

Overview of the Judiciary

The organization of the judiciary, the district and circuit boundaries, the places of holding court, and the number of federal judges are established by laws passed by Congress and signed by the President. The number of federal judges in each district and in the courts of appeals is authorized by Congress on the basis of workload.

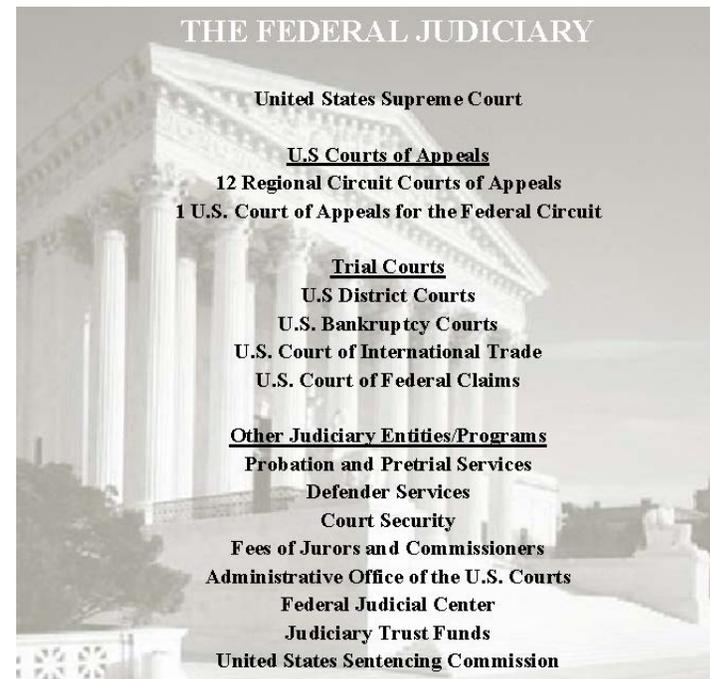
In addition to the adjudication of cases, other related functions, such as the provision of criminal defense services and the supervision of offenders, are prescribed by statute. Following is a brief overview of the work of the courts and other related activities of the Judicial Branch.

United States Supreme Court

The United States Supreme Court consists of nine justices, one of whom is appointed as Chief Justice of the United States. The Supreme Court is the final arbiter in the federal court system.

United States Courts of Appeals

There are 12 regional courts of appeals and 167 authorized appellate court Article III judgeships nationwide. These 12 courts of appeals have jurisdiction over cases within a regional area or “circuit.” The 12 regional courts of appeals review cases from the United States district courts and the United States Tax Court as well as orders and decisions from a number of federal administrative agencies.



United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit

The United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit has exclusive national jurisdiction over a large number of diverse subject areas, including international trade, government contracts, patents, trademarks, certain monetary claims against the United States government, federal personnel, and veterans' benefits. Appeals to the court come from all 94 federal district courts, as well as the United States Court of Federal Claims, the United States Court of International Trade, and the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. There are 12 authorized Article III circuit judgeships on the Court.

United States District Courts

There are 94 district courts in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the territories of Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands. The U.S. District Courts are the courts of general jurisdiction in the federal court system, and most federal cases are initially tried and decided in these courts. There are 677 authorized Article III district court judgeships nationwide.

The Federal Magistrates Act of 1968 created the office of magistrate judge to assist the district court judges. Magistrate judges are non-Article III judges appointed by the district judges, and they serve for a term of years rather than a lifetime appointment. Full-time magistrate judges serve a term of eight years and may be reappointed.



United States Bankruptcy Courts

The bankruptcy courts are separate units of the district courts. Federal courts have exclusive jurisdiction over bankruptcy cases; a bankruptcy case cannot be filed in a state court. United States bankruptcy judges are non-Article III judges appointed by the courts of appeals for a term of years, rather than a lifetime appointment. They serve for a term of 14 years and may be reappointed.

United States Court of International Trade

The Court of International Trade, with nine Article III judges, has exclusive nationwide jurisdiction of civil actions against the United States, its agencies and officers, and certain civil actions brought by the United States, arising out of import transactions and the administration and enforcement of the federal customs and international trade laws.

United States Court of Federal Claims



The Court of Federal Claims has nationwide jurisdiction over certain types of claims against the federal government. Its 16 judges are appointed for a term of 15 years by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate. Judges appointed to the Court of Federal Claims are authorized under Article I of the Constitution and do not have the tenure and salary protections of Article III judges.

Probation and Pretrial Services

Federal probation and pretrial services officers protect the public through the investigation and supervision of defendants and offenders within the federal criminal justice system. A pretrial services officer supervises defendants awaiting trial who are released into our communities and provides a source of information upon which the court can determine conditions of release or detention while criminal cases are pending adjudication. In support of sentencing determinations, which require both uniformity of practice and attention to individual circumstances, probation officers provide the court with reliable information concerning the offender, the victim, and the offense committed, as well as an impartial application of the sentencing guidelines. Probation officers supervise offenders sentenced to probation, as well as offenders coming out of federal prison who are required to serve a term of supervised release.

Defender Services

The federal judiciary oversees and administers the federal defender and appointed counsel program, which provides legal representation and other services to persons financially unable to obtain counsel in criminal and related matters in federal court. The Sixth Amendment to the Constitution guarantees that “[i]n all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right...to have the assistance of counsel for his defense.” The Criminal Justice Act provides that courts shall appoint counsel from federal public and community defender organizations or from a panel of private attorneys (“panel attorneys”) established by the court.

Court Security

The judiciary’s Court Security appropriation funds protective guard services and security systems and equipment for United States courthouses and other facilities housing federal court operations. These services are contracted for and managed by the Department of Justice’s United States Marshals Service, with additional guard services provided by the Department of Homeland Security’s Federal Protective Service.

Fees of Jurors and Commissioners

The judiciary receives funding to provide for the statutory fees and allowances of federal grand and petit jurors and for the compensation of land commissioners.

Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts

The Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts is the central support entity for the judicial branch. It has management oversight of the court security program, the probation and pretrial services program, and the defender services program. It supports the Judicial Conference of the United States in determining judiciary policies; develops new methods, systems, and programs for conducting the business of the federal courts efficiently and economically; develops and supports the application of technology; collects and analyzes statistics on the business of the federal courts for accurate planning and decisions about resource needs; provides financial management services and personnel and payroll support; and conducts audits and reviews to ensure the continued quality and integrity of federal court operations.

Federal Judicial Center

The Federal Judicial Center is the judiciary's research and education agency. The Center undertakes research and evaluation of judicial operations and procedures for both the committees of the Judicial Conference and the courts themselves. It provides judges, court personnel, and others orientation, continuing education, and training through seminars; curriculum units for in-court use; monographs and manuals; and audio, video, and interactive media programs.

Payment to Judicial Trust Funds

This appropriation finances annuity payments to retired bankruptcy judges and magistrate judges, U.S. Court of Federal Claims judges, and spouses and dependent children of deceased judicial officers.

United States Sentencing Commission

The U.S. Sentencing Commission promulgates sentencing policies, practices, and guidelines for the federal criminal justice system. The Chair, three Vice Chairs, and three other voting commissioners are appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate.

