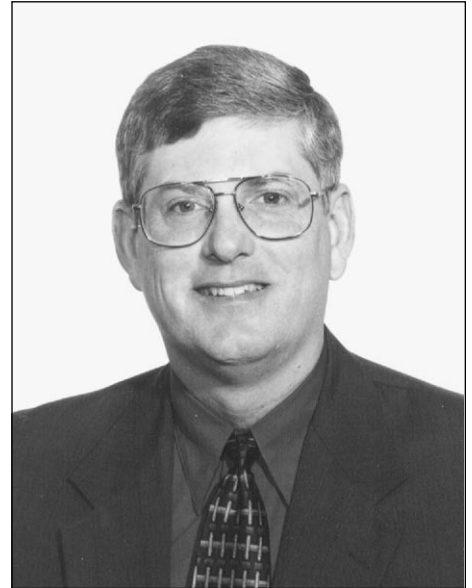


2001 Caseload: The Year in Review

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Looking back at past articles for this column I noticed that three years have elapsed since the Circuit Court's caseload information was last presented. Given that I recently (at the time this article was being prepared) received the year-end caseload reports for 2001, the time is ripe to provide you with a glance at the court's activity for the year just completed.

A total of 30,981 new cases and petitions were filed in Circuit Court last year. The table below shows the number of cases and petitions filed by case type. The number of dispositions is also shown for the case types listed.

For purposes of a reference point, I'd like to draw some comparisons with the previous year's caseload information. Before I do, here's an explanation as to what's included in some of the case types listed above. General civil cases include all case numbers wherein the suffix (for those who are familiar with the Circuit Court's case numbering system) begins with a "C." These are contract cases that include such areas as business claims, condemnation, environment, forfeiture, housing and real estate, labor relations, among others.

The "Civil-damages" reference includes cases whose suffix begins with "N" (except auto negligence cases). Cases in this category include primarily, but not exclusively, medical malpractice, personal injury, and product liability. Civil cases listed as "other" include cases whose suffix begins with "P." Examples include attachment proceedings; proceedings to restore, establish or correct records; claim and delivery matters; and garnishments.

Under the domestic category you will see a reference to "interstate." These cases generally involve child support issues (i.e., enforcement or modification of a court order) where one party is not in Michigan or an order was issued in another state. The remaining case types are probably self-explanatory. One last item before I move on: PPOs are short for Personal Protection Orders.

Now for the comparisons with 2000 caseload data. The number of new case filings for the general jurisdiction division is 2.3% higher than in 2000. The increase is wholly attributable to the civil arena in which new filings in 2001 exceeded the previous year by 7.6%. The number of appeals and criminal cases fell in 2001 by 13.4% and 0.7%, respectively.

In the family division, total caseload increased by 0.6% in 2001. New domestic and PPO filings decreased by 2.1% and 2.6%, respectively. These reductions were slightly more than offset by an increase of 10.5% in the number of juvenile petitions authorized. The number of filings pertaining to

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CASE TYPE	CASES/PETITIONS FILED	CASES/PETITIONS DISPOSED
1) APPEALS	1,133	1,144
A. Criminal	64	70
B. Civil	90	110
C. Agency	370	365
D. Other	609	599
2) CIVIL	7,861	8,223
A. Auto Neg.	1,377	1,469
B. General	4,700	4,760
C. Damages	1,590	1,809
D. Other	194	185
3) CRIMINAL	6,007	6,845
A. Capital	251	305
B. Non-Capital	5,756	6,540
Subtotal - General	15,001	16,212
4) DOMESTIC	7,876	8,042
A. Div. w/ child.	2,792	2,965
B. Div. w/o child.	2,772	2,895
C. Paternity	851	864
D. Interstate	411	405
E. Support	863	742
F. Other	187	171
5) JUVENILE	3,680	3,632
A. Delinquency	2,331	2,340
B. Abuse & Negl.	333	314
C. Juvenile Traffic	539	510
D. Adoptions	477	468
6) NAME CHANGES	430	428
7) PPOs	3,994	4,351
Subtotal - Family	15,980	16,453
Total - Circuit Court	30,981	32,665

(On the Circuit – continued)

name changes increased by 4.3%. On the whole, the number of new filings in 2001 (30,981) exceeded the filings in 2000 (30,546) by a modest 1.4%.

Here are a couple of statistics that might be of interest. A total of 765 trials were conducted in 2001 – 509 jury and 256 non-jury. The average length of time for jury and non-jury trials was 2.8 days and 1.3 days, respectively. This does not include the time necessary to select a jury. We also conducted 281 hearings during the last quarter of 2001 – the first quarter for which hearing time data was compiled.

Projecting that number over four quarters would yield an expected number of hearings for the year in excess of 1,100. The average length of a hearing was just under 0.4 days.

Last year was a busy year for the court, as were the past few years. Accordingly, the State Court Administrative Office has recommended, and the Legislature approved, that Oakland County may have two additional circuit judgeships. The Board of Commissioners, who must approve the two new judgeships, is expected to consider the issue this month. I'll discuss this issue in more detail in the months ahead.

Until next month ...