

2001 Annual Report

North Carolina Courts:



Partnership for Justice

The North Carolina Judicial Branch

2001 REPORT OF THE NORTH CAROLINA JUDICIAL BRANCH

This report highlights Judicial Branch activities during calendar year 2001 and includes statistical and financial data from fiscal year 2000/01. In addition, the Administrative Office of the Courts publishes a comprehensive annual *Statistical and Operational Summary of the Judicial Branch of Government*. This report can be obtained by contacting the offices of the Administrative Office of the Courts at 919-733-7107.

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N.C. Administrative Office of the Courts
P.O. Box 2448
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Dear friend of the court:

As the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and the Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts, we are pleased to present the 2001 Annual Report of the North Carolina Judicial Branch. The purpose of this report is to provide a description of the North Carolina Judicial Branch and its components, major accomplishments during calendar year 2001, and challenges for the future.



**I. Beverly Lake, Jr.
Chief Justice
N.C. Supreme Court**

From the beginning of 2001, the Judicial Branch was greatly impacted by a very severe state budget crisis. As a result, the Judicial Branch endured a hiring slowdown, as well as, several budget cuts at various times throughout the year. However, even in light of these budgetary constraints, there are noteworthy accomplishments to acknowledge in the 2001 Annual Report of the North Carolina Judicial Branch.



**John M. Kennedy
Director
Administrative
Office of the Courts**

As we begin 2002, the challenges that the court system faces are very similar to those it has faced in the past. The need for additional resources substantially impacts every goal of the court system. Court system goals include improving court technology, creating more efficient court operations, expanding essential court programs, and making the court system more accountable and responsive to citizens. In order to achieve these goals, the Judicial Branch must continue to work diligently to convey the importance of these improvements statewide. As such, we recognize that enhancing the partnership between the judiciary, the legislature, and citizens is essential to achieving these goals.

The year 2001 has served as a reminder of the importance of law and order in maintaining our nation's liberties. Despite a tight budget year, we are encouraged as we look forward to the year ahead. As always, we appreciate your interest in the North Carolina Judicial Branch.

Sincerely,

I. Beverly Lake, Jr., Chief Justice
N.C. Supreme Court

John M. Kennedy, Director
Administrative Office of the Courts

The North Carolina Judicial Branch is a separate and coordinate branch of State Government. North Carolina has a unified court characterized by standard policies and procedures, state funding for all court officials and prosecutors, a uniform fee structure, and a separate statewide administrative arm. The Judicial Branch employs over 5,500 employees covering all 100 North Carolina counties and administers a total budget of nearly \$400 million. Following is a very brief overview of the courts and other components of the Judicial Branch.

The North Carolina court system is a General Court of Justice consisting of an Appellate Division and two Trial Divisions: the Superior Court Division and the District Court Division.

APPELLATE DIVISION

♦**SUPREME COURT:** The seven-member Supreme Court is the State's highest court and decides questions of law in civil and criminal cases on appeal or upon discretionary review of the Court of Appeals. The Supreme Court has the power to control and supervise the proceedings of other courts and has the authority to set court schedules and promulgate rules of practice and procedure for the trial courts. The voters elect the Chief Justice and the six Associate Justices of the Supreme Court for eight-year terms.



♦**COURT OF APPEALS:** The fifteen-judge Court of Appeals is North Carolina's intermediate appellate court and hears appeals from the State's trial courts, from the Industrial Commission, and from final orders and decisions of certain administrative agencies. The voters elect the judges on the Court of Appeals for eight-year terms and the Chief Justice appoints the Chief Judge from among the members.

TRIAL DIVISIONS

♦**SUPERIOR COURT DIVISION:** The Superior Court has jurisdiction over the most serious criminal cases (felonies) and civil cases (over \$10,000). Superior Court is held in the county seat of each of North Carolina's counties and in other locations. For administrative purposes, the counties are grouped into forty-six judicial districts, each with a Senior Resident Superior Court Judge who exercises administrative supervision authority. These districts are further grouped into eight judicial divisions (effective January 1, 2000) and Superior Court Judges rotate among the counties in their division. There are ninety-three Resident Superior Court Judges each elected by the voters for an eight-year term. In addition, there are twelve Special Superior Court Judges, appointed by the Governor, who hold court as needed throughout the State.

♦**CLERKS OF SUPERIOR COURT:** The Clerk of Superior Court is a judicial officer of the Superior Court Division. The Clerk exercises the judicial power of the State in the probate of wills, administration of estates, and the handling of special proceedings such as adoptions and foreclosures. Clerks are also the official custodians of the records of all the courts in their counties and are responsible for receiving, investing and disbursing all funds paid into or through the court. There is a Clerk for each of North Carolina's counties, all elected for four-year terms.



