

# ANNUAL REPORT *of the* NORTH CAROLINA JUDICIAL BRANCH

2019-20



JULY 1, 2019 – JUNE 30, 2020  
[WWW.NCCOURTS.GOV](http://WWW.NCCOURTS.GOV)



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<b>8</b>	BUDGET AND PERSONNEL	<b>20</b>	COURT PROGRAMS	Chief Justice Cheri Beasley appointed McKinley Wooten Jr. as director of the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC).  Wooten had served as interim director since February 28, 2019, managing the administrative services provided to the Judicial Branch's more than 6,400 employees and judicial facilities in every county of the state. He previously served as deputy director of NCAOC, deputy secretary of the Department of Administration, and inspector general at the North Carolina Department of Justice. He is the first African American to serve as director of the NCAOC.	
<b>9</b>	JUDICIAL BRANCH PERSONNEL	<b>24</b>	JUDICIAL BRANCH HIGHLIGHTS	As interim director, Wooten engaged with stakeholders to discuss their concerns and priorities and to keep them informed of NCAOC work.	
<b>11</b>	ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND ROUTES OF APPEAL	<b>25</b>	STATE LEADERS DISCUSS PRIORITIES TO COMBAT HUMAN TRAFFICKING	The appointment was made upon the recommendation of a select committee (formed by Chief Justice Beasley in January 2020) comprised of stakeholders of the court system and the legal profession.	
<b>12</b>	SUPREME COURT OF NORTH CAROLINA	<b>26</b>	SCHOOL JUSTICE PARTNERSHIP KEEPS KIDS IN SCHOOL AND OUT OF COURT		

# MISSION OF THE NORTH CAROLINA JUDICIAL BRANCH



TO PROTECT AND PRESERVE THE RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES OF ALL THE PEOPLE AS GUARANTEED BY THE CONSTITUTIONS AND LAWS OF THE UNITED STATES AND NORTH CAROLINA BY PROVIDING A FAIR, INDEPENDENT, AND ACCESSIBLE FORUM FOR THE JUST, TIMELY, AND ECONOMICAL RESOLUTION OF THEIR LEGAL AFFAIRS

*justice for all*

## A SPECIAL MESSAGE FROM CHIEF JUSTICE CHERI BEASLEY

This has been a year filled with change and challenges that have presented us with opportunities to innovate and improve the administration of justice. It has also demanded a renewed focus on the health and well-being of our court personnel and the people and communities we serve.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck in March, we acted swiftly to protect health and safety. I issued a number of emergency directives to require social distancing and the use of face coverings, allow virtual instead of in-person hearings, and establish other safety protocols to limit the transmission of COVID-19 while keeping our courts accessible.

Providing stability during turbulent times is a responsibility shared by judicial leadership across all 100 counties and by every one of our dedicated Judicial Branch employees. Director McKinley Wooten brought steady leadership to the Administrative Office of the Courts, which provided essential support throughout the Branch. And our COVID-19 Task Force provided thoughtful, comprehensive guidance and best practices that improved the health and safety of our courts.

While COVID-19 renewed our focus on personal health, heightened racial tensions focused our attention on the health of our justice system. Understanding that disparities continue to exist despite our best efforts at rooting them out, we returned to the recommendations of the Commission on the Administration of Law and Justice. We continued to expand programs like School Justice Partnerships that keep kids in classrooms, out of courts, and on a path toward success in their lives.

We pursued pilot programs to improve our system of pretrial release. We have seen promising results demonstrating that we can keep communities safe by ensuring that release is determined by risk, not by wealth or poverty.

This is a time that demands that we come together in collaboration to find solutions for our communities. In that spirit, I was proud to launch the Faith and Justice Alliance to bring legal training and pro bono legal services to communities who need them most.

We continued our efforts to restore suspended driver's licenses for hundreds of thousands of North Carolinians unable to pay traffic fines or fees. In partnership with district attorneys and community organizations, we eliminated millions of dollars in debt for more

than 20,000 North Carolinians. We also launched [NCFairChance.org](http://NCFairChance.org) to provide pro bono legal help to those trying to reinstate their license after a court-debt related suspension.

We also took important steps this year to support families by implementing a new parental leave policy providing up to eight weeks of paid leave for new parents. We extended that support to attorneys who practice in our courts by guaranteeing up to twelve weeks of secured leave for new parents.

All of these efforts have been undertaken with the goal of improving the health of our Judicial Branch, our personnel, and the people and communities we serve.

This year has demanded so much of our court leadership and personnel, and they have risen to the challenge. North Carolinians are resilient and resourceful, and we approach our challenges with a spirit of cooperation and innovation. As we navigate the ongoing pandemic and the monumental changes technology will bring to our courts in the years ahead, let us continue to come together to find new and exciting ways to ensure that our courts embody the fundamental principles of fairness and equality and that we administer justice efficiently with the health and safety of every North Carolinian at heart.

Sincerely,



— Chief Justice  
Cheri Beasley  
Supreme Court of  
North Carolina



# LETTER FROM NCAOC DIRECTOR MCKINLEY WOOTEN JR.

Going above and beyond the call of duty in the midst of difficult circumstances defined Judicial Branch personnel this fiscal year. During an unprecedented pandemic, judges, clerks, district attorneys, magistrates, court managers, and all of our employees rose to the occasion to ensure that justice remained accessible in North Carolina's courts. I am humbled by the many sacrifices that were made by our court family. These sacrifices were nothing short of heroic, fulfilling a civic duty to ensure the continuation of our constitutional government. Through the use of strict health and safety protocols and modern technology, I am proud to say that the Judicial Branch never closed during one of the most turbulent times in recent history.

Remaining vigilant as health experts issued recommendations on preventing the spread of COVID-19, courthouse leadership and staff established procedures to ensure the safety of our employees and the general public. As health experts changed safety protocols when they learned more about how the virus is transmitted, our staff remained adaptable and ready to enact the most effective safety measures possible. Enforcing social distancing standards, conducting frequent hand washing and hand sanitizing, and requiring face coverings in all courthouses and court offices became standard operating procedure for the Judicial Branch.

As the effects of the pandemic continued without end in sight, a weariness, which became known as "virus fatigue," became a concern for our statewide personnel. The added stress caused by personal or family health issues, the burden of a growing case backlog, and the necessity of performing supplemental duties related to COVID-19 safety protocols, could easily affect the health and wellbeing of our employees. To help mitigate these stressors, leadership responded with assistance such as approving the hiring of temporary staff and extending overtime to pay. I recognize that the people who embody the Judicial Branch are more than our employees. They are our friends and family and we must provide the health and wellness support they need to function during this critical time.

Like safety protocols and staff support measures, COVID-19 changed how we use technology in many of our courthouses.

In addition to using safety protocols to reduce the transmission of COVID-19, many courthouses used advanced technology to conduct court business. Cameras

and microphones where deployed in courtrooms to conduct remote hearings, and modern video conferencing technology ensured that judges, clerks, attorneys, and the general public were well connected and able to meet face-to-face in a virtual setting.

The use of modern technology proved essential to the continuation of court business this fiscal year, and online services became increasingly more important as the public sought to conduct their court business remotely. This trend reaffirms the decision to further our eCourts vision of a virtual courthouse, where paper processes are a thing of the past. Beginning in Fiscal Year 2020–2021, the public will begin to see select services offered online with a move toward statewide online access of our court system within 10 years. I am excited about the future of eCourts and believe it will prove to be an effective tool for our court's operations and to expand the public's access to justice.

Despite serious challenges this fiscal year, the Judicial Branch remained open and accessible to the public. The credit goes to our steadfast personnel who were resourceful in the use of technology as they continued to perform their duties in the face of adversity. As we move forward into the next fiscal year, I am confident that the Judicial Branch is capable of continuing to fulfill its constitutional role under any circumstance as we strive for the goal of ensuring justice for all.

Sincerely,



— McKinley Wooten Jr.,  
Director, North Carolina  
Administrative  
Office of the Courts



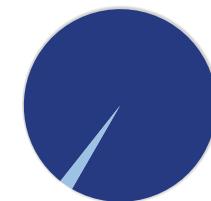


# BUDGET & OPERATIONS

OVERSEEING THE BUDGETING SERVICES  
FOR THE STATE'S JUDICIAL BRANCH

# JUDICIAL BRANCH BUDGET

North Carolina's court system is a unified statewide and state-operated system. The state pays the majority of operating expenses of the Judicial Branch. By state statute, G.S. 7A – 302, counties and municipalities are responsible for the physical facilities occupied by court personnel across the state. G.S. 7A – 343 sets forth the duties of the NCAOC director (appointed by the Chief Justice), which include identifying staffing needs and managing and authorizing expenditures for the judicial budget. Detailed budget information is in the Budget Management and Financial Services Statistical and Operational Report at [www.NCcourts.gov](http://www.NCcourts.gov).



