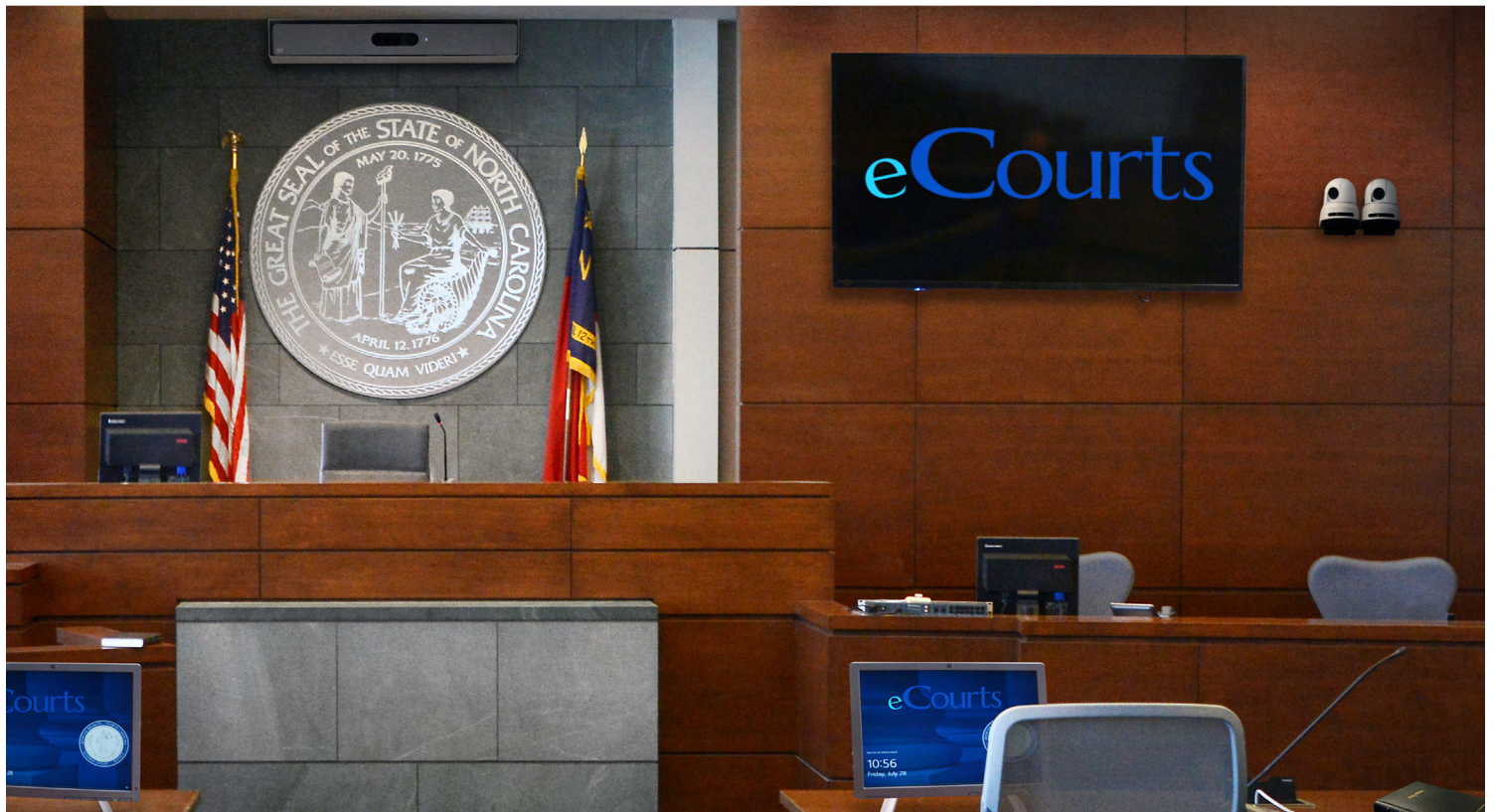


2022-2023

NORTH CAROLINA
JUDICIAL BRANCH
ANNUAL REPORT



TECHNOLOGY AND OUR COURTS



NCCOURTS.GOV

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ADVANCES *in* TECHNOLOGY *are* VITAL
WHEN LOOKING TO IMPROVE ACCESS
TO JUSTICE FOR ALL CITIZENS.

OUR MISSION



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 Paul Newby

It was a groundbreaking year for the North Carolina Judicial Branch. Our accomplishments are the result of the hard work of everyone in the court system and at the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). My wife, Macon, and I completed our visits to the courthouses, visiting all 100 counties. North Carolina is an incredibly diverse state. Every area has its charm and local pride. We are so encouraged by the professionalism and dedication of the Branch employees.

The Branch continues to receive generous support from our General Assembly, for which we are grateful. We have used some of our resources to address the significant case backlogs that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of our Branch's hard work and dedication, we have reduced the pending cases to numbers less than those *before* the pandemic.

When I became Chief Justice, I inherited the long-awaited eCourts initiative for North Carolina. On February 13, 2023, we launched eCourts in four pilot counties: Harnett, Johnston, Lee and Wake. This launch included two major components: 1) eFiling, which enables electronic filing of court documents through the eCourts Portal, a centralized, secure location that provides instant, no-cost online access to case information and court dates; and 2) Guide & File, a free online tool to help self-represented citizens prepare court documents for filing.

When I visited these pilot counties on the day that eCourts went live, I was proud to see the dedication and teamwork demonstrated by our courthouse personnel—all working hard to ensure the launch went as smoothly as possible—and AOC personnel, who provided hours of training and on-site assistance during the launch. The teamwork between the Branch stakeholders and AOC is evident in the successes of the launch.

Roughly 30 million pieces of paper are currently added to court files each year in North Carolina. AOC estimates that the eCourts pilot phase alone saved over 1.39 million sheets of paper, with pilot counties successfully accepting over 287,503 electronic filings over a six-month period. Citizens now conduct an average of 10,000 electronic searches each day through the eCourts Portal, providing free public access to online court records and saving countless trips to the

courthouse. Our goal is to continue expanding access to justice by transitioning all 100 counties to eCourts by the end of 2025.

The Chief Justice's Task Force on ACEs-Informed Courts has made great strides towards accomplishing its mission of equipping our court system to better serve children who have encountered adverse childhood experiences or adverse community environments (ACEs). This year, the Task Force implemented personnel training and court programs to further this goal of better recognizing childhood trauma. On June 2023, incoming District Court judges participated in the Branch's first ACEs-informed judges training. We also announced plans to launch the Safe Babies Court Team Pilot Program in July 2023—a pilot program that aims to reduce the amount of time to permanency for very young children by providing intensive support and services to families during a child's crucial early years.

At every courthouse I visit, I am grateful for our bright, dedicated, resourceful, and courteous courthouse personnel. It is an honor to personally thank them for the incredible job they are doing to serve our state, and I look forward to continuing to work together to administer justice without favor, denial, or delay.