♦**DISTRICT COURT DIVISION:** District Court has jurisdiction over preliminary matters in felony cases and over the trial of all misdemeanors and infractions. In civil cases, it is the proper court for all actions involving \$10,000 or less. It has exclusive jurisdiction over all juvenile proceedings, mental health hospital commitments, and domestic relations cases. There is a District Court in each of the State's counties. For administrative purposes, District Courts are organized into thirty-nine statewide districts; each with a Chief District Court Judge who exercises administrative supervision authority. Currently, there are 235 District Court Judges in North Carolina; each elected by the voters for a 4-year term.

♦**MAGISTRATES:** The magistrate is a judicial officer of the District Court Division. In criminal cases, magistrates issue arrest and search warrants, conduct initial appearances, and determine conditions of pretrial release. For some relatively minor offenses they may accept guilty pleas, impose punishment and conduct trials. In civil cases, they preside over the trial of small claims (\$4,000 or less). One or more magistrates are appointed in each county as officers of the court. Candidates are nominated by the Clerk of Superior Court, appointed by the Senior Resident Superior Court Judge, and supervised by the Chief District Court Judge. There are 719 authorized magistrates in North Carolina.

OTHER MAJOR COURT COMPONENTS

♦**DISTRICT ATTORNEYS:** District Attorneys represent the State in all criminal actions and infractions brought in Superior and District Court and all juvenile delinquency cases in which an attorney represents a juvenile. The District Attorney is also responsible for calendaring criminal cases for trial. The State is divided into thirty-nine prosecutorial districts and the voters of each district elect the District Attorney for a four-year term. In addition, each District Attorney may hire Assistant District Attorneys as provided



by statute. There are 39 elected District Attorneys and 438 Assistant District Attorneys authorized throughout North Carolina.

♦ **PUBLIC DEFENDERS AND OTHER REPRESENTATION FOR INDIGENT PERSONS:** The State provides legal counsel in a variety of actions and proceedings for defendants who have been determined by a judge to be financially unable to hire their own attorneys. As of fiscal year 2000/01, there were 11 Public Defenders and 121 Assistant Public Defenders representing indigent persons in 13 counties. Public Defenders are appointed by the Senior Resident Superior Court Judge, for four-year terms and may employ assistants as authorized by the Administrative Office of the Courts and funded by the General Assembly. In the remaining counties, representation of indigent persons is provided almost entirely by assignment of private counsel. Private counsel is assigned by the court, the Office of Indigent Defense Services, and in certain circumstances, the public defender. There is also an Appellate Defender Office to handle criminal defense services for indigent persons who appeal convictions to the Supreme Court or the Court of Appeals.

♦ **TRIAL COURT ADMINISTRATORS:** These administrators assist in managing the day-to-day administrative operations of the trial courts. Their responsibilities include civil case calendaring, jury utilization, and establishing and managing local court rules. There are currently twelve Trial Court Administrators, serving fourteen of the State's forty-six Superior Court Districts. Trial Court Administrators are appointed by the Senior Resident Superior Court Judge and work for both the Superior and District Courts.

♦ **ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS:** The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) is the administrative arm of the Judicial Branch. The AOC provides statewide support services for the courts, including information, technology, personnel, financial, legal, research, and purchasing services. In addition, the AOC prepares and administers the court system's over \$397 million budget and employs over 400 people. The Director of the AOC is appointed by the Chief Justice but has independent statutory responsibility for the administration of the court system. The Assistant Director is also appointed by the Chief Justice, and serves as the administrative assistant to the Chief Justice.



♦ **STATE JUDICIAL COUNCIL:** The eighteen-member State Judicial Council consists of court officials from every court function, private attorneys, and the public. Conceived as an oversight body to promote overall improvement in Judicial Branch operations, it may study and make recommendations to the Chief Justice about all aspects

of our court system. Some of its specific statutory duties are to make recommendations concerning budget preparation and funding priorities, the benefits and compensation of judicial officials, creation of judgeships, development of court performance standards, case management, alternative dispute resolution, the boundaries of the judicial districts, and other matters. The five committees of the State Judicial Council are Salaries and Benefits, Alternative Dispute Resolution, Public Trust, Court Performance Standards, and Court Jurisdiction and Organization. The work of some of these committees is summarized in the “Challenges for the Future” section of this report.



♦ **JUDICIAL BRANCH COMMISSIONS:** The Judicial Branch has four commissions.

Judicial Standards Commission: This seven-member Commission is the appropriate agency for the investigation of complaints “concerning the qualifications of any justice or judge of the General Court of Justice.” The Commission was created by the General Assembly in 1972 pursuant to a constitutional amendment approved by the voters.

Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission: This thirty-member Commission is responsible for developing recommendations regarding the appropriate sentencing of felons and misdemeanants in North Carolina. The Commission also monitors sentencing practices in the State, publishes annual statistical data, and projects state prison and jail populations. The Commission was created by the General Assembly in 1990.