**2.37%**

Judicial Branch budget as a percentage of the State General Fund

## III HOW THE BUDGET IS SPENT

### 88.4% SALARIES & BENEFITS

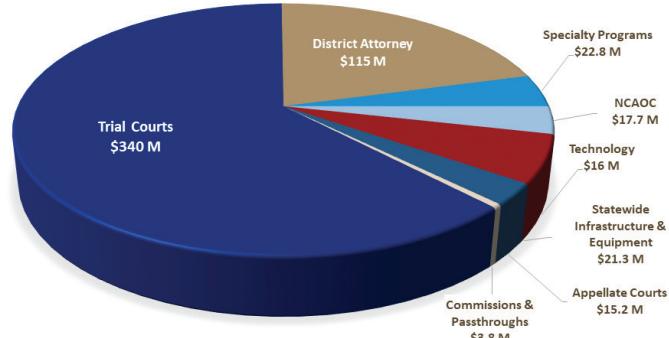
27.7% (\$160 million) for elected judicial officials, magistrates, and appointed officials

### 11.6% OPERATIONS

- 87% local court operations
- 4% central administration
- 6% technology services, equipment, and statewide infrastructure
- 3% appellate courts, commissions, and passthrough appropriations

### FY 2019 – 20 STATE GENERAL FUND APPROPRIATIONS

CERTIFIED BUDGET TOTAL: \$24.4B  
JUDICIAL CERTIFIED: \$578.4M



## III MONIES COLLECTED BY COURTS

### <1% STAYS WITH COURT SYSTEM

(Fines, Fees, Forfeitures, Restitution, and Civil Judgments)

### \$629 MILLION DISBURSED BY CLERKS

41% to state treasurer, state agencies, law enforcement retirement

\$308 million to citizens

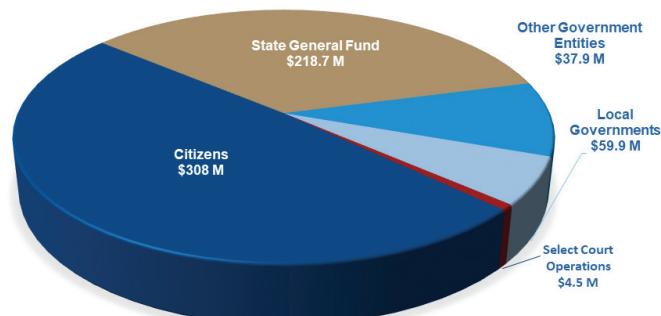
\$218.7 million to State General Fund

\$59.9 million to local governments

\$32.4 million fine and forfeiture revenue

\$4.5 million to select court operations

### FY 2019 – 20 CLERK OF SUPERIOR COURT DISBURSEMENTS \$629M TOTAL DISBURSED



## BUDGET AND PERSONNEL

NCAOC partners with the National Center for State Courts to develop methodology that is used to determine staffing needs for district court judges, superior court judges, clerks of superior court staff, magistrates, assistant district attorneys, and legal assistants. Using the same case weight based approach, NCAOC has conducted workload studies for family court case coordinators and custody mediators.

This information is used to advise the General Assembly about needs for staffing and other resources. Whenever the fiscal situation does not permit the filling of all vacancies, this information is the basis of the vacancy management system. In addition, the workload information is used to reassign vacant resources to needier offices throughout the state.

Certified Appropriations	Budget
Total certified appropriations, 2019 – 20	\$578,403,718
Percent increase from 2018 – 19	4.54%
Total certified appropriations as a percent of total state General Fund appropriations	2.37%

**88.4%**  
of the total budget  
pays employees.  
Remaining funds are for  
Judicial Branch operations.

### EXPANSION NEEDS

The Judicial Branch continues to have core services (including foreign language access, juror and witness fees, and technology advancements) that are unfunded or underfunded as determined by workload formulas. Per the expansion budget summary, the total number of new positions needed for the Judicial Branch to address workload needs is 379.5.

### Personnel (All Funding Sources)

Position	Total
JUSTICES AND JUDGES	
*Supreme Court Justices	7
*Court of Appeals Judges	15
*Superior Court Judges	107
*District Court Judges	273
AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL	
*District Attorneys	43
Assistant District Attorneys	689
District Attorney Support Staff	676
*Clerks of Superior Court	100
Clerk Personnel	2,659
Guardian ad Litem Personnel	186.5
Magistrates	672.6
Indigent Defense Services Staff	573
Administrative Office of the Courts Staff	384.9
Court Support Staff	1,207
Court Reporters	98
Trial Court Administrators	8
Foreign Language Court Interpreters	9
**Other	63.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6,415.60</b>

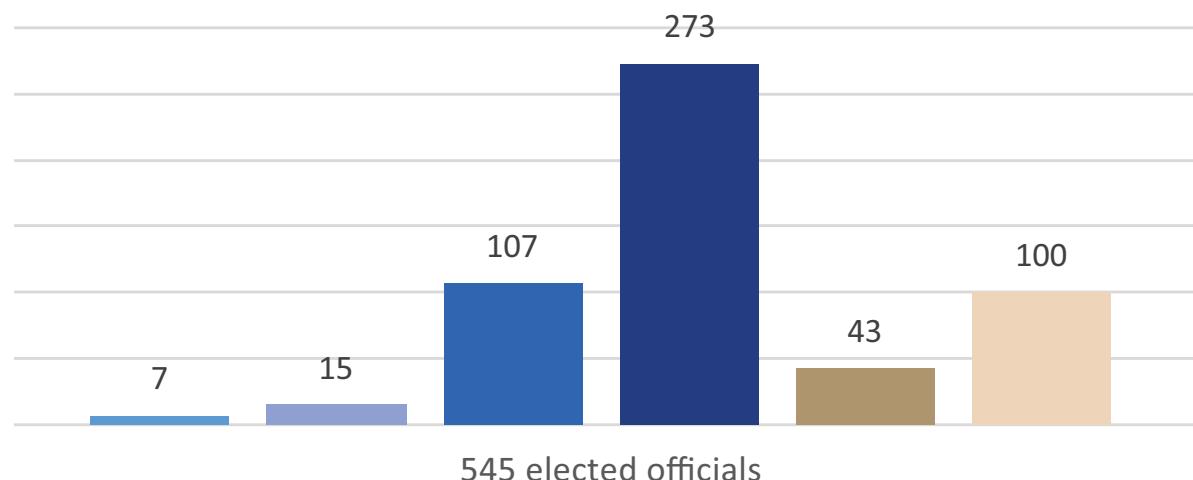
*\*Independently elected judicial officials; the North Carolina Judicial Branch has 545.*

*\*\*Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism, Conference of Clerks of Superior Court, Conference of District Attorneys, Dispute Resolution Commission, Equal Access to Justice Commission, Human Trafficking Commission, Innocence Inquiry Commission, Judicial Standards Commission, Pro Bono Resource Center, and Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission.*

# JUDICIAL BRANCH PERSONNEL

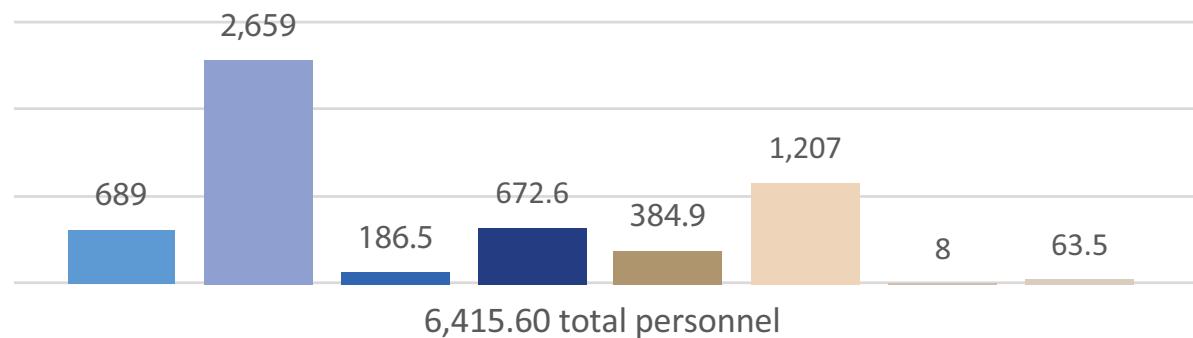
## ELECTED OFFICIALS

█ Supreme Court Justices      █ Court of Appeals Judges      █ Superior Court Judges  
█ District Court Judges      █ District Attorneys      █ Clerks of Superior Court



