

Message From the Director

This report contains statistical profiles for the 12 regional U.S. courts of appeals and the 94 U.S. district courts. The format for the report, approved by the Judicial Conference Subcommittee on Judicial Statistics, is intended to provide historical information for each court and to present caseload data in a slightly different format from annual and semiannual reports. In addition to total caseload information, the report presents data based on the number of judgeships authorized by statute.

District court caseload figures are divided by the number of authorized judgeship positions in each court to provide caseload data per judgeship. Cases in the courts of appeals are generally handled by panels of three judges; therefore, caseload figures are shown per panel. The figures per judgeship and per panel allow comparisons between courts of different sizes.

Reaching a record level for the third consecutive year, filings in the U.S. courts of appeals rose 3 percent in 1998 to 53,805, and case terminations rose 2 percent to 52,002. Increases in civil appeals (up 6 percent) and bankruptcy appeals (up 4 percent) were responsible for the overall growth. Filings of prisoner petition appeals rose 8 percent this year due to increases in habeas corpus petitions and motions to vacate sentence, which grew 36 percent and 5 percent, respectively. Criminal appeals remained stable this year, rising less than 1 percent. Increases in appeals related to immigration laws (up 66 percent) and drugs (up 2 percent) offset declines in those involving weapons and firearms (down 14 percent) and fraud (down 10 percent). In 1998, the median time from filing to disposition for cases in the courts of appeals rose to 11.6 months from the 1997 figure of 11.4 months. The number of sitting senior judges remained unchanged from last year's total of 80, and the number of vacant judgeship months dropped 6 percent to 247.3 months in 1998.

In the U.S. district courts, criminal felony cases filed (excluding transfers) surged 17 percent in 1998 to 42,202, primarily because of increases in cases related to immigration and drugs. Civil filings decreased for the first time in five years, falling 6 percent. However, this follows an increase in civil filings in 1997 that resulted from a decision by the U.S. Courts of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit to transfer more than 10,000 preexisting breast implant cases or claims to the Eastern District of Michigan.

The court profile pages in this report provide more detailed summaries of the caseloads of the courts of appeals (excluding the Federal Circuit Court of Appeals) and of the district courts on both a national basis and a local court basis.

Any comments you have on the content and format of this report are welcome.

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Director