Dispute Resolution Commission: This fourteen-member Commission is charged with certifying and regulating the conduct of mediators serving the Mediated Settlement Conference Program and the Family Financial Mediation Program. Upon request, the Commission also provides advice and support to State agencies in the process of establishing dispute resolution programs or offering dispute resolution services. The Commission was established by the General Assembly in 1995.

Chief Justice’s Commission on Professionalism: This sixteen-member Commission’s mandate is to encourage professionalism within the practice of law in North Carolina and to raise the public’s perception of the court system. The North Carolina Supreme Court created the Commission in 1998. In 2001, Chief Justice I. Beverly Lake, Jr. presented the first annual Chief Justice’s Professionalism Award to William F. Womble of Winston-Salem.

SERVING FAMILIES AND CITIZENS:

The North Carolina Judicial Branch has placed increased emphasis on serving children, families, victims, and other citizens in need across the State. Following are some of the major highlights and accomplishments in this area.

♦**Family Courts:** Legislation in 1998 authorized the AOC to experiment with unified family courts. In 1999, Districts 14, 20, and 26 established the first Family Court pilot programs. In 2000, the Family Court program was expanded to three districts, and in 2001 two additional sites were established. Family Courts coordinate all case management and service agency efforts for a single family in distress, to better serve that family and provide more consistent, efficient use of trial court time. Each contested divorce or juvenile matter is assigned to one judge for all court action. Non-trial means of resolving the case, such as mediation, are used to settle these disputes before resorting to an adversarial trial.

♦**Parent Education Video:** “Mending Hearts: Families in Transition”, a twenty-six minute video, was produced by the N.C. Agency for Public Telecommunications at the direction of the AOC Court Services Division as part of a 1999 legislative mandate to Family Court to produce a parent education program. Media Communications Association, Carolina Chapters, recently awarded their top honors, a Silver Reel Award, to the video. “Mending



Hearts” is shown to all separating and divorcing parents with pending child custody cases in the eight Family Court districts in North Carolina. Due to the popularity of the video and upon request, it has been made available to all other districts. Additionally, as part of the initial disbursement plan, a copy of “Mending Hearts” was also sent to every state court administrator in the nation.

♦**Drug Treatment Courts (DTC):** Drug treatment courts are an innovative court-based intervention wherein the judge, prosecutor, defense attorney, probation officer, community policing officer, and the treatment case manager work together in a non-adversarial fashion to help ensure that chemically dependent offenders receive appropriate treatment and are held strictly accountable for their behavior while in the program. Offenders participate for a minimum of one year and typically appear before a specially trained judge on a biweekly basis. The judge closely monitors the participant’s progress and may order sanctions and/or rewards as appropriate to promote success. During 2001, fifteen DTC programs were operational in ten Judicial Districts (3B, 5, 9, 9A, 10, 14, 21, 25, 26, and 28). This included two juvenile DTCs (Districts 10 and 14) and one family DTC (District 26). In addition, implementation plans have been finalized for adult DTC programs in Judicial Districts 11, 12, 15B, 18, and 19B; for juvenile DTC programs in Districts 19C, 21, and 26; and for a family DTC in District 14.

♦**Custody Mediation:** As of December 31, 2001, fifty-five counties in twenty-eight districts had a custody and visitation mediation program. The program provides parties who have unresolved issues about custody or visitation, with a non-adversarial alternative to litigation. It helps them to step back from their own conflict and focus on the best interests of their children. In most cases, parents are required to participate in this program before proceeding through the traditional court system. The mediators selected are highly skilled and must meet rigid training and experience requirements. Through this program, many parents are able to reach mutual agreement regarding the structure and parameters of child custody without returning to the court system.

♦**Court-Ordered Arbitration:** As of June 30, 2001, arbitration programs were operating in thirty-three Superior Court Districts covering seventy-two counties. In these counties, all civil cases involving claims totaling \$15,000 or less may be subject to court-ordered, non-binding arbitration. As a rule, arbitration hearings are limited to one hour, take place in the courthouse, and are conducted by a trained and approved attorney arbitrator who is either appointed by the court or selected by the parties. In many cases, the arbitrator's award becomes the final settlement, without the need for a trial.

♦**Mediated Settlement Conferences:** In 1995, the General Assembly authorized a statewide program of mediated settlement conferences for Superior Court civil cases. In some districts, the Senior Resident Superior Court Judge refers all eligible cases to mediated settlement, while in other districts, certain case types are exempted. Mediators facilitate settlement discussions between litigating parties in an effort to help them arrive at mutually agreeable solutions to their disputes. As of June 2001, nearly 1,000 mediators were certified in North Carolina to conduct mediated settlement conferences. In addition, about 53 percent of mediated cases were settled at the conference during fiscal year 2000/01.