Sincerely

Paul Newby
Chief Justice Paul Newby
Supreme Court of North Carolina



A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Our state's promises of liberty and opportunity rest on the foundation of equal justice under the law. For that reason, the North Carolina Judicial Branch exists to provide a "fair, independent, and accessible forum" where all people may seek the swift resolution of their legal affairs. The Branch's nearly 7,500 officials and staff fulfill this promise every day through hard work and tireless effort to serve their communities.

The past year has been one of immense change and progress within the Judicial Branch. In February, we launched the final component of the eCourts project, the Odyssey (Enterprise Justice) integrated case management system, in the pilot counties of Harnett, Johnston, Lee, and Wake. eCourts is the most important access to justice project in our state's history and, once fully implemented, will provide nearly unlimited access to digital court records and eliminate the barriers inherent in a paper-reliant system.

We continue to explore new programs to expedite case resolutions and promote improved outcomes for our most vulnerable citizens. Earlier this year, we announced the Safe Baby Court project, a new court model that seeks to expedite permanency for children zero to three years old. NCAOC also partnered with the North Carolina Collaboratory at UNC-Chapel Hill to develop a long-term strategic plan that will enable our state courts to provide recovery court services to residents throughout the state. We thank the North Carolina General Assembly for funding these important projects.

NCAOC and its judicial partners continue to develop strategies to strengthen hiring despite nationwide challenges in recruitment and retention. Along with our judicial partners, we launched the "Do Your Career Justice" initiative to educate job seekers about the benefits of employment within the Judicial Branch. NCAOC also successfully advocated for salary increases for all judicial positions and has announced plans to continue reimbursements for employment expenses such as parking and State Bar dues. The strength of our Branch resides within its people and we're always working to attract the next generation of court leaders. Again, we

appreciate our state legislative leaders who share this goal and provided valuable resources to recruit and retain throughout our state courts.

The Branch's core mission of adjudicating legal disputes continues at a laudable pace even in this era of transformational technological and societal change. The "COVID Backlog" is largely eliminated and will soon be relegated to the ash heap of history. Case resolutions continue to outpace new filings, and average disposition times continue to improve. Every case represents an important moment in an individual's life, and the Branch continues to carry out its charge of swift and impartial justice.

No organization can excel without great people, and the Judicial Branch is no exception. From the judge on the bench, the prosecutor or public defender at the counsel table, the clerk at the front counter, the court reporter capturing the record, the magistrate working the late-night shift, the court manager coordinating multi-county dockets, the GAL advocate protecting a child's rights, to the AOC staff member assisting the field, every member of our Branch plays an important role in delivering justice to our state and our local communities. I extend my most sincere thanks to all 7,500 members of the North Carolina Judicial Branch for their incredible work and dedication. Our state's constitution gifts to us the opportunity to make a difference by ensuring that justice is accessible to all within our great state. We're honored to accept that mission.



Director Ryan S. Boyce
North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts



BUDGET & OPERATIONS

Overseeing the Budgeting Services
for the State's Judicial Branch



JUDICIAL BRANCH BUDGET

2.64%

Judicial Branch budget as a percentage of the State General Fund

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 North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts 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 [NCcourts.gov](https://www.nccourts.gov).

HOW THE BUDGET IS SPENT

87% SALARIES & BENEFITS

- ▶ 31% (\$192M) for elected judicial officials, magistrates, and appointed officials

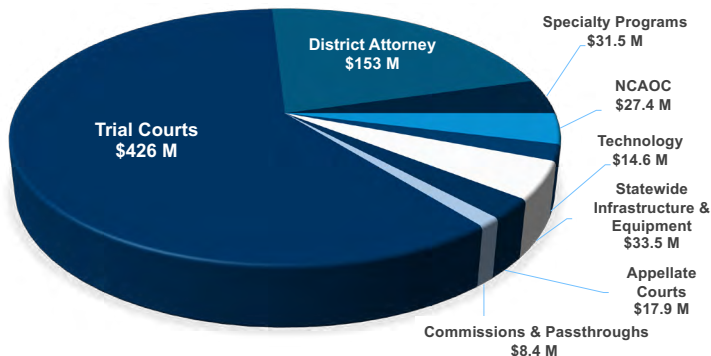
11.5% OPERATIONS

- ▶ 34.6% local court operations
- ▶ 9.7% central administration
- ▶ 47.2% technology services, equipment, and statewide infrastructure
- ▶ 8.5% appellate courts, commissions, and passthrough appropriations

FY 2022 – 23 STATE GENERAL FUND APPROPRIATIONS

CERTIFIED BUDGET TOTAL: \$26.98B

JUDICIAL CERTIFIED: \$712.8M



MONIES COLLECTED BY COURTS

<1% STAYS WITH COURT SYSTEM

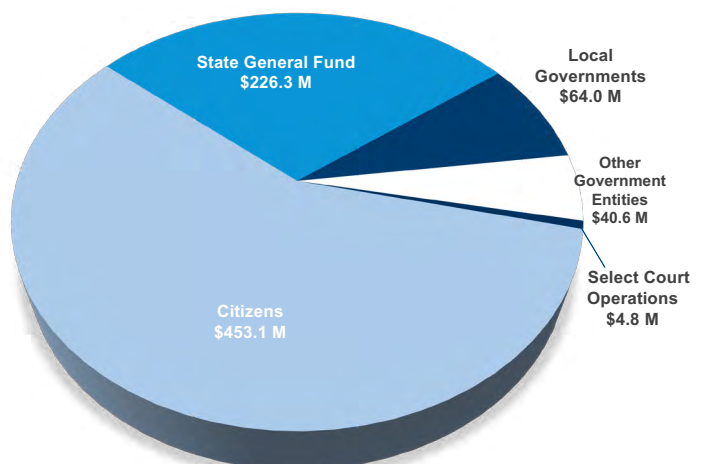
- ▶ (Fines, Fees, Forfeitures, Restitution, and Civil Judgments)

\$788.8M DISBURSED BY CLERKS

- ▶ 29% to state treasurer, state agencies, law enforcement retirement
- ▶ \$453.1 million to citizens
- ▶ \$226.3 million to State General Fund
- ▶ \$64.1 million to local governments
- ▶ \$40.6 million to other government entities
- ▶ \$4.8 million to select court operations

FY 2022 – 23 CLERK OF SUPERIOR COURT DISBURSEMENTS

\$788.8M 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, 2022–23	\$712,807,152
Percent increase from 2021–22	6.01%
Total certified appropriations as a percent of total state General Fund appropriations	2.64%

87.0%

**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 571.25.

PERSONNEL (ALL FUNDING SOURCES)

Position	Total
JUSTICES AND JUDGES	
*Supreme Court Justices	7
*Court of Appeals Judges	15
*Superior Court Judges	111
*District Court Judges	285
AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL	
*District Attorneys	42
Assistant District Attorneys	726
District Attorney Support Staff	692.50
*Clerks of Superior Court	100
Clerk Personnel	2,771.10
Guardian ad Litem Personnel	216
Magistrates	694.60
Indigent Defense Services Staff	619
Administrative Office of the Courts Staff	459.90
Court Support Staff	498.125
Court Reporters	91
Court Administrators	8
Foreign Language Court Interpreters	9
**Other	84.625
TOTAL	7,429.85