## TOTAL PERSONNEL

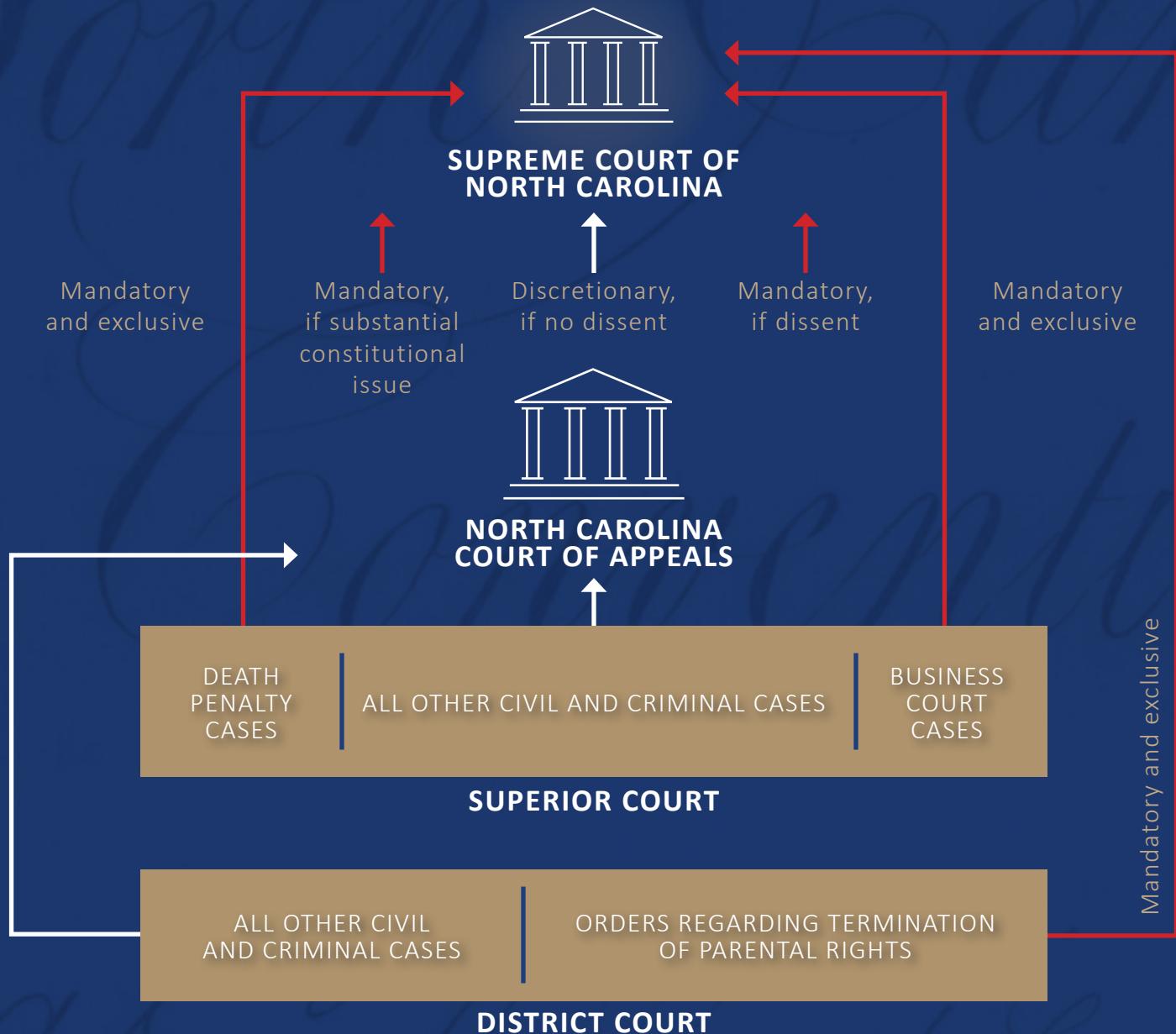
█ Assistant District Attorneys      █ Clerk Personnel  
█ Guardian Ad Litem Personnel      █ Magistrates  
█ Administrative Office of the Courts Staff      █ Court Support Staff  
█ Trial Court Administrators      █ Other



# THE COURTS

PROTECTING AND PRESERVING THE  
RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES OF ALL PEOPLE

# ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND ROUTES OF APPEAL



## ROLE OF THE SUPREME COURT

- Highest court in state
- Final word on whether state government action violates the North Carolina Constitution
- Discretionary review of unanimously decided criminal and civil cases from the Court of Appeals
- Mandatory review, if appealed, of criminal and civil cases from the Court of Appeals where there was a dissenting opinion
- Mandatory and exclusive appellate review of District Court orders regarding the termination of parental rights
- Mandatory review, if appealed, of cases from the Court of Appeals involving a substantial question under the United States or North Carolina constitutions
- Mandatory and exclusive appellate review of first-degree murder cases tried by the Superior Court where the defendant received a death sentence
- Mandatory and exclusive appellate review of trial court decisions by the North Carolina Business Court

# SUPREME COURT OF NORTH CAROLINA

The Supreme Court of North Carolina is the state's highest court, and there is no further appeal from its decisions on matters of state law. The Supreme Court has no jury and makes no determinations of fact. It considers whether error occurred at trial or in judicial interpretation of the law. The court consists of the Chief Justice, who also serves as the head of the Judicial Branch, and six associate justices. Each justice serves an eight-year term.

- **196 appeals docketed**
- **141 appeals disposed**
- **475 petitions docketed**
- **419 petitions disposed**

7

justices who serve  
eight-year terms

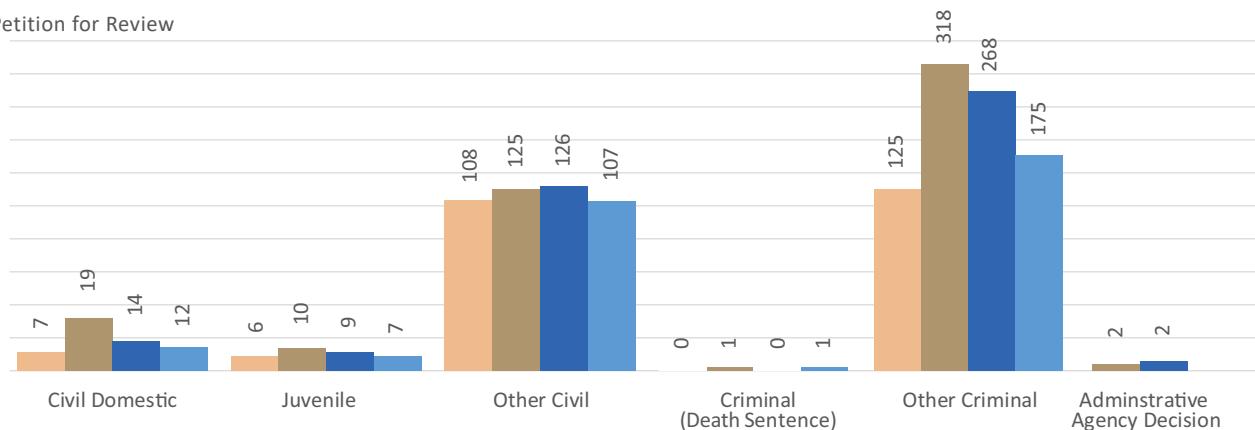
The Supreme Court  
of North Carolina,  
located in Raleigh  
was established in

**1819**

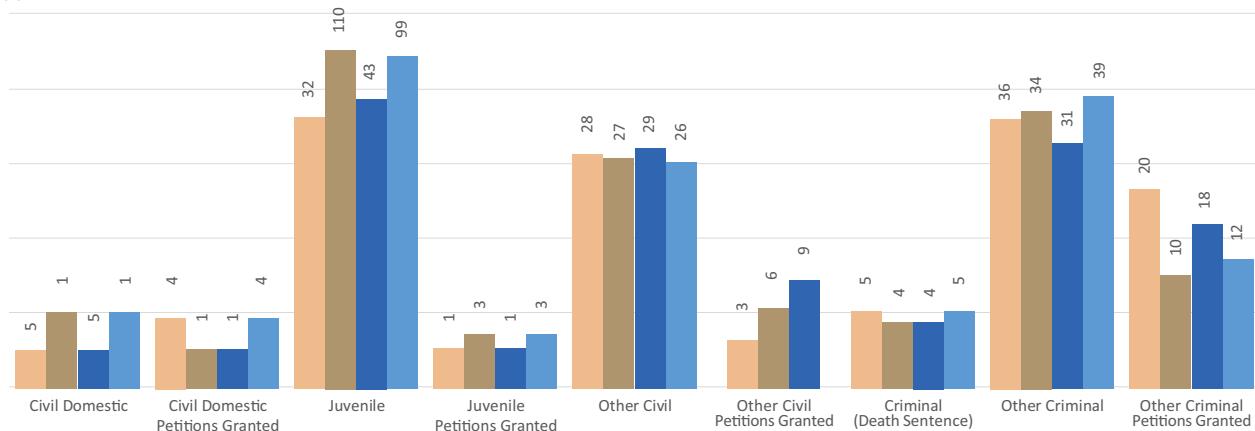
## III CASELOAD FY 2019 – 20

■ Begin Pending ■ Disposed ■ Filed ■ End Pending

### Petition for Review



### Appeals



# NORTH CAROLINA COURT OF APPEALS

Established in 1967, the North Carolina Court of Appeals is the state's intermediate appellate court. The court is led by a chief judge, who is appointed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of North Carolina. The Court of Appeals reviews the proceedings that occurred in the trial courts for errors of law or legal procedure; it decides only questions of law – not questions of fact. The court decides if the trial court correctly applied the law, or if there was prejudicial error in the conduct of the trial.