♦**Guardian ad Litem:** The mission of the program is to provide independent advocates to represent and promote the best interests of abused, neglected or dependent children in court; and to work towards a services system that ensures that these children are in a safe permanent home. During fiscal year 2000/01, the program provided representation to 14,781 children through 3,425 volunteers and 100 attorneys. The program continued its efforts to recruit, supervise and train volunteers. During fiscal year 2000/01, the program also underwent a strategic planning process. The process resulted in a plan that outlines the steps the program will take to meet the challenges of its work. In addition, the training coordinator was able to increase training capacity through the revision of the volunteer training curriculum into a national-



recognized model that incorporates principles of adult learning theory. Also, the corporate recruiter and the volunteer recruiter have both been involved in expanding capacity by tapping into new markets for volunteers.

INCREASING UNDERSTANDING OF THE COURTS:

The North Carolina Judicial Branch made efforts to bridge the information gap between the public and the court system. The following are some highlights in this area.

♦**Chief Justice’s Media and the Courts Forum:** The Chief Justice’s Media and the Courts Forum was created to open a dialogue between the court system and the media. This thirty-six-member forum consists of representatives from the working press as well as their top management, judges, magistrates, clerks of court and other judicial members, attorneys and professors. The goal of the Forum is to help make court information more accessible to the press while ensuring that the right to a fair trial is maintained for both prosecuting witnesses and defendants.

As of 2001, reporters can access a manual on how to cover the courts by going to www.ncpress.com on the Internet. Also, revisions on cameras in the courtroom rules were submitted. Additionally, a brochure on the court system, a quick fact card, and a letter to copy editors giving guidance to headline writers were reviewed and approved by the Forum. The Forum has also discussed developing a speaker’s bureau for court officials and the media.

IMPROVING COURT OPERATIONS:

During the year, the North Carolina Judicial Branch continued to search for ways to improve court operations and to make them more efficient and more effective. Following are some of the accomplishments and highlights in this area.

♦**Commission on Indigent Defense Services:** The Indigent Defense Services Act of 2000 created this thirteen-member Commission. This Commission and its staff, the Office of Indigent Defense Services, are located within the Judicial Branch, but exercise their prescribed powers independently from the AOC. The Commission and the Indigent Defense Services Director are responsible for establishing, supervising, and maintaining a system for providing legal representation and related services in all cases where indigent persons are entitled to representation at state expense.



♦**Sentencing Services:** Sentencing Services is a unique partnership comprising the AOC, a network of not-for-profit agencies and county operated programs. These programs work closely with the bench to develop sentencing plans that more effectively use available treatment and correctional resources in criminal cases. All programs across the state use two initial screening instruments for offenders: the *Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R)* and the *Adult Substance Use Survey (ASUS)*. These research-derived assessment instruments evaluate the risk of failure under community supervision and the level of intervention needed to improve a probationer's opportunity to lead a law-abiding life.

During fiscal year 2000/01, the Sentencing Services programs prepared a record number of sentencing plans for the court. In early 2001, the program submitted to the Governor's Crime Commission the results of a two-year study, *Sentencing Information and Judicial Decision Making: The Use of the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R) and the Adult Substance Use Survey (ASUS) in the Sentencing Services Program*. The study found important links between offender success under community supervision and the use of sentencing information by judges. At the legislature's request, the program is in the process of preparing a comprehensive report analyzing the effectiveness of the program under structured sentencing and the criminal case docketing system. This report is due by April 1, 2002.

♦**Foreign Language Interpreter Project:** As North Carolina's non-English speaking population grows, the North Carolina Judicial Branch's Foreign Language Services Project continues to make the courts more accessible to everyone. The program, funded by grants in 2001, has continued to meet the needs of court officials and non-English speakers around the state by translating and distributing three criminal forms, eight domestic violence forms, six civil forms, two brochures on the criminal and civil court process, and a slip card with the best advice for court attendance. The program has also trained over five hundred prospective court interpreters and now has twenty-three Spanish interpreters who have passed the state court interpreting certification exam. In addition, classes on interpreting, culture, and Spanish are offered by the foreign language coordinator to all court officials at conferences around the state.

UTILIZING TECHNOLOGY:

The Judicial Branch continued to seek ways to utilize new technologies to improve court processes and to provide better service to the citizens of North Carolina. Following are some of the accomplishments and highlights in this area:

◆**Network Conversion:** With the completion of the network conversion project, Frame Relay, county courthouses and other Judicial Branch customers realized increased network speed and reliability in 2001. This project enabled the AOC to begin removing Green Screen (“dumb”) Terminals and replace them with Network Terminals (Thin Clients) or Desktop Computers, thus providing a strong infrastructure for the deployment of next generation, web-based applications that are accessed via an Internet browser.