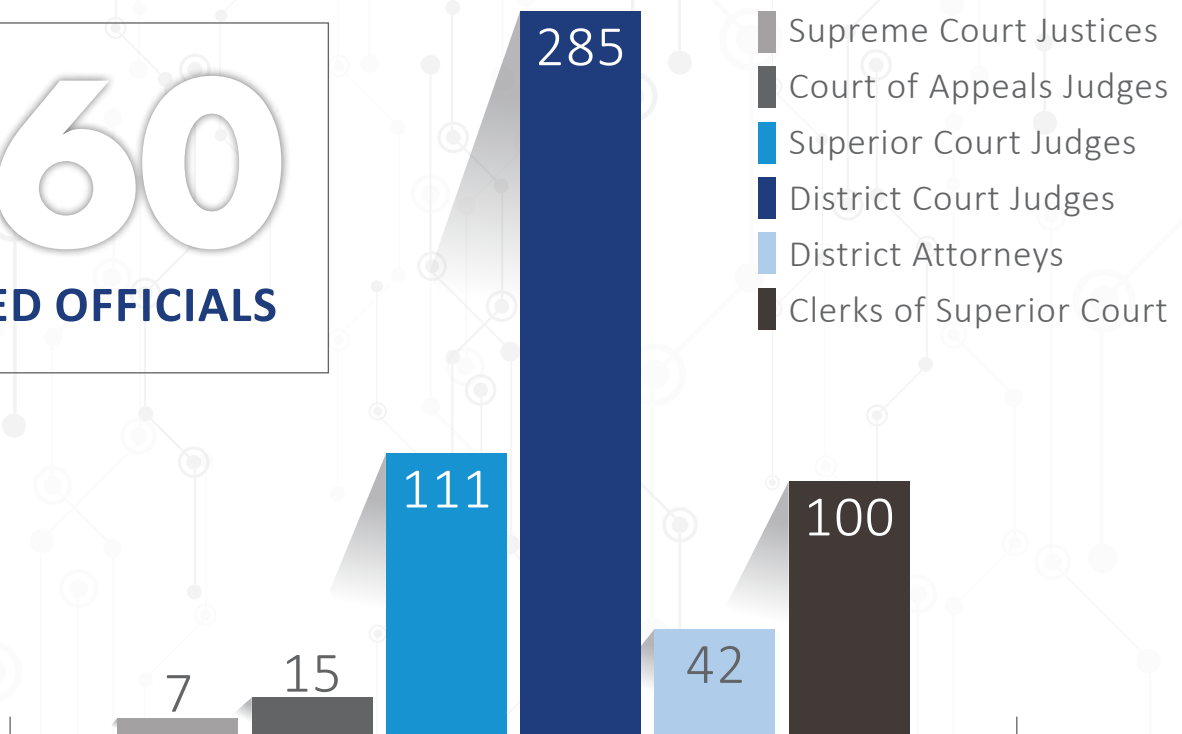
*Independently elected judicial officials; the North Carolina Judicial Branch has 560.