- **1,765 appeals / petitions filed**
- **1,892 appeals / petitions disposed**

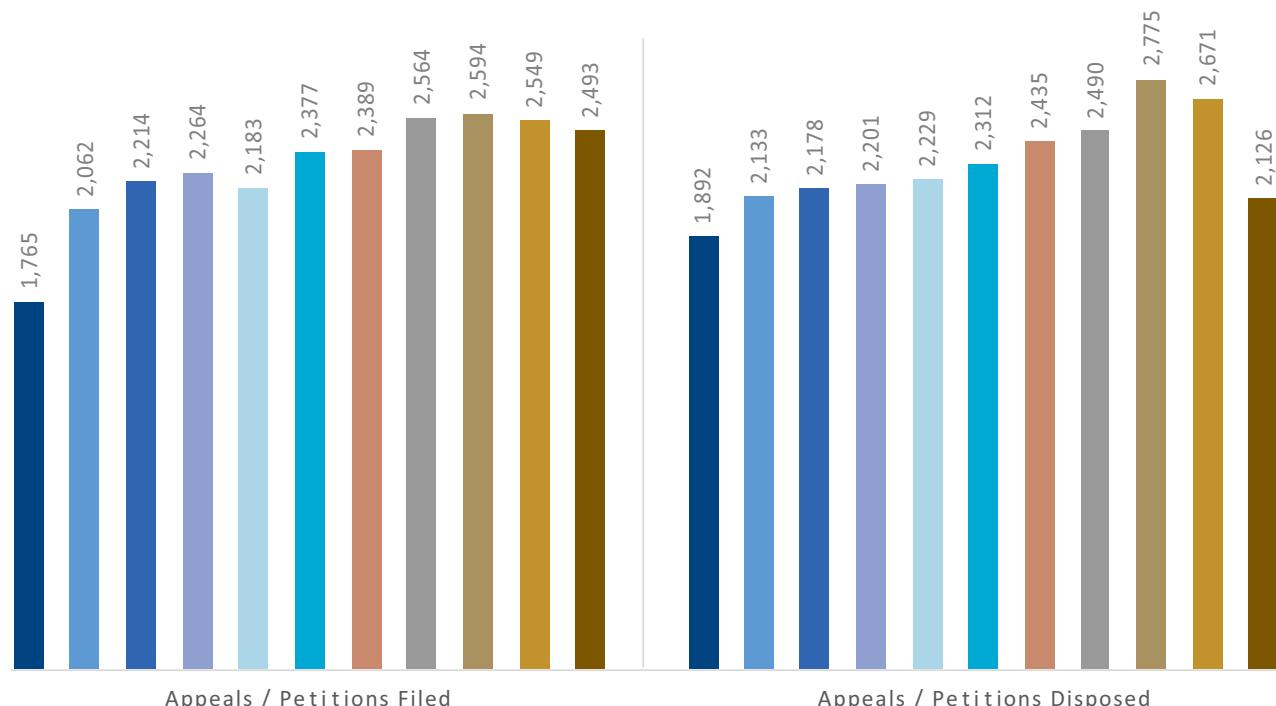
**15  
JUDGES**

who serve  
eight-year terms

Hear cases in panels of

**3**

## III CASELOAD FY 2019 – 20



## SUPERIOR COURTS

Established in 1777 and North Carolina's oldest courts, the superior court division hears civil cases involving more than \$25,000, all felony criminal cases, and misdemeanor and infraction appeals from the district court. Superior court is divided into five divisions and 48 districts across the state.

Judges rotate every six months among the districts within their divisions. The senior resident superior court judge manages the administrative duties of the court. The clerk of superior court is responsible for all clerical and recordkeeping functions and serves as the judge of probate.

**107**

JUDGES

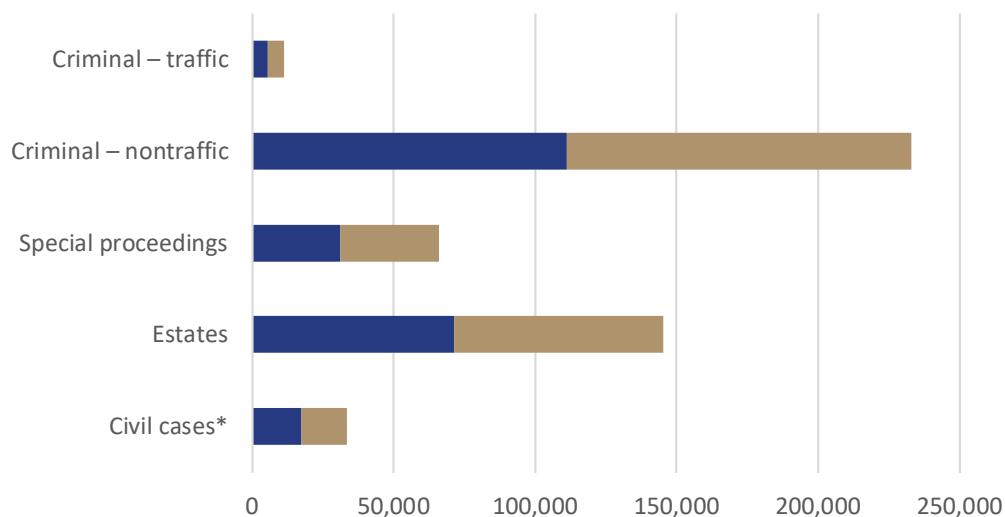
**100**

CLERKS OF  
SUPERIOR  
COURT

- **236,750 total cases filed**
- **252,618 total cases disposed**

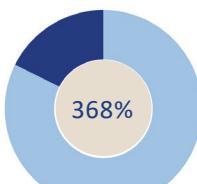
### ＼ CASELOAD FY 2019 – 20

■ Disposed ■ Filed

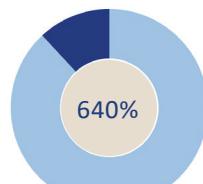


# SUPERIOR COURTS CASELOAD

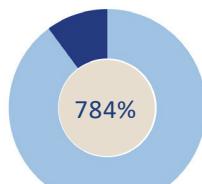
■ 1970 Judicial Branch Annual Report  
 ■ FY2019 – 20 Statistical & Operational Report



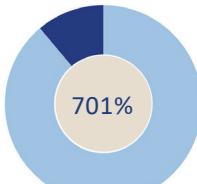
Superior Court  
Cases Filed – All



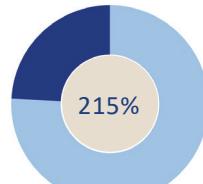
Superior Court  
Cases End Pending – All



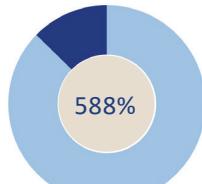
Superior Court  
Civil Cases Filed\*



Superior Court  
Civil Cases End Pending\*



Superior Court  
Criminal Cases Filed

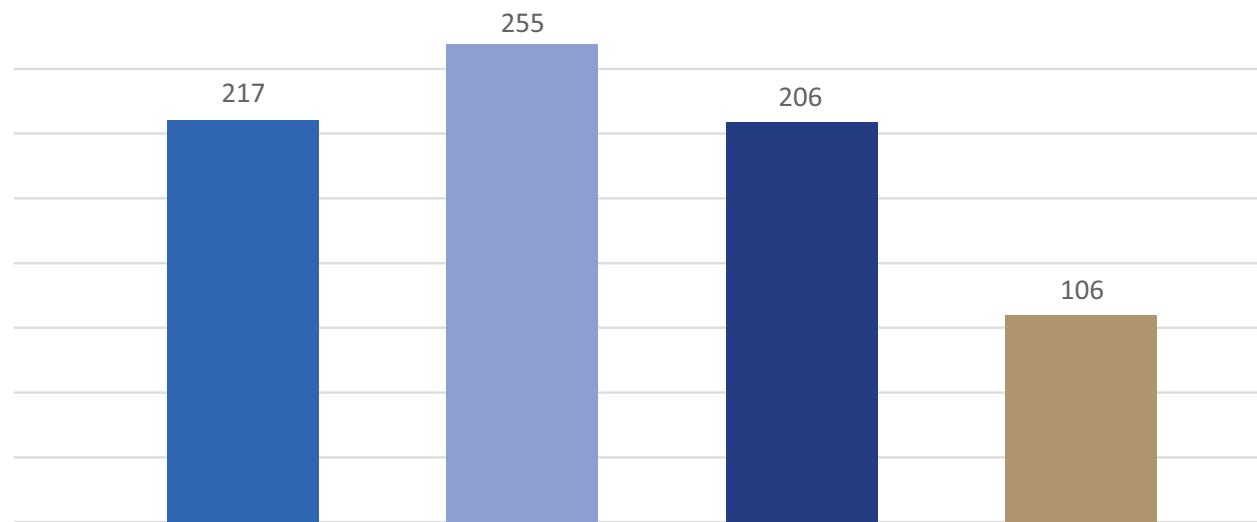


Superior Court  
Criminal Cases End Pending

\* 1970 only says "Civil"—2019 combines civil, estates, and special proceedings non-confidential

## SUPERIOR COURT — TIME TO DISPOSITION (IN DAYS) FY 2019 – 20

■ Total civil superior court cases   ■ Superior court misdemeanor cases, other than traffic  
 ■ Superior court felony cases   ■ Special proceeding cases



## DISTRICT COURTS

Established in 1966, district courts hear civil and criminal cases including all matters of family law, as well as all infractions and misdemeanors. District courts are divided into 41 districts across the state, but not grouped into larger judicial divisions. District courts sit in the county seat of each county. The chief district court judge manages the administrative duties of the court. Magistrates perform numerous duties in both civil and criminal matters, issuing warrants and presiding over small claims cases.