◆**End User Technology (EUT):** The goal of the EUT project was to modernize North Carolina’s court system equipment and enable all counties to access local and statewide AOC networks and external resources. The EUT project was funded jointly by a federal grant and by the AOC through the use of existing staff and equipment. As a result of this project, the majority of court system customers in each county have access to AOC supplied resources. However, while the network infrastructure is now in place on which to continue building, obtaining funding to continue the replacement of the remaining aged equipment and provide LAN connectivity for customers not located in the courthouses still needs to be addressed.

◆**Wireless Local Area Network (LAN):** AOC also piloted Wireless Local Area Networks (LAN) in New Hanover, Pender, Wayne, Greene, and Lenoir counties. District Court Judges and District Attorneys in these counties demonstrated the product’s value in the prosecution of cases and as a cost savings in the elimination of hardwire cabling.

◆**Security:** In addition, AOC employed measures to provide both physical and electronic security in compliance with established security standards set by the Criminal Justice Information Network (CJIN). This level of protection ensures the integrity and privacy of the Courts’ data and information processing resources both in Raleigh and on every network and computer located in court offices across the state.



◆**Software Applications:** In 2001, AOC began developing the Judgment Abstracting module, which once deployed, will fully automate the handling of complex judgments that currently must be manually captured, calculated, and recorded in large Judgment Docket Books. AOC successfully completed and implemented the eCitation Pilot project in Cumberland County, which was a cooperative effort between AOC and the State Highway Patrol. Law enforcement officers using this system can process traffic citations directly from their vehicles via mobile data terminals, which then electronically transmit citation data to the Courts criminal database. AOC also began the early development stages of the NC AWARE (Statewide Warrant Repository) project.

♦**Maintenance and Support:** As more AOC users gained access to the Internet in 2001, a greater emphasis was placed on web capabilities, including providing useful tools and information on the AOC web site. In that regard, AOC began an effort to provide long-term hosting of the NC Courts' new web site. Completion of a Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Plan for the courts and installation of a new Uninterrupted Power Supply (UPS) system in the Raleigh Data Center now provides measures to quickly recover electronic records and resume normal operations in the event of a significant outage or major catastrophe.

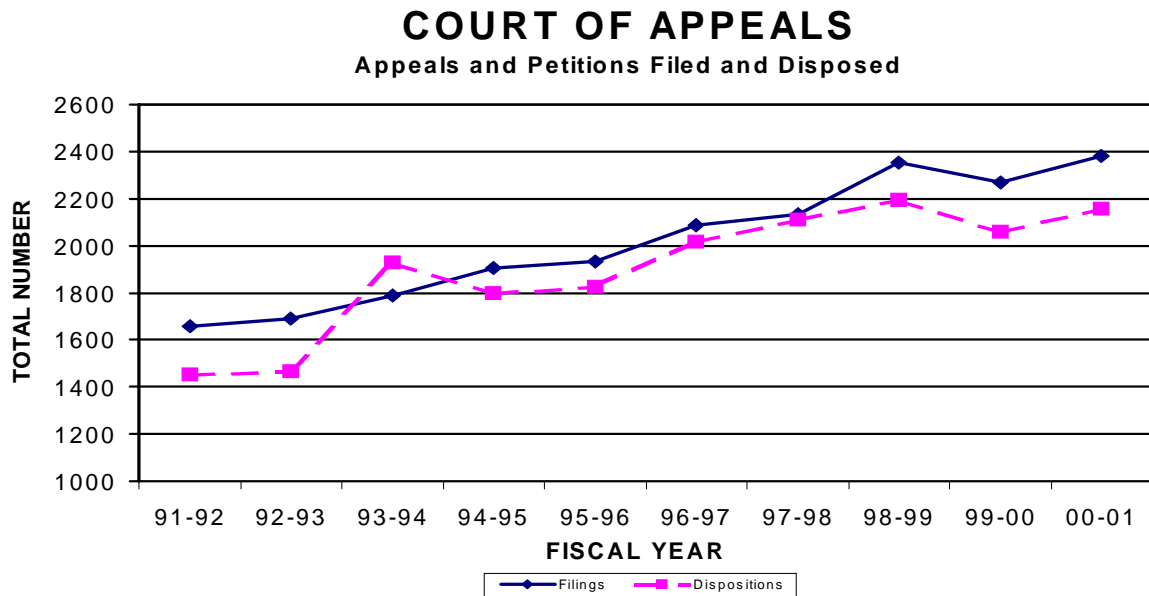
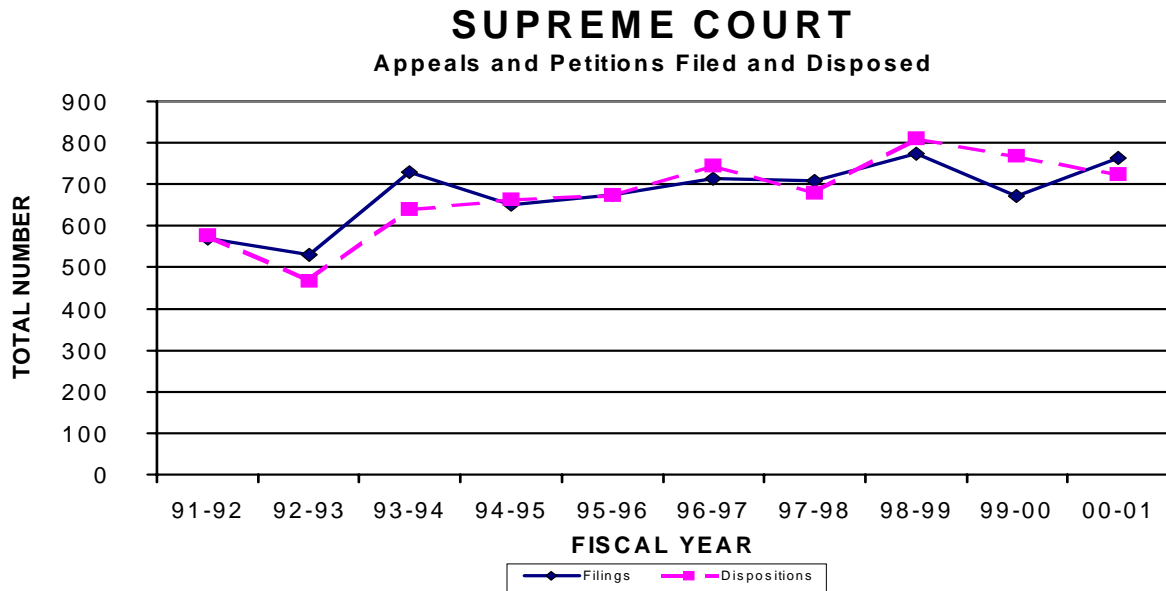
♦**Magistrate System:** The implementation of the statewide Magistrate System was completed in August 2001. This system is operational in 97 counties with computers located in 147 cities throughout the state. The Magistrate System is a centralized database developed to automate and track the magistrate's processing of criminal warrants, orders, citations and summons. The system interfaces with the AOC Criminal/Infraction System (ACIS), eliminating the need for redundant data entry by the clerk of court offices. The system also enables law enforcement to be quickly notified when there are outstanding warrants on a criminal offender. During 2001, digital cameras were distributed to each Magistrate System location and users were trained on how to take a digital image of the defendant and attach it to the criminal process. The image is stored in the database so it can be used again if additional warrants are issued against the individual. Images are also printed on the paper copies and have assisted law enforcement and court officials with proper identification of the individual charged.