**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.

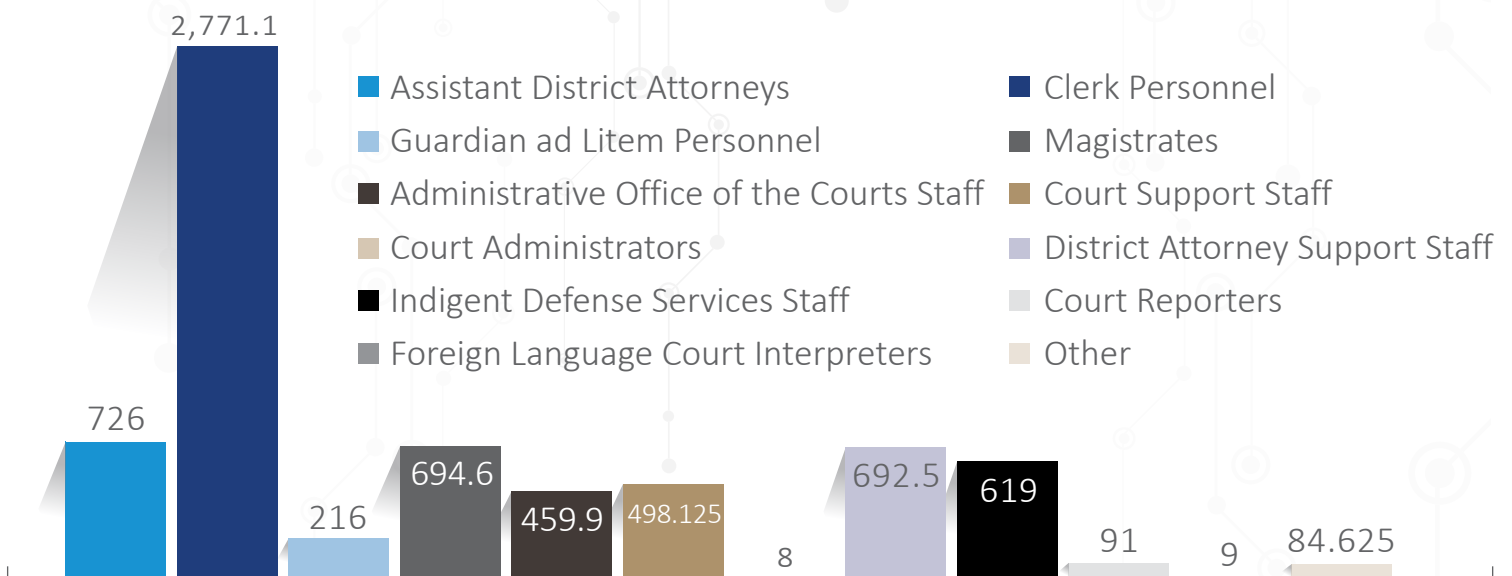


JUDICIAL BRANCH PERSONNEL

560
ELECTED OFFICIALS

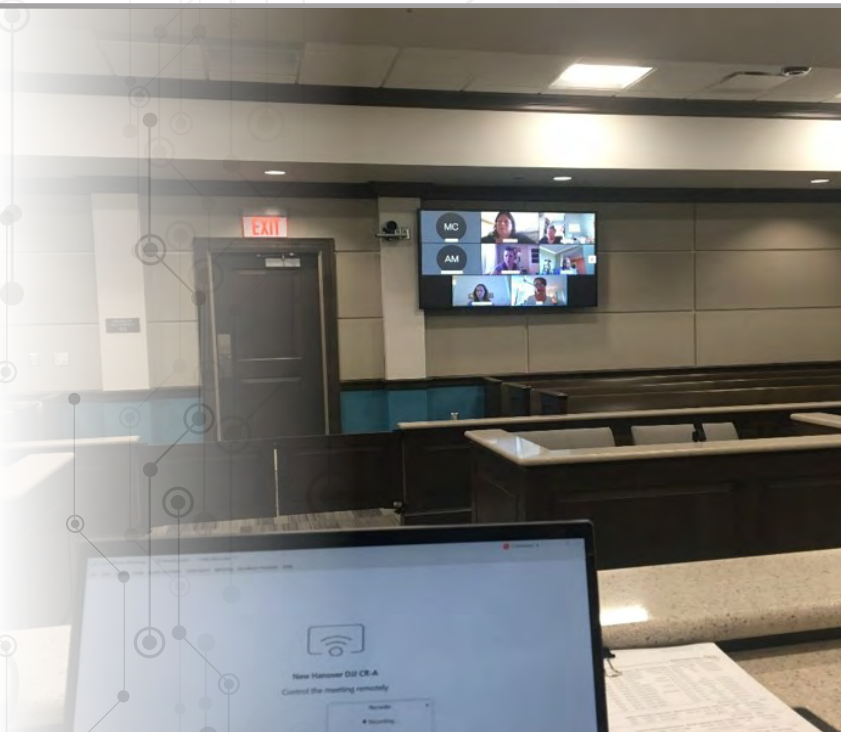


7,429.85 **TOTAL PERSONNEL**



THE COURTS

Protecting and Preserving the Rights
and Liberties of All People



Courtroom systems integrate with Webex technology, and include HD monitors, HD cameras, and audio for attorney, judge, and witness use during remote proceedings. A public kiosk located in the courthouse is connected with the system and allows self-represented litigants to make an appearance outside of a courtroom. The technology will greatly reduce the need for an in-person appearance in some cases and reduce courthouse foot traffic.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND ROUTES OF APPEAL



Role of the SUPREME COURT OF NORTH CAROLINA

- 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 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
- Mandatory review, if appealed, of cases from the Court of Appeals involving a substantial question under the United States or North Carolina constitutions



Role of the NORTH CAROLINA COURT OF APPEALS

- Mandatory and exclusive
- Mandatory, if substantial constitutional issue
- Discretionary, if no dissent
- Mandatory, if dissent



SUPERIOR COURT

Superior courts hear civil and criminal cases, including felony cases and civil cases over \$25k.

Death Penalty Cases

Business Court Cases



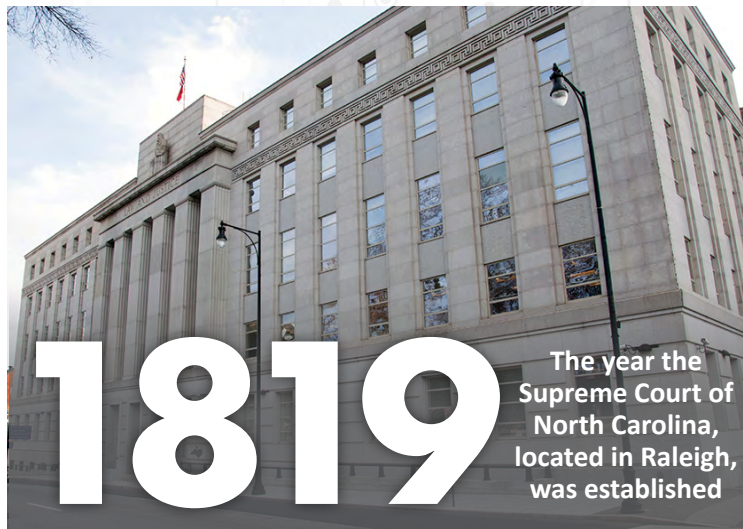
Mandatory and exclusive

DISTRICT COURT

District courts hear cases involving civil, criminal, juvenile, and magistrate matters.

All Other Civil and Criminal Cases

SUPREME COURT OF NORTH CAROLINA



1819

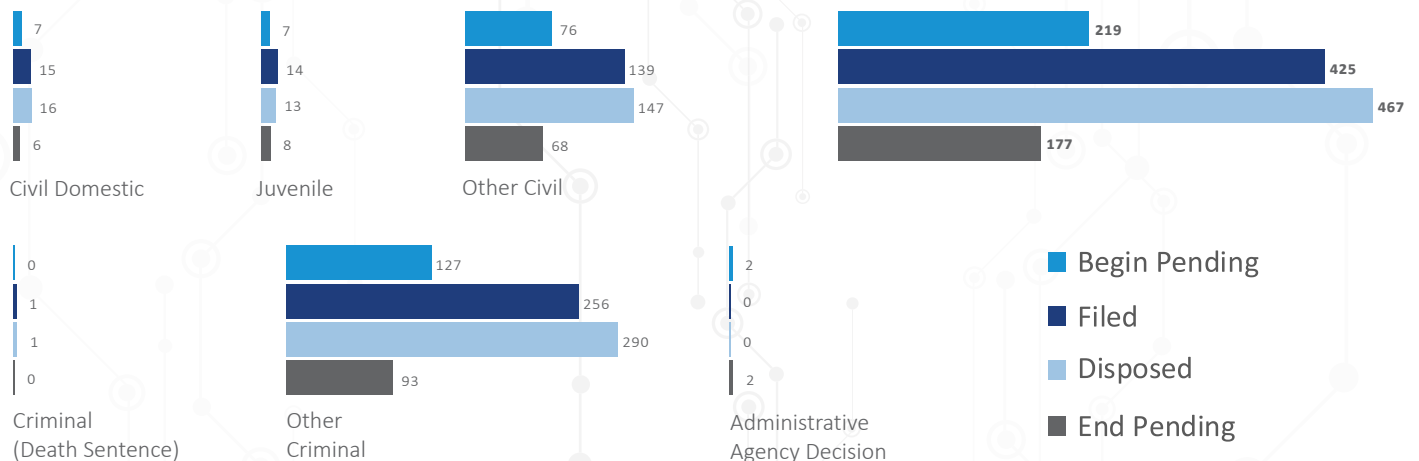
The year the Supreme Court of North Carolina, located in Raleigh, was established

7
justices who
serve eight-year
terms

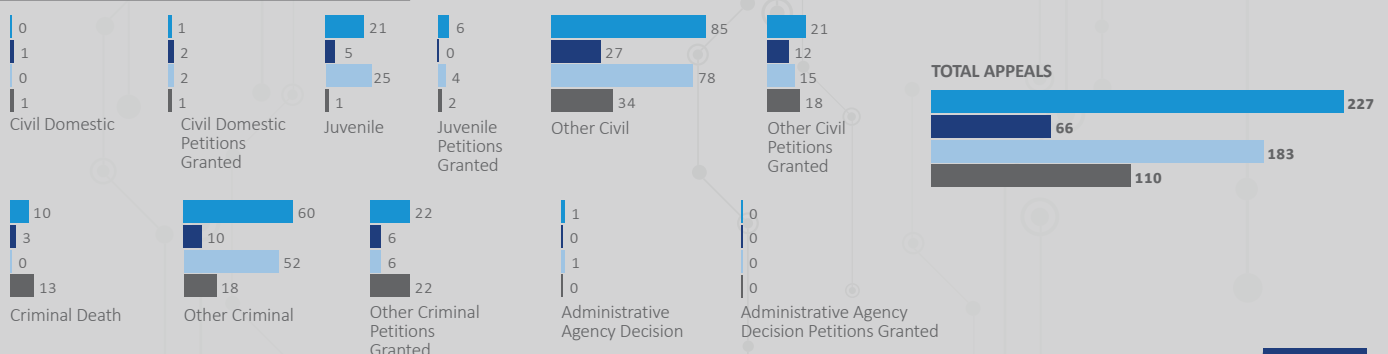
- 66 appeals docketed
- 183 appeals disposed
- 425 petitions docketed
- 467 petitions disposed

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.

