases have increased by approximately 64.0% statewide. Cases in the county civil division include: small claims (up to \$5,000); civil (\$5,001 to \$15,000); replevins; evictions; other civil (non-monetary); and civil traffic infractions.

Civil traffic infraction filings, which have increased by 97.5% statewide since fiscal year 2000-01, have driven the growth.

Due to a refinement in methodology used to calculate traffic infractions, OSCA staff have developed a more accurate formula for determining the proportion of traffic infraction cases brought before a judge or hearing officer compared to those disposed through the payment of fines. The new methodology has allowed counties to be credited for those cases that are being brought before their courts. Thus, this refinement has, along with natural growth, resulted in the significant increase in the figures since fiscal year 2000-01.

Chart 2

**COUNTY COURT FILINGS
Fiscal Years 2000-01, 2001-02, and
2002-03**



For Further Information

To receive a copy of the Statistical Reference Guide or to access other trial court statistics, contact the Florida Office of the State Courts Administrator, Court Services Unit at (850) 922-5094 or visit our web site at www.flcourts.org.

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