♦**Helpdesk Operations:** The AOC Helpdesk became a 24 x 7 environment in order to provide first level support for the Magistrate System. To provide adequate support, staff was increased from five employees (year 2000) to fifteen employees (year 2001). With the increased staff, there has been significant improvement noted, and fewer calls lost or unanswered.

♦**Bond Forfeiture Tracking:** The revision of the Bond Forfeiture Tracking System, a subsystem of the Civil Case Processing System (VCAP), was completed as of June 1, 2001. This was the second phase of a system-wide revision, necessitated by changes to the bond forfeiture statutes in the General Assembly's 2000 session. The first phase was completed in December 2000, in time for new forfeitures to be initiated according to the revised statutes. With the system revision in place, the bond forfeiture process is now completely automated, from the point of the initial forfeiture through judgment enforcement.

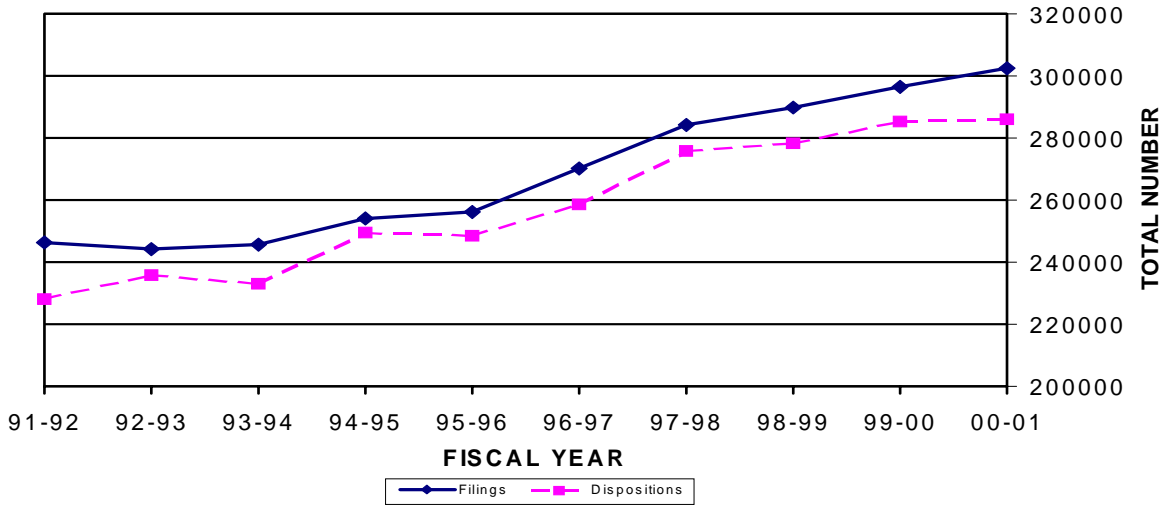
♦**Jury Interface Program:** A Jury Interface program to automate payment of jurors has been created and implemented. This interface provides the ability to pay jurors by using information transmitted from local jury selection software (provided by the county) to the Jury Payment Module in the Financial Management System (FMS). The name and address of the jurors, along with jury service information is communicated to FMS for payment.