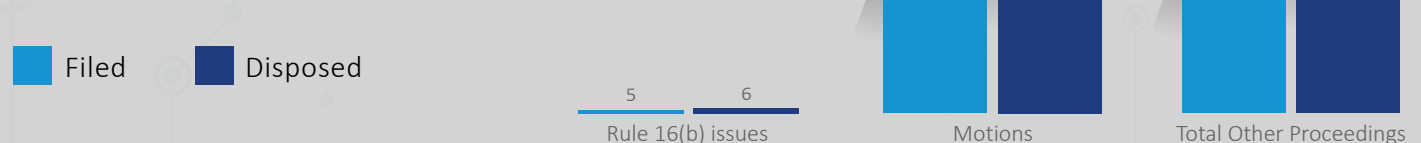
CASELOAD FY 2022 – 23 (PETITIONS)



CASELOAD FY 2022 – 23 (APPEALS)



CASELOAD FY 2022 – 23 (OTHER PROCEEDINGS)



NORTH CAROLINA COURT OF APPEALS



15

**Judges who serve
eight-year terms**

Hears cases
in panels of

3

1,921
appeals / petitions filed

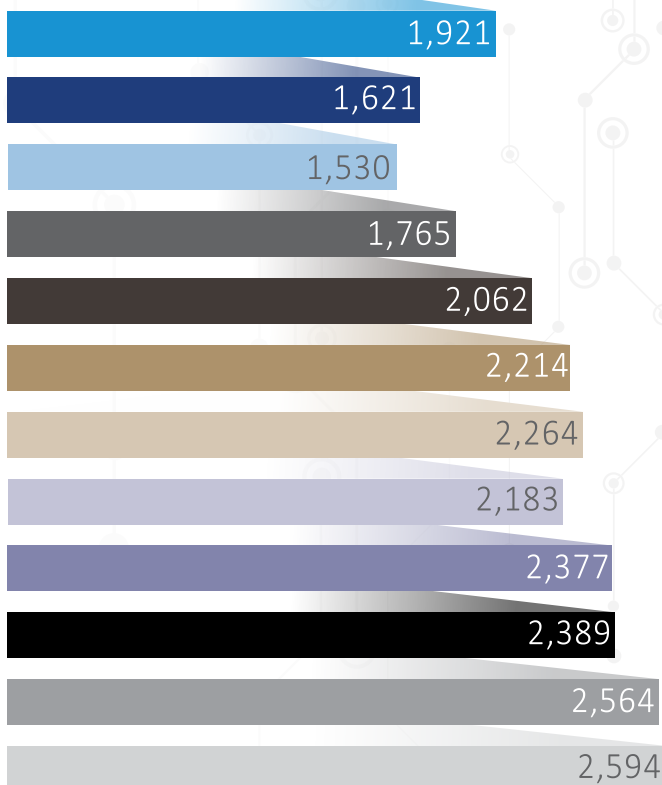
1,773
appeals / petitions disposed

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.