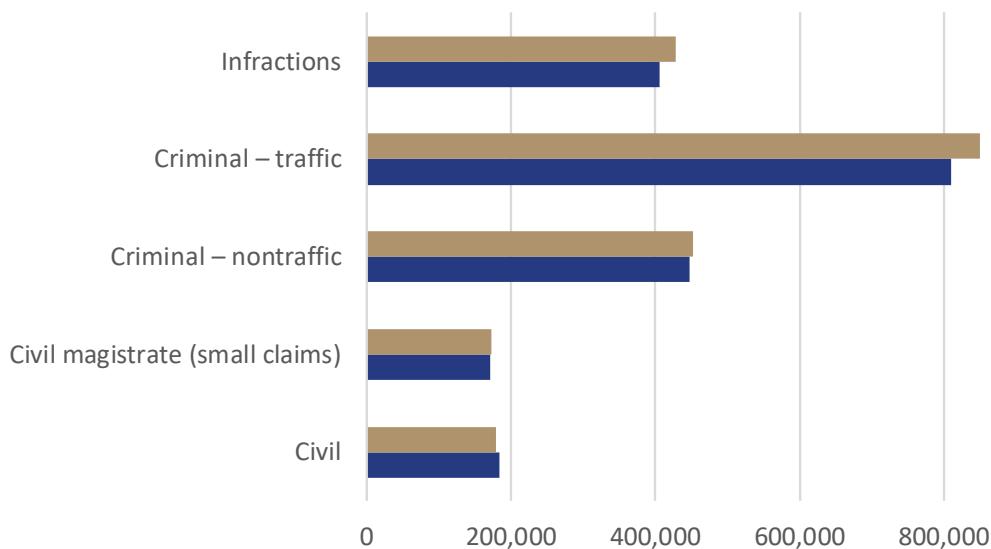
- **2,017,941 total cases filed**
- **2,079,714 total cases disposed**

*As the Judicial Branch continues to prepare for eCourts, and implementation of the Integrated Case Management System (ICMS), the NCAOC announced the launch of the Data Integrity Initiative in 2018. The goal of this initiative is a widespread “clean-up” of pending cases to ensure that data in Judicial Branch legacy systems reflect the most current information available. Among other things, this process may impact statistics for dispositions and pending cases during the fiscal year, and is also noteworthy for comparisons with previous fiscal years.*

273	JUDGES
672.6	MAGISTRATES
43	DISTRICT ATTORNEYS
17	PUBLIC DEFENDERS

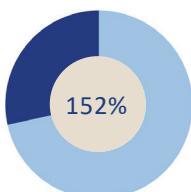
### █ CASELOAD FY 2019 – 20

■ Disposed ■ Filed

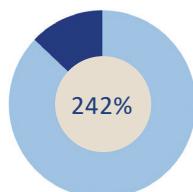


# DISTRICT COURTS CASELOAD

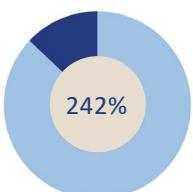
■ 1970 Judicial Branch Annual Report  
 ■ FY2019 – 20 Statistical & Operational Report



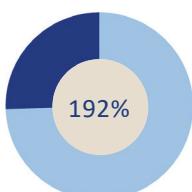
District Court  
Small Claims  
Cases Filed



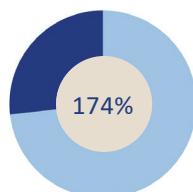
District Court  
Domestic / Juvenile  
Cases Filed



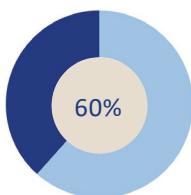
District Court  
Other Civil  
Cases Filed



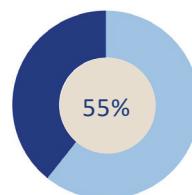
District Court  
Civil Cases  
Total Filed



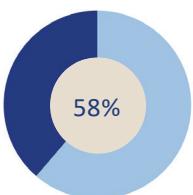
District Court  
Civil Cases  
End Pending



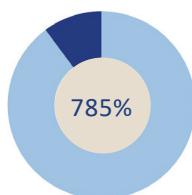
District Court  
Criminal MV Filed



District Court  
Criminal Non-MV Filed



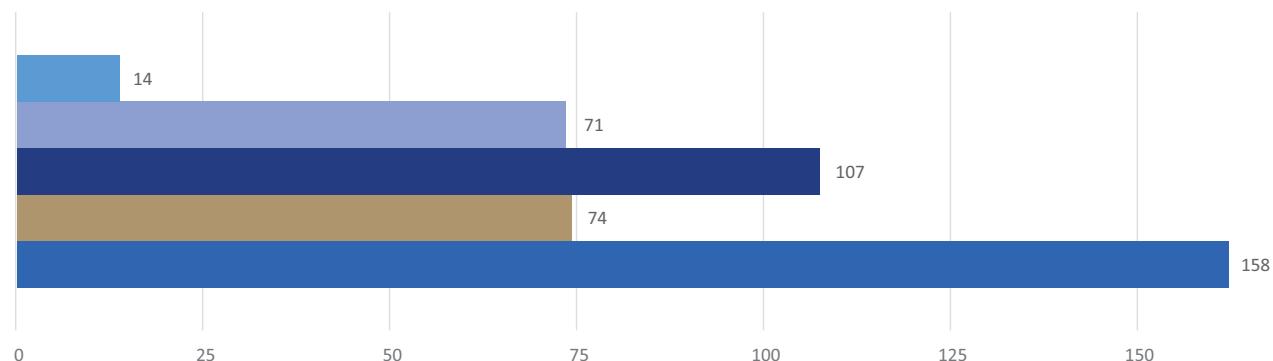
District Court  
Criminal Total Filed



District Court  
Criminal End Pending

## DISTRICT COURT — TIME TO DISPOSITION (IN DAYS) FY 2019 – 20

- Civil magistrate cases
- Civil district court cases
- District court felony cases
- Infractions cases
- District court misdemeanor cases, other traffic



# BUSINESS COURT

Established in 1996, the North Carolina Business Court is a specialized forum of the superior court division. Cases involving complex and significant issues of corporate and commercial law in our state are assigned by the Chief Justice to a special superior court judge for complex business cases.

Appeals from Business Court decisions go directly to the Supreme Court. The Business Court has four locations across the state in Charlotte, Greensboro, Raleigh, and Winston-Salem. The chief business court judge manages the administrative duties of the court. For more information, please see the Business Court's annual reports found at [www.NCcourts.gov/documents/publications/nc-business-court-reports](http://www.NCcourts.gov/documents/publications/nc-business-court-reports).

5

JUDGES

## FREQUENCY OF CASE TYPES FROM JULY 1, 2019 TO JUNE 30, 2020

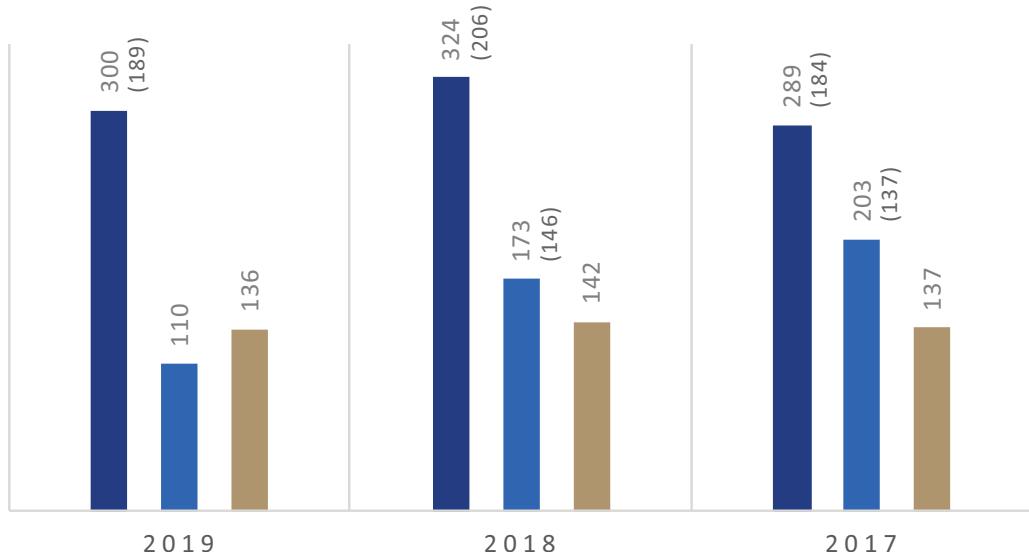
*NOTE — A party's Notice of Designation may indicate more than one dispute type.*

- **66 Corporations**
- **33 Trade Secrets**
- **18 Intellectual Property**
- **12 Contracts**
- **12 Securities**
- **8 Antitrust**
- **5 Trademark**
- **3 \$5M Amount in Controversy**
- **1 Contested Tax**

## 🏛 CASELOAD (CALENDAR YEAR)

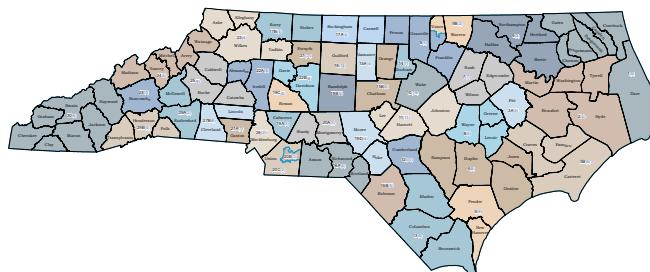
\* Parenthetical figures represent when a consolidated group of cases is counted as one case.