As has been the trend over the past decade, the work demands on the North Carolina Judicial System continue to increase. As shown on the following tables, both filings and dispositions increased last year for most courts.



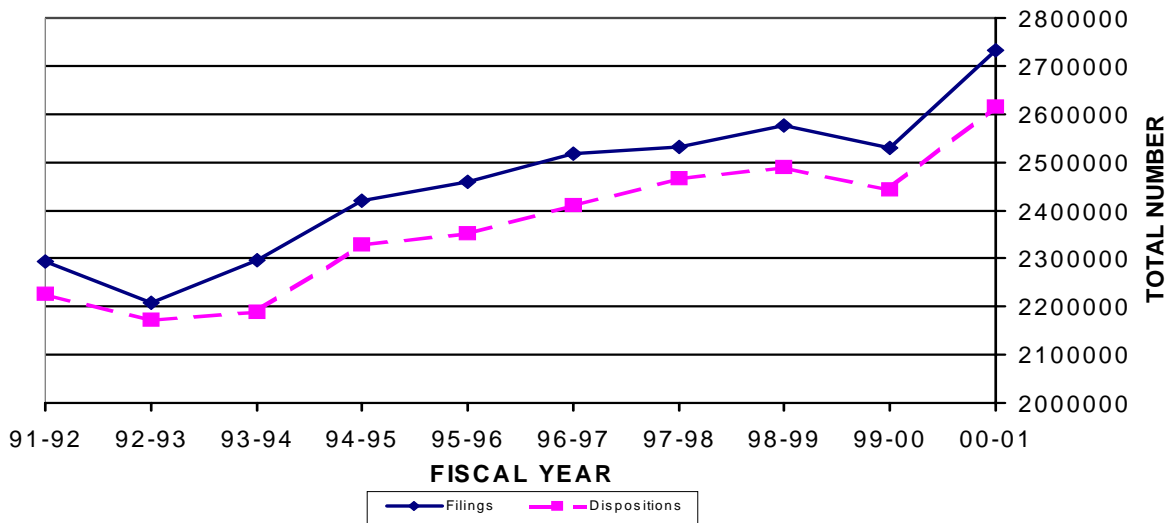
SUPERIOR COURT

Criminal, Civil, Estates, and Special Proceedings Filed and Disposed



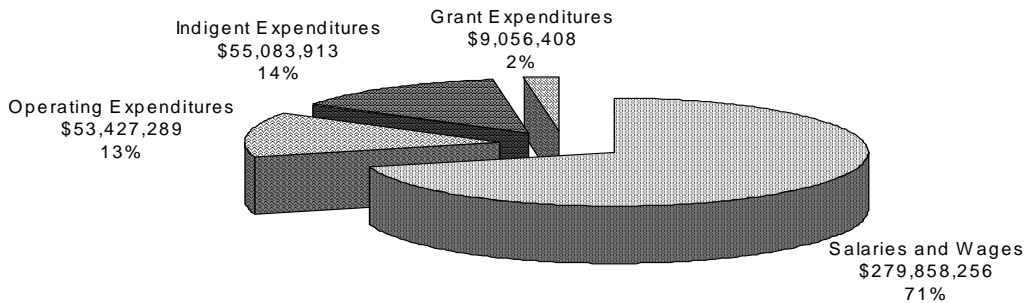
DISTRICT COURT

Criminal, Civil, Infractions, and Civil License Revocations Filed and Disposed



The North Carolina Judicial Branch budget represents less than 3% of the total state budget. The following chart shows major court budget expenditures for fiscal year 2000/01 and the accompanying table show the expenditures in specific program areas.