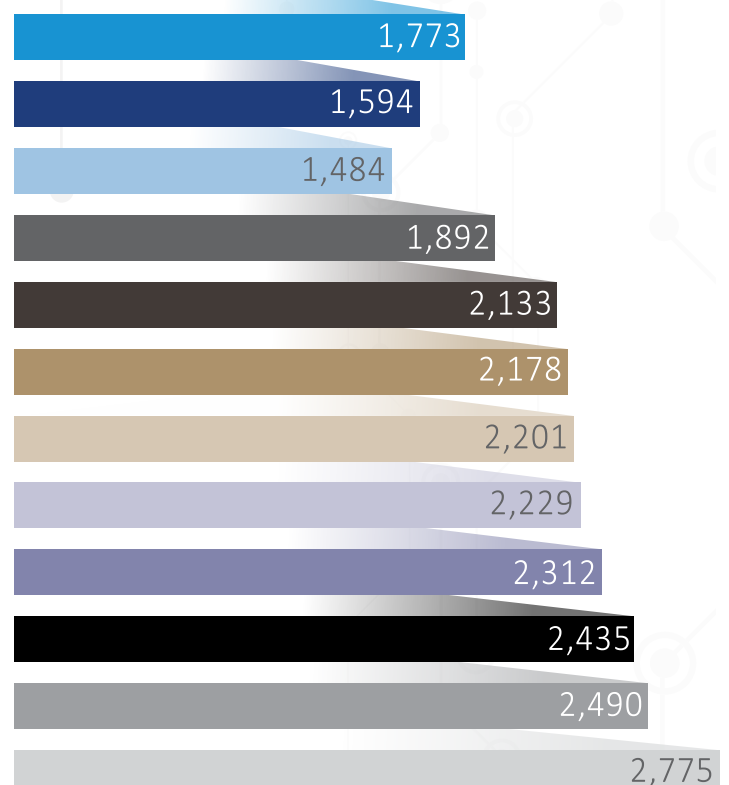
CASELOAD FY 2022 – 23



APPEALS / PETITIONS FILED



APPEALS / PETITIONS DISPOSED



SUPERIOR COURTS

111

JUDGES

100

CLERKS OF SUPERIOR COURT

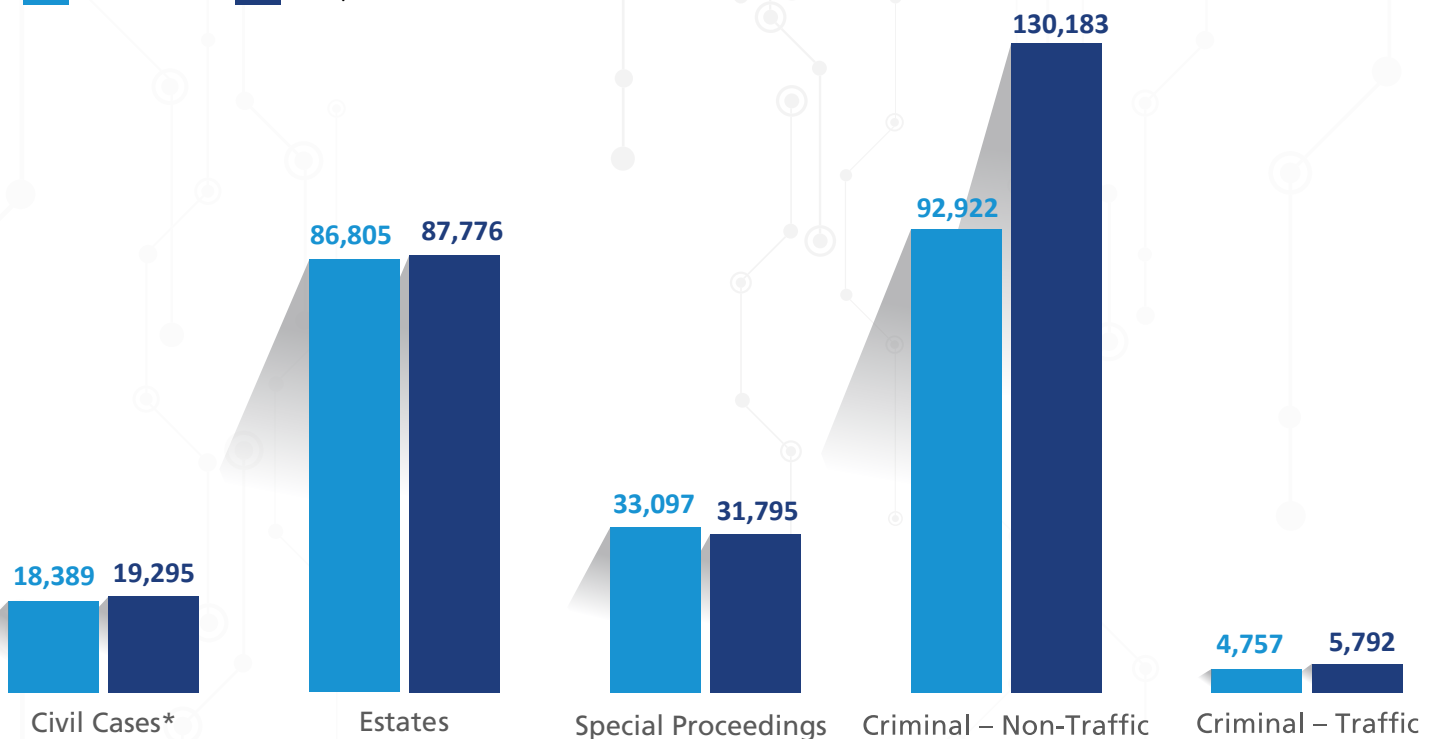
Established in 1777 and North Carolina's oldest courts, the superior court division hears civil cases involving more than \$25,000, all felony criminal cases, and misdemeanor and infraction appeals from the district court. Superior court is divided into five divisions and 48 districts across the state.

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 record keeping functions and serves as the judge of probate.

- 235,970 total cases filed
- 274,841 total cases disposed

CASELOAD FY 2022 – 23

■ Filed ■ Disposed



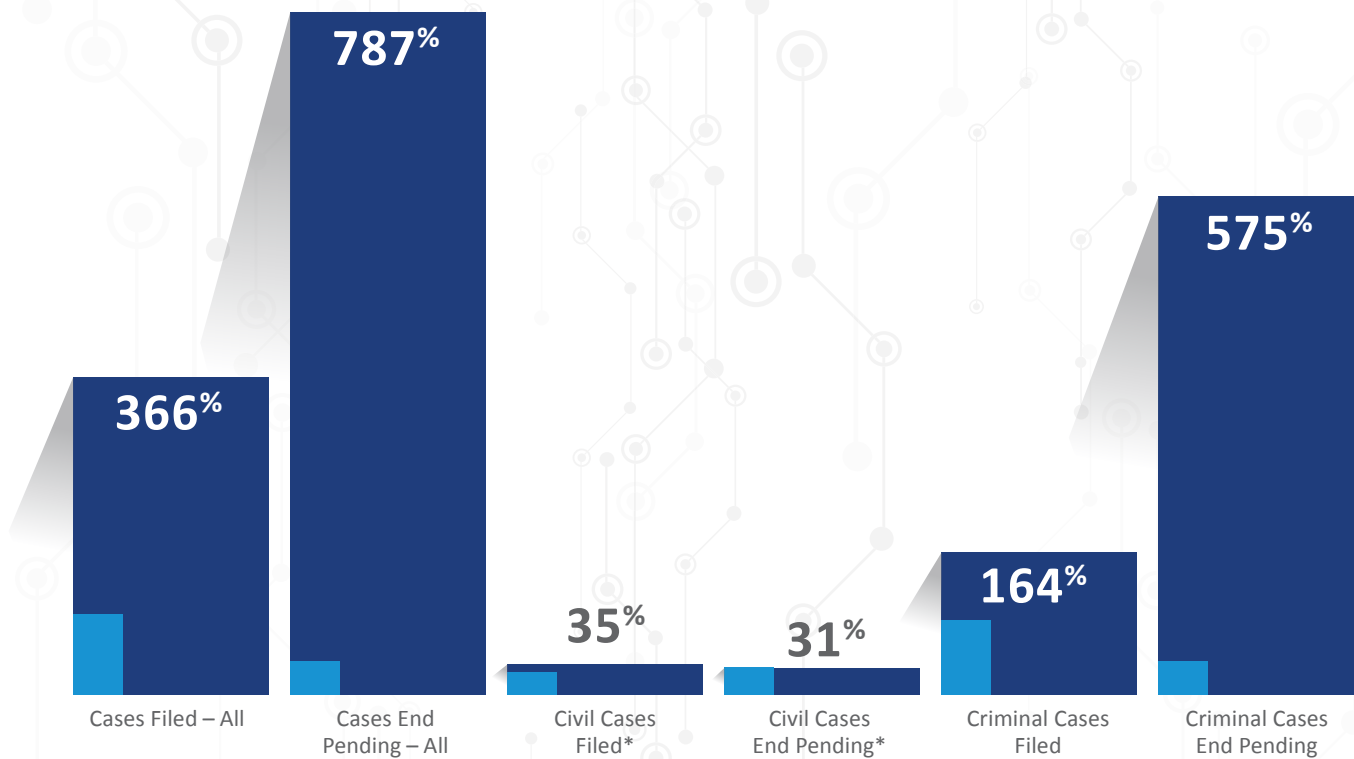
*"Civil" Cases includes cases heard by Business Court