■ Pending Cases\*   ■ New Cases   ■ Closed Cases

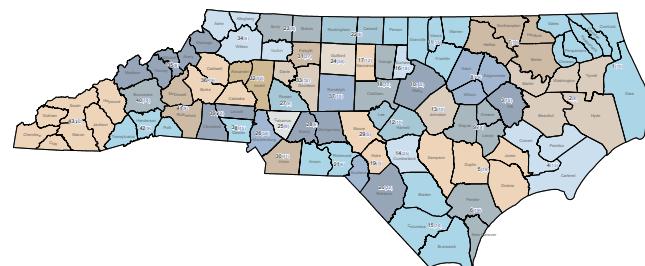


# 2.5 MILLION CASES FILED

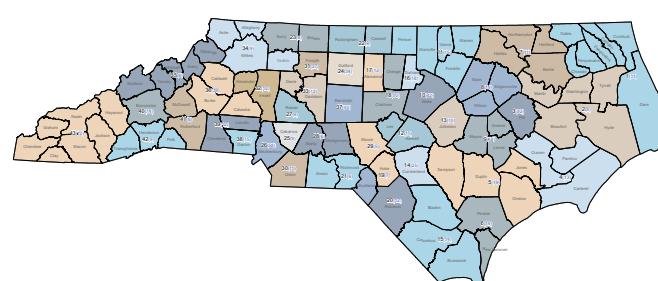
## DISTRICT COURT DISTRICTS



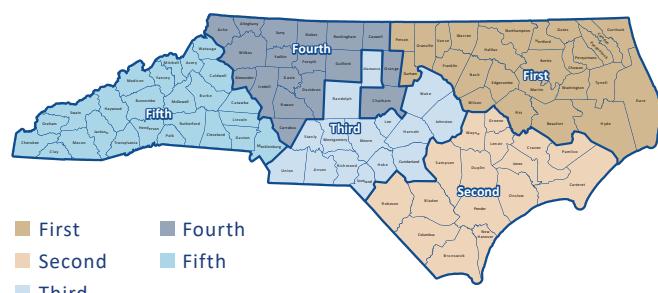
## PROSECUTORIAL DISTRICTS



## SUPERIOR COURT DISTRICTS



## SUPERIOR COURT DIVISIONS



**213**  
judicial sites,  
2 appellate courts,  
100 counties, and an  
Administrative Office  
of the Courts

**545**  
elected officials  
(more than the Executive  
Branch and the Legislative  
Branch combined)

**6,415**  
public servants

**<1%**  
monies collected and  
receipted by the courts stays  
with the courts



# COURT PROGRAMS

PROVIDING INFORMATION,  
ADVICE, SUPPORT, AND SOLUTIONS

# INCREASING ACCESS TO JUSTICE THROUGH PROGRAMS & SERVICES

**ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION (ADR)** helps parties resolve disputes outside of court. ADR services include family financial settlement, court-ordered arbitration, mediated settlement conferences, and the clerk's mediation program, all of which offer a less adversarial, more expeditious process for settling legal disputes.

**CHILD CUSTODY MEDIATION** offers a “family-friendly” way to resolve custody and visitation actions filed with the district court. Mediators provide neutral, non-adversarial court-ordered services in cases involving custody and visitation of minor children, including preparing parenting agreements. Custody mediation creates an opportunity for parents to focus on the best interests and needs of their children.

**FAMILY COURT** provides a forum that resolves family-related issues in a manner that respects the rights of each individual family member, promotes the best interest of the family, and helps families structure their own solutions. Family court currently serves 27 counties that comprise 47% of North Carolina’s population. The median pending age of cases in non-family court districts is nearly two and a half times longer than in family court districts.

**GUARDIAN AD LITEM (GAL) PROGRAM** provides an attorney advocate and community volunteers to serve abused and neglected children in every North Carolina county by advocating for their best interests in court. The GAL volunteer represents and promotes the best interest of children in court to help the courts work efficiently toward safety and permanence and provide the children with a voice.

**4,906**

district court cases  
settled in mediation

**8,993**

child custody cases mediated

**42,671**

civil domestic cases  
filed in family court districts

**522,528**

hours of GAL volunteer  
service to children



North Carolina  
**GUARDIAN AD LITEM**  
A CHILD'S ADVOCATE IN COURT



**JUDICIAL FELLOWSHIP** program provides independent, confidential, and timely legal support for the judges of the district and superior court benches of North Carolina with regard to the matters over which those judges preside. The Fellowship is made up of 10 law clerk / staff attorneys, who are based in Raleigh and travel throughout the state to assist judges.

**JUVENILE COURT IMPROVEMENT** program works to improve the performance of North Carolina's juvenile courts in abuse and neglect cases so that safety, permanence, and well-being for each child are achieved in a fair and timely manner. The work of this program helps ensure children are placed in permanent homes within one year, each family receives the individual attention necessary to make effective decisions for the child, and each child and each parent are afforded due process and effective legal representation.

**LANGUAGE ACCESS** services provide court interpreters who speak more than 66 different languages. Court interpreters are an essential public service, giving direct assistance to those who are limited English proficient or deaf or hard of hearing.

# 281

district and superior court matters assisted by judicial fellows; plus  
6 cases before three-judge panels

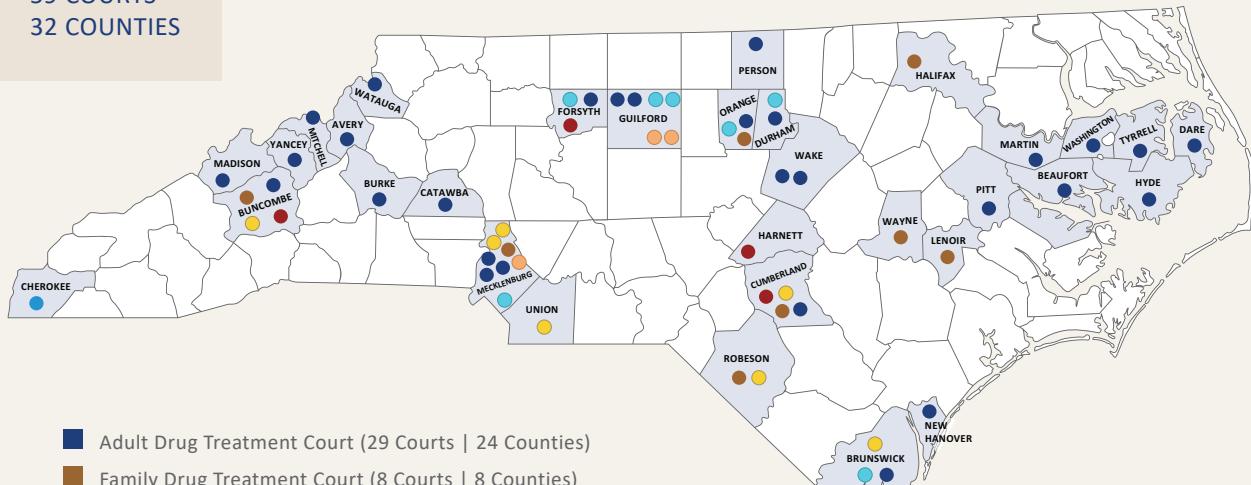


# 41,177

interpreting events of more than 66 different languages

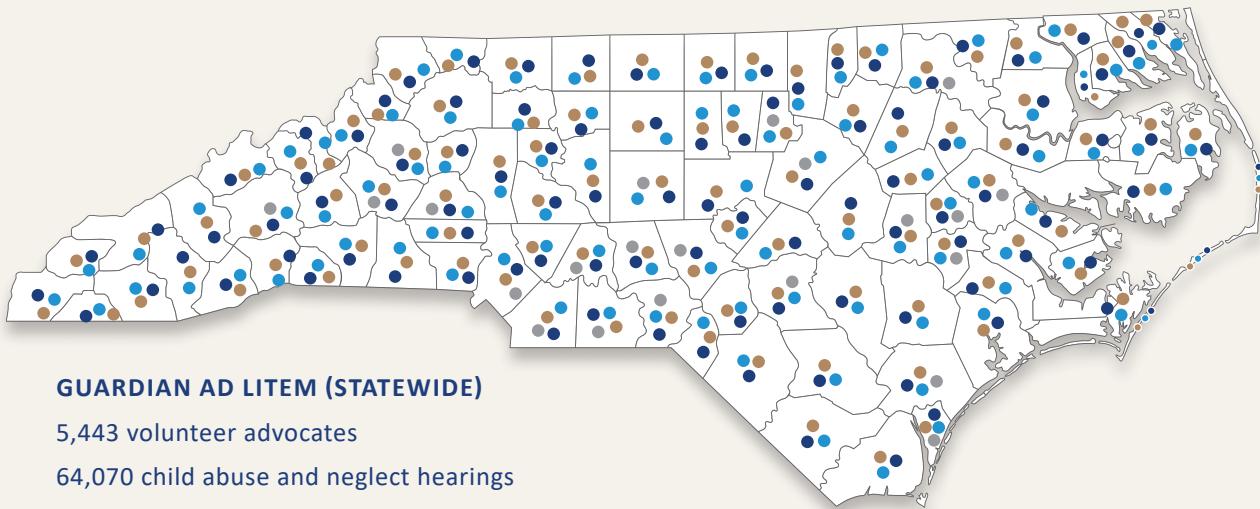
## RECOVERY COURTS AVAILABLE IN NORTH CAROLINA