2000-2001 Judicial Branch Actual Expenditures



2000-2001 Judicial Branch Actual Expenditures

Court Component	Expenditures	Percent of total
AOC	\$28,308,677	7.12%
Supreme Court/Court of Appeals	\$9,640,179	2.43%
Superior Court	\$30,654,374	7.71%
District Court	\$64,443,603	16.22%
Clerk of Superior Court	\$99,268,415	24.98%
Family Court	\$1,477,224	0.37%
District Attorney	\$55,369,117	13.93%
Special Programs	\$7,445,611	1.87%
Sentencing Services	\$6,306,294	1.59%
Equipment/Supply	\$5,957,115	1.50%
Indigent	\$55,083,913	13.86%
Public Defender	\$12,877,539	3.24%
Special Counsel	\$674,721	0.17%
Guardian Ad Litem	\$7,520,837	1.89%
Grant Expenditures	\$9,056,408	2.28%
Appellate Defender	\$1,091,839	0.27%
State Bar	\$2,250,000	0.57%
Grand Total	\$397,425,866	100.00%

The following are some of the major themes that will need to be addressed in the near future.

♦**Funding:** The Judicial Branch continues to struggle due to inadequate funding. In fact, in fiscal year 2000/01, the Judicial Branch received less than three percent of the entire state budget. Since the State's current budget situation may affect the ability of all state agencies to secure proper funding, the Judicial Branch must continue to thoughtfully prioritize court system needs and allocate court resources. As a result, the court system will continue to search for innovative ways to increase the efficiency of court operations, maintain quality of justice, and provide better service to the public.

♦**Technology:** During 2001, technological progress for the courts was a direct result of adherence to strategic planning initiatives, effective utilization of project management principles, ability to adapt within the given political and economic environment, and the hard work and dedication of employees. This level of improvement, once sustained, will allow for information technology solutions to accomplish the business goals of the courts. Responsive and efficient technology will enable the AOC to more effectively deliver services and provide information to our courts, the legal community, businesses, and the public in North Carolina. While budget issues may continue to slow this progress, the Judicial Branch moves forward in 2002 with confidence in our priorities to continue infrastructure and software modernization, provide consistent maintenance and support, and deliver the highest quality customer service across our organization.

♦**Court Jurisdiction and Organization:** Since the days of court reform, more than thirty years ago, there has been no comprehensive study regarding the appropriateness of cases to be heard by court officials at various levels of the court system. As a result, the State Judicial Council created the Court Jurisdiction and Organization Committee to study this issue and draft proposed legislation adjusting jurisdictional levels, shifting caseloads as needed, assigning resource budgetary needs, and defining any required training levels throughout the court system. Appointed by the Chief Justice, the committee members include two court officials at every level (appellate court judges, superior court judges, district court judges, clerks, magistrates, and district attorneys), two legislators, and Institute of Government officials. Appointments were made taking into account numerous factors, including but not limited to urban and rural factors, single and multi-county districts, geographic considerations, and caseload levels. The Committee hopes to provide an interim report to the 2002 Session of the General Assembly.

♦ **Judicial Branch Education Study Committee:** This twenty-eight-member Committee was established to plan and develop the structure to govern a comprehensive, centralized approach to Judicial Branch education throughout the State. Committee members represent all of the constituent groups of court personnel, as well as adult educators, AOC, and the Institute of Government. During 2001, the Committee members decided that Judicial Branch education should cover the broad spectrum of needs of employees and not be restricted to that knowledge and those skills required in order to perform one's current job. In addition, the Committee also focused on the structure and delivery of education and training programs. To that end, the Committee explored the concept of establishing a centralized Judicial College that would be charged with the development, delivery and evaluation of high quality education and training programs for personnel throughout the Judicial Branch in North Carolina. Plans for the College are still under consideration by the Committee, which is due to complete its work and issue recommendations by April 30, 2002.

♦ **Court Performance Standards:** The Performance Standards Committee of the State Judicial Council is overseeing a pilot project to improve court operations and public satisfaction by implementing the "Trial Court Performance Standards and Measurement System" developed for court systems nationwide by the National Center for State Courts. Adopted in some half the states, the Standards System is designed to help trial courts develop and use specific standards to evaluate and improve performance, and thus become more effective and efficient for, and accountable to, the public we serve. The Standards System was adopted for North Carolina's courts in November 2001 by Chief Justice I. Beverly Lake, Jr., on recommendation of the State Judicial Council. The pilot project will implement the Standards System in up to five volunteer judicial districts and on a limited basis statewide. AOC staff from several divisions will help in this ambitious project, and grant funds will be sought. The project is designed to improve court operations within the pilot areas, and help the AOC learn how to implement and use the Standards to improve court performance for years to come.

♦ **Public Trust:** The Public Trust Committee of the State Judicial Council is composed of both Council members and persons from outside of the Council. The goals set forth by the Committee involve changing the perceptions and realities of the court system by improving communication with and education of court users. In November 2001, the State Judicial Council adopted the Committee's recommendations to improve the public school curriculum as it relates to court and civics education, improve and make court educational materials more accessible to court users, and train court officials and staff to better serve court users. Grant funds are being sought to implement these recommendations.



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