SUPERIOR COURTS CASELOAD

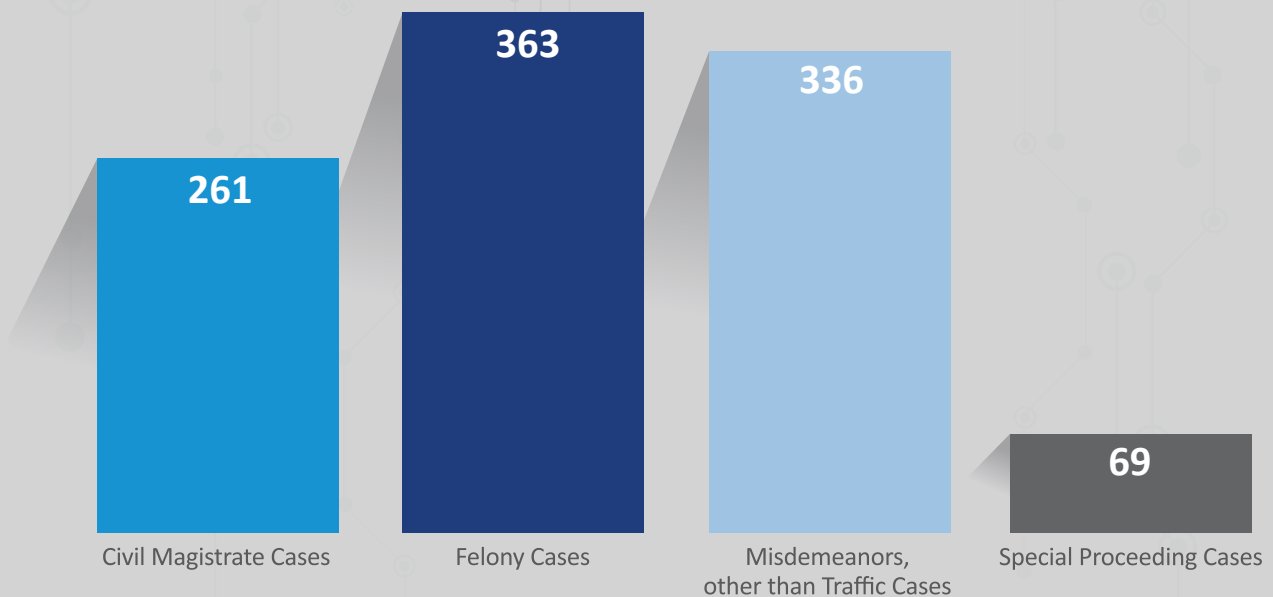
- 1970 Judicial Branch Annual Report
- FY 2022-23 Statistical & Operational Report

*1970 figure based off appropriations bill SL1969-807 for FY 1969-1970.

**1970 only says "Civil" - FY 2021 combines civil, estates, and SP non-confidential



SUPERIOR COURT – TIME TO DISPOSITION (IN DAYS) FY 2022 – 23



DISTRICT COURTS

285

JUDGES

694.6

MAGISTRATES

42

DISTRICT ATTORNEYS

19

PUBLIC DEFENDERS

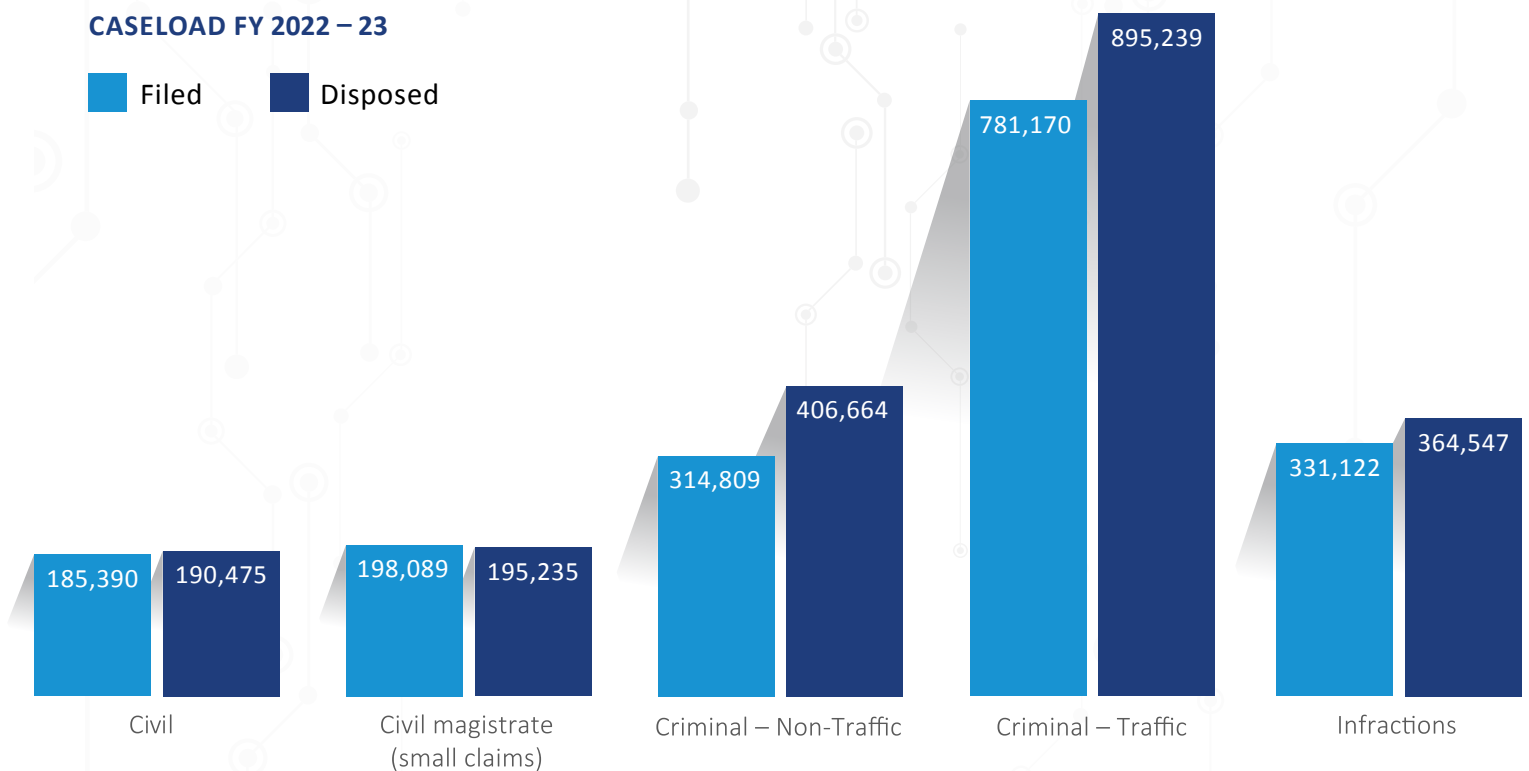
Established in 1966, district courts hear civil and criminal cases including all matters of family law, as well as all infractions and misdemeanors. District courts are divided into 43 districts across the state, but not grouped into larger judicial divisions. District courts sit in the county seat of 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.