59 COURTS  
32 COUNTIES



- Adult Drug Treatment Court (29 Courts | 24 Counties)
- Family Drug Treatment Court (8 Courts | 8 Counties)
- Mental Health Court (7 Courts | 6 Counties)
- DWI Court (7 Courts | 7 Counties)
- Veterans Treatment Court (4 Courts | 4 Counties)
- Youth Drug Treatment Court (3 Courts | 2 Counties)
- Tribal Court (1 Court | 1 County)

# COURT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES AVAILABLE BY COUNTY



## ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

- 2,190 family financial cases completed
- 4,465 arbitration cases completed
- 4,906 mediated settlement cases completed

## CHILD CUSTODY MEDIATION

- 16,891 people attended orientation
- 8,993 child custody cases mediated
- 9,523 mediation sessions held
- 4,521 parenting agreements drafted

## FAMILY COURT

- 42,671 domestic cases filed
- 72.1% of pending domestic cases < 1 year

## LANGUAGE ACCESS INTERPRETERS

84 Spanish	3 Korean
5 Arabic	9 Mandarin
4 French	6 Portuguese
2 Haitian Creole	11 Russian
3 Hmong	5 Vietnamese

\* Includes certified and conditionally qualified interpreters available from in and out of state.



NOT ALL PROGRAMS ARE  
AVAILABLE IN EACH COUNTY

The North Carolina Judicial Branch needs funding to expand these programs and services statewide.



# JUDICIAL BRANCH HIGHLIGHTS



## STATE LEADERS DISCUSS PRIORITIES TO COMBAT HUMAN TRAFFICKING

On January 25, Chief Justice Cheri Beasley along with federal, state, and local law enforcement; government leaders; stakeholders; and advocates joined together to declare January 2020 as Human Trafficking Prevention and Awareness Month and to discuss priorities for combating human trafficking in North Carolina.

"Combating human trafficking requires all branches and all levels of government to work together in partnership," said Chief Justice Beasley. "In Cumberland County, judicial officials and law enforcement have come together to start a new innovative court program called WORTH to help get services to survivors when they do find themselves in court."

North Carolina has made significant progress over the last decade in reducing human trafficking, thanks in large to the efforts of the North Carolina Human Trafficking Commission (NCHTC). The work of the commission has brought North Carolina to an "A" rating, according to a 2019 report produced by Shared Hope International. North Carolina's report card rating of 94 is a significant improvement from the 61 rating in 2011. The commission works to increase awareness and foster partnerships to bring services to survivors.

"Public awareness of human trafficking is vital to not only identify victims and traffickers, but also to prevent this crime from happening in the first place. The Commission has been working to increase awareness for six years and appreciates all partnerships to develop the public's understanding of this crime," said Jennifer Haigwood, NCHTC chair.

To increase awareness, the Commission also announced the new public awareness signs available online to view, download, print, display, and share on social media. Through the anti-human trafficking efforts of North Carolina, citizens can learn to recognize the signs of human trafficking and how to report suspected instances. By taking steps to become familiar with the signs, citizens can save innocent lives.





## SCHOOL JUSTICE PARTNERSHIP KEEPS KIDS IN SCHOOL AND OUT OF COURT

School Justice Partnerships (SJP) bring together community stakeholders, including law enforcement officials, judges, district attorneys, juvenile court counselors, teachers, and school administrators, who work together to keep kids in school and out of court as a result of routine misconduct at school. SJP stakeholders collaborate to establish specific guidelines for school discipline with a focus on minimizing suspensions, expulsions, and school-based referrals to court for minor misconduct. On August 12, 2019, Chief Justice Cheri Beasley and Governor Roy Cooper were joined by public officials from across the state to [announce the release of the SJP Toolkit](#). The Toolkit, provides resources to help develop and implement the SJP, including a model memorandum of understanding and other templates.

“Our courts must be focused on helping our young people be successful. School Justice Partnerships are one of the most important investments in that success we can make,” said Chief Justice Beasley. “We are excited about bringing together our partners in education, in juvenile justice and in law enforcement to help keep our kids in school where they can build toward a bright and promising future.”

Statistics show that contact with the juvenile justice system increases the likelihood that youth

will reoffend, and outcomes worsen with deeper involvement in the system. For example, confinement in a juvenile facility increases the risk that a youth will be rearrested as an adult. For some students, a school-based referral can lead to a permanent criminal record, which creates barriers to college financial aid, employment, housing, and military eligibility. As a result, SJPs seek to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline practices and school-based court referrals, which push students out of school and into court.

SJP strategies help students succeed in school and prevent negative outcomes for both youth and their communities. A recent analysis of data from the seven North Carolina counties where SJPs have been implemented for at least two years – Brunswick, Greene, Lenoir, Mecklenburg, New Hanover, Stanly, and Wayne – reflect that overall, SJPs have a positive impact in reducing the number of school-based offenses that are referred to juvenile court. Five of the seven counties – Brunswick, Lenoir, Mecklenburg, New Hanover, and Stanly – have experienced a decrease in the number of school-based offenses since SJPs were first implemented in those counties.

- Brunswick County, which formed an SJP on July 1, 2017, has seen a 79% decrease from 2016 (366 total) to 2020 (74 total);

- Lenoir County, which formed an SJP on March 16, 2018, has seen a 74% decrease from 2017 (100 total) to 2020 (26 total);
- Mecklenburg County, which formed an SJP on January 28, 2016, has seen a 39% decrease from 2016 (866 total) to 2020 (528 total);
- New Hanover County, which formed an SJP on November 2, 2015, has seen a 23.4% decrease from 2016 (141 total) to 2020 (108); and
- Stanly County, which formed an SJP on July 1, 2018, has seen a 20.3% decrease from 2017 (59 total) to 2020 (47 total).

As of FY 2019-2020, SJPs are active in 35 counties with several more counties in the planning stages. Here is what some of our judges who have convened SJPs in their counties have to say about the program:

- Judge Ericka James, Wayne County SJP: “The Wayne County Partnership Agreement for Community Teams with Schools (PACTS), implemented in fall 2018 and our version of the SJP program, has seen a reduction in school-based complaints and disproportionate minority contact. We’ve gone from routinely referring youth to the juvenile justice system for petty misconduct at school, to restorative justice programs such as teen court, mediation, and now circle sentencing which force youth to take personal responsibility in addressing conflict while still providing age appropriate sanctions to deal with minor misconduct.”
- Judge Scott Ussery, Brunswick County SJP: “SJPs help keep kids where they belong, in the schoolhouse and out of the courthouse.”
- Judge J.H. Corpening, New Hanover County SJP: “The New Hanover County School Justice Partnership experience has been transformative. We have dramatically reduced school referrals to juvenile justice. We have seen a transformation in approaches to discipline for school-based conduct that focuses on changing behavior for the better instead of pushing the child out of school. We have seen support grow across our systems and our community and have built support to work to reduce all forms of exclusionary school discipline, and to work on reducing the disproportionate impact on children of color.”

The Toolkit was completed in collaboration with several stakeholder agencies who support the development of SJPs, including the Juvenile Justice Section of the North Carolina Department of Public Safety, the North Carolina Sheriffs' Association, the North Carolina Association of Chiefs of Police, the North Carolina Conference of District Attorneys, and the North Carolina Center for Safer Schools.



North Carolina's 2017 Raise the Age law (S.L. 2017-57 § 16D.4.(aa)) authorized the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts Director to establish policies and procedures for chief district court judges and local stakeholders to establish SJPs. SJPs strive to reduce in-school arrests, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions by developing and implementing effective strategies to address minor school-based misconduct through in-school and community-based resources. A school-based offense is one that occurs on school grounds, school property, at a school bus stop, at an off-campus school sanctioned event, or where the school is the victim. For more information about School Justice Partnership, visit [SJP.NCcourts.gov](http://SJP.NCcourts.gov).





## CELEBRATING THE SUPREME COURT OF NORTH CAROLINA'S BICENTENNIAL

The Supreme Court of North Carolina continued to celebrate its bicentennial this fiscal year in communities across the state. North Carolina's legal community paid tribute to the Court during a gala reception held in October, and the history of the Court was honored in a public television documentary that aired statewide, and in an exhibit showcased at the North Carolina Museum of History.

