

# Explanation of Selected Terms

## Vacant Judgeship Months

“Vacant judgeship months” is the total number of months that vacancies occurred in any judgeship positions in a circuit or district.

The Federal Judgeship Act of 1990, enacted on December 1, 1990, authorized 11 additional judgeship positions in the U.S. courts of appeals and 74 additional positions in the U.S. district courts. As of October 1, 1998, one of these positions remained vacant in the courts of appeals. Overall, 17 vacancies existed in the courts of appeals and 53 vacancies existed in the district courts on that date.

This year, one temporary judgeship authorization was lost in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania and one judgeship authorization was moved from the Eastern District of Louisiana to the Middle District of Louisiana. Although the losses occurred during the 12-month period, per-judgeship calculations for the entire year were made using the reduced number of judgeship authorizations.

## Weighted Filings

Since 1946, the federal judiciary has applied weights to filings in the U.S. district courts as a means of accounting for differences in the time required for judges to resolve various types of civil and criminal actions. The total for “weighted filings” is the sum of all weights assigned to civil cases and to criminal felony defendants.

Average cases each receive a weight of approximately 1.0; more complex types of cases receive higher weights (e.g., a death penalty habeas corpus case is assigned a weight of 5.99); cases that demand relatively little time from judges receive lower weights (e.g., a student loan case is assigned a weight of 0.031). The weighted filings are presented in conjunction with a 95% confidence interval to indicate the statistical reliability of the estimates.

The Judicial Conference’s Subcommittee on Judicial Statistics approved the use of a new system developed in 1993 by the Federal Judicial Center (FJC) that uses the scale derived from the FJC’s federal district court time study of 1979, but assigns weights to criminal felony cases on a per-defendant basis rather than on a per-case basis (e.g., the weight assigned to a case in which three defendants are charged with the same offense is calculated by multiplying the weight associated with that offense by three). Moreover, the new system assigns weights only when cases are first filed in district courts as original proceedings or following removal from state court or interdistrict transfer. Thus, data on reopens, remands, appeals from magistrate judgments, and multidistrict litigation are not included among the totals for weighted filings.

The new weight system was used to derive weighted filings for all six years shown on the district court profile pages.

## **Median Times: Civil**

"Median times" refers to median time intervals between the filing of cases and their disposition. Civil median times exclude data for cases involving land condemnation, prisoner petitions, deportation reviews, recovery of overpayments, and enforcement of judgment. Because courts can quickly process cases involving recovery of overpayments (which primarily address veterans' benefits) and enforcement of judgment (which primarily address student loans), including data on these cases would shorten the civil median times for some courts to the point of giving an inaccurate impression of the time usually required to process a case in the federal courts.

## **Median Times: From Filing to Trial**

Beginning in 1994, the median time for civil cases from filing to trial is calculated from the date the case was filed to the date the trial began. For prior years, these data are calculated from the date that the answer or response was filed.

## **Criminal Felony Filings by Offense**

Beginning in 1995, data for all criminal filings involving drug laws are reported under category "F." In previous years, some drug law cases involving narcotics were reported under category "G," which is not in use at this time.