North Carolina's diverse citizenry welcomed the Supreme Court into their communities throughout 2018 and 2019 by hosting travel sessions in local courthouses and municipal buildings. This special recognition culminated in a gala reception held in North Carolina's capital city in October 2019 where members of North Carolina's legal community honored the court, present and past justices, and the hallowed judicial precedent the Court established over the past two centuries. Most notable was the presentation of the framed 1878 law license of North Carolina's first woman lawyer, Tabitha Ann Holton. Tom Earnhardt, attorney, producer, writer, and host of the Emmy Award nominated television series *Exploring North Carolina*, gave the gala's keynote address and produced the Court's documentary entitled, "North Carolina Supreme Court at 200."

Capturing the development and the historical significance of the Court, this documentary traced the Court's evolution through its inception until present day. Airing statewide on UNC-TV, the documentary provided an entertaining and informative look at North Carolina's highest court, a court that not only shaped North Carolina's legal precedent, but influenced American jurisprudence through the personalities of its justices and the case law it handed down. Many of the images and artifacts that reflected the Court's colorful history that were presented to television viewers in the hour-long documentary, were also placed on display in the North Carolina Museum of History.



In an exhibit entitled, "Law and Justice: The Supreme Court of North Carolina, 1819-2019," museum patrons walk through the Court's early years, the people of the court, and how the court evolved through technology and modernization. Artifacts from prominent chief justices like Susie Sharp and Walter Clark, help bring history to life



and transport visitors to earlier eras in the Court's history. The tangible experience with images and artifacts in the exhibit connects visitors with the important cases of the past that still echo in our society 200 years later.

Until this fiscal year, the impactful 200 year story of the Supreme Court of North Carolina remained a hidden treasure in our state. Through the diligence and talent of many in North Carolina's legal community, the Court's story is now woven into the known fabric of North Carolina history. Most significantly, the Supreme Court of North Carolina's bicentennial was not simply explained to viewers and visitors, but it was felt in the lives of families and friends who warmly welcomed the court and its justices into their communities during the Court's travels over the past three years.

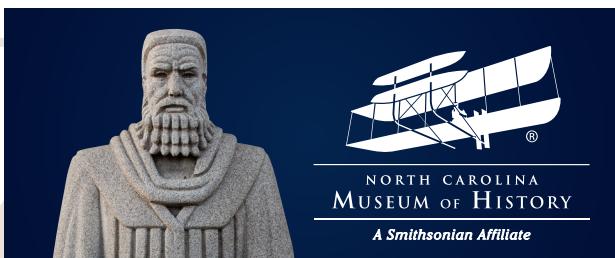
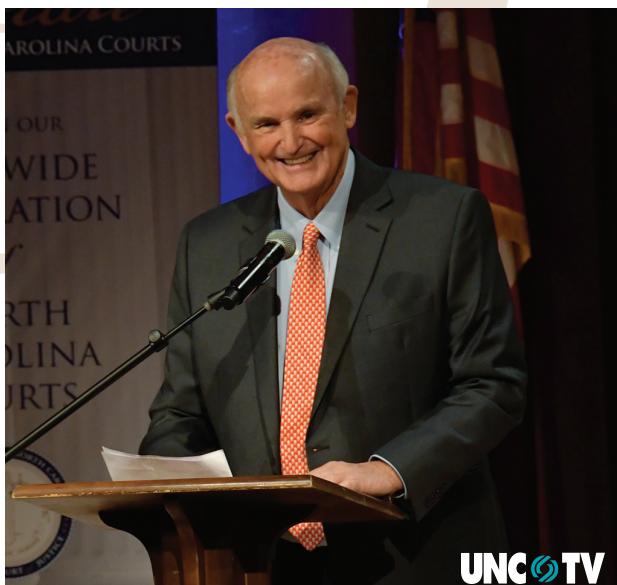
*Photo, page 28:* Current and former justices of the Supreme Court of North Carolina pose for a photo as they walk through the exhibit first.

*Top photo, page 29:* Current and former members of the Supreme Court of North Carolina and North Carolina Court of Appeals, and leadership from the North Carolina Museum of History and North Carolina Supreme Court Historical Society, pose with documentarian Tom Earnhardt (center left) and Chief Justice Cheri Beasley (center right) at the Supreme Court of North Carolina's documentary premiere.

*Middle photo, page 29:* Chief Justice Cheri Beasley accepts the law license of Tabitha Ann Holton, the first woman licensed attorney in North Carolina, from Holton's relatives at the Supreme Court's gala reception.

*Bottom-left photo, page 29:* Title panel of the exhibit "Law and Justice: the Supreme Court of North Carolina, 1819-2019" at the North Carolina Museum of History.

*Bottom-right photo, page 29:* Documentarian Tom Earnhardt at the premiere of the documentary, "North Carolina Supreme Court at 200."



## CONFERENCES AND COMMISSIONS

**Conference of Clerks of Superior Court** serves as the primary point of contact between the 100 elected clerks of superior court, the General Assembly, the NCAOC, and other state, local, and public entities to ensure the effective and efficient exchange of information.

**Conference of District Attorneys** established in 1983 to improve criminal justice in North Carolina by coordinating the prosecution efforts of the various district attorneys. The conference serves the 43 elected district attorneys in their pursuit of justice and improvement of the administration of criminal law through training, research, and monitoring criminal legislation.

**Commission on Indigent Defense Services** established in 2001 to safeguard individual liberty and the Constitution by equipping the public defense community with the resources it needs to achieve fair and just outcomes.

**Equal Access to Justice Commission** charged with expanding access to the civil justice system for people of low income and modest means in North Carolina.

**Innocence Inquiry Commission** charged with providing an independent and balanced truth-seeking forum for credible post-conviction claims of innocence. The commission was established in 2006 by the General Assembly to investigate and evaluate post-conviction claims of factual innocence.

**Judicial Standards Commission** established in 1973 to uphold high standards of professional and ethical judicial conduct. The commission reviews and investigates complaints of judicial misconduct that would violate the Code of Judicial Conduct.

**Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission** makes recommendations to the General Assembly for the modification of sentencing laws and policies.



## COMMISSION HONORS 25 YEARS OF STRUCTURED SENTENCING

The North Carolina Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission recently marked the 25th Anniversary of the enactment of the **Structured Sentencing Act**, and Governor Roy Cooper proclaimed October 1, 2019, as Structured Sentencing Day in North Carolina.

Commission Chairman and Rowan County Chief District Court Judge Charlie Brown welcomed nearly 100 distinguished guests to a 25th Anniversary commemoration and reception, held September 26 at the North Carolina Museum of Art. Guests included current and former Commission members, members of the judiciary, legislature, and Executive Branch, and other criminal justice system stakeholders.

“The development, enactment, and endurance of the Structured Sentencing Act is a remarkable achievement for North Carolina,” said Judge Brown. “As we collectively reflect upon the important milestone of 25 years of sound sentencing laws for our state, I know we all feel proud.”

Judge Tom W. Ross and Judge W. Erwin Spainhour, the former Sentencing Commission chairmen, provided their historical perspectives on the development,

implementation, and changes to Structured Sentencing over the past 25 years. Chief Judge Linda McGee of the North Carolina Court of Appeals brought her congratulations to the Commission and spoke about the way in which the principles of Structured Sentencing further the Judicial Branch’s fair and impartial administration of justice.

The Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission was created by the General Assembly in 1990 to make recommendations for the modification of sentencing laws and policies, and for the addition, deletion, or expansion of sentencing options as necessary to achieve policy goals. The Commission recommended the General Assembly enact the Structured Sentencing Act in 1993. Since its enactment 25 years ago, Structured Sentencing and the principles it embodies continue to serve as the foundation of North Carolina’s criminal justice system.

For more information, contact the North Carolina Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission’s Executive Director Michelle Hall at 919-890-1470 or [sentencingcommission@nccourts.org](mailto:sentencingcommission@nccourts.org).

## NCAOC SERVICES

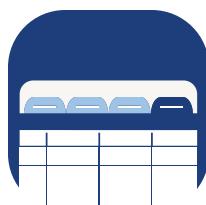
The North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC) provides services to help North Carolina's unified court system operate more efficiently and effectively, taking into account each courthouse's diverse needs, caseloads, and available resources. The NCAOC's approach is to apply professional expertise consistently and uniformly in the best interest of the court system. NCAOC is intently focused on expanding court programs and services to provide equal access to justice. Following are a few highlighted areas of NCAOC's services. Learn more at [NCcourts.gov](http://NCcourts.gov).



**30.8M**  
website views



**91**  
foreign language  
court interpreters



**53,042**  
NCAWARE users supported



**3,100**  
eCitations created daily



**118,055**  
help desk tickets supported  
24 / 7 statewide from  
courthouses and offices



**26,952**  
law enforcement  
officers using eCITATION



**\$19.7M**  
collected online in court  
costs, fines, fees, and  
probation payments



**216**  
judicial sites provided with  
network connections for  
the administration of justice

### EXPANDING ACCESS TO JUSTICE

# eCourts

Since announcing in mid-2019 a 10-year contract with Tyler Technologies to help fulfill the vision of a

21st century courthouse, where technology is used to enhance efficiency, effectiveness, and timeliness of process, the North Carolina Judicial Branch in the past year has initiated a host of technical projects to configure the new system, known as the Integrated Case Management System (ICMS), on the standardized rules and practices of North Carolina's courts. Learn more at [NCcourts.gov/services](http://NCcourts.gov/services).



PREPARED *by the*  
NORTH CAROLINA  
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE  
*of the COURTS*

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