- 1,810,580 total cases filed
- 2,052,160 total cases disposed

CASELOAD FY 2022 – 23

Filed Disposed



DISTRICT COURTS CASELOAD

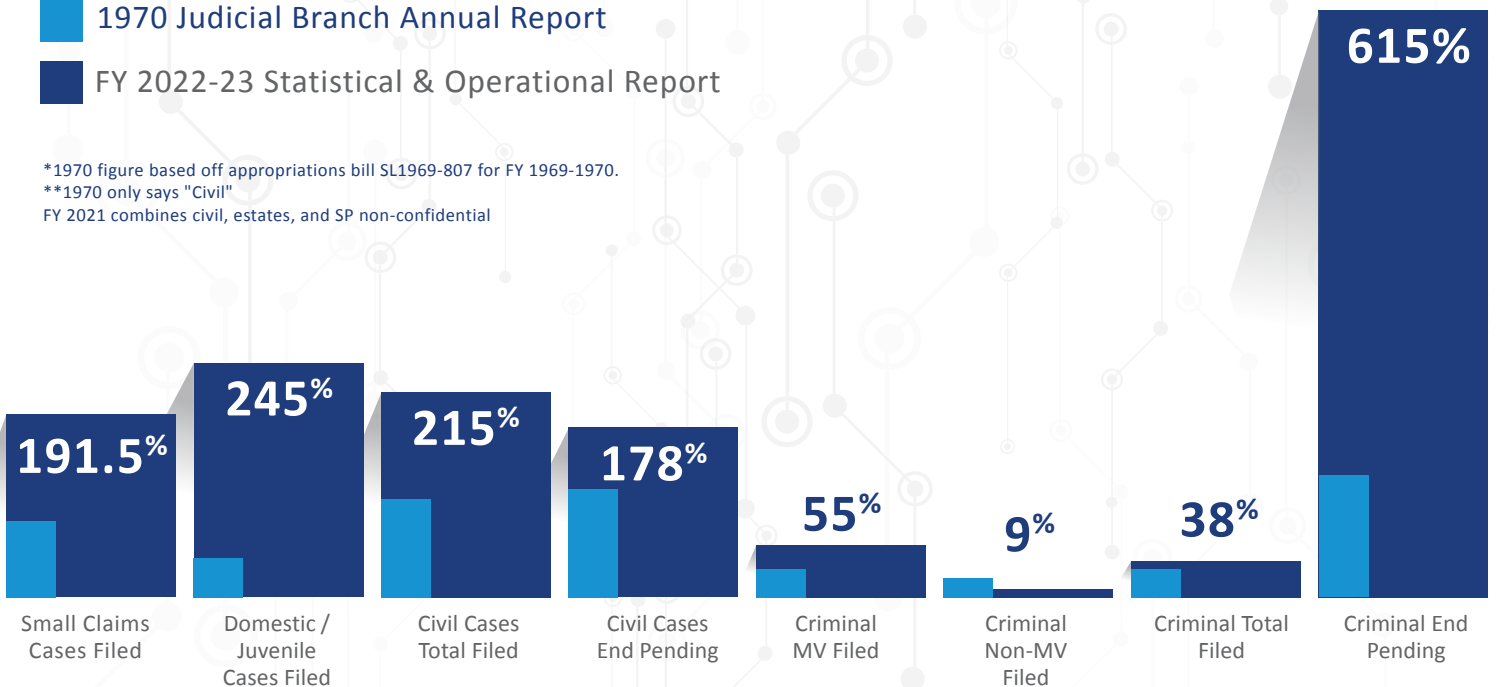
1970 Judicial Branch Annual Report

FY 2022-23 Statistical & Operational Report

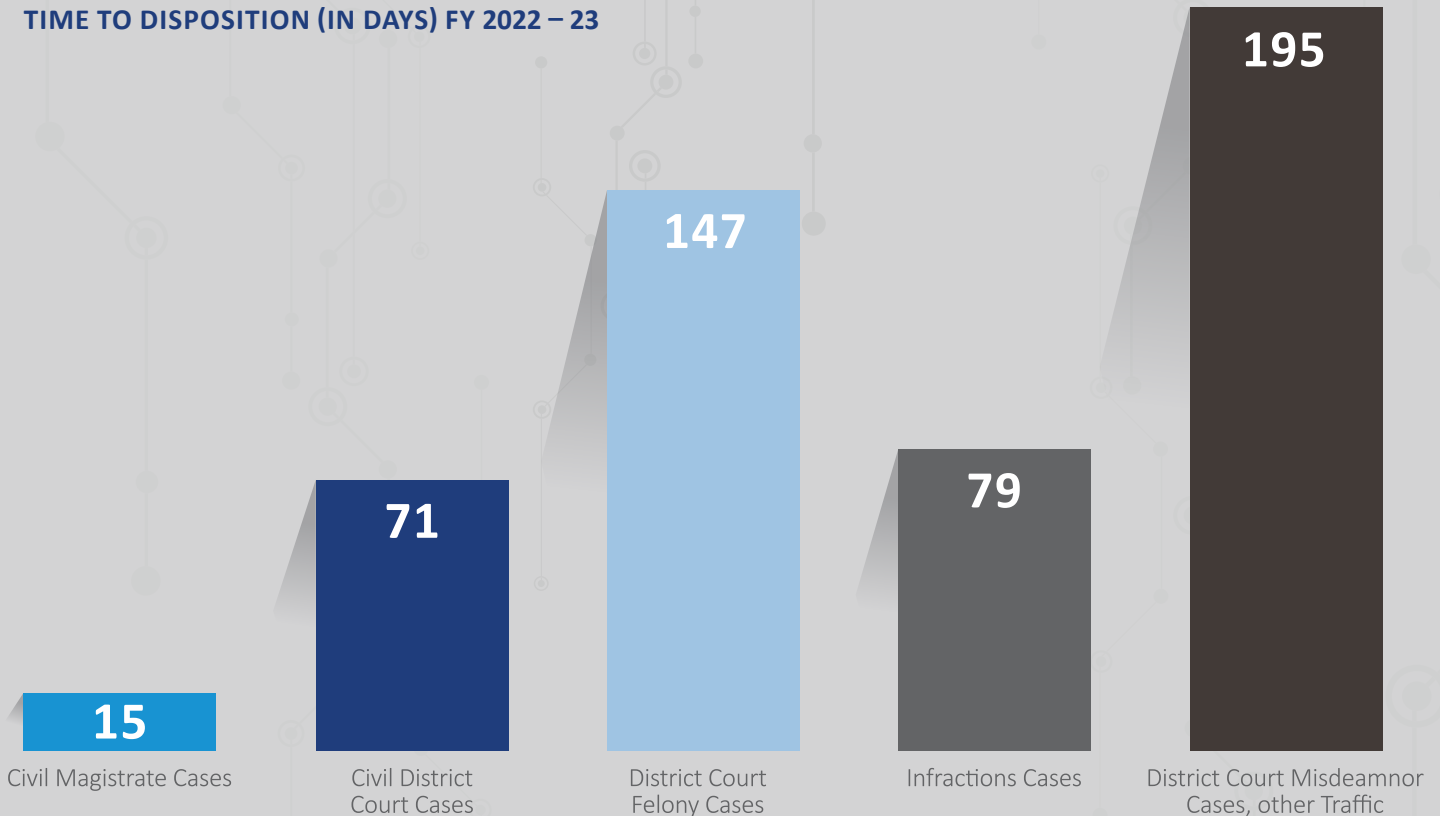
*1970 figure based off appropriations bill SL1969-807 for FY 1969-1970.

**1970 only says "Civil"

FY 2021 combines civil, estates, and SP non-confidential



DISTRICT COURT – TIME TO DISPOSITION (IN DAYS) FY 2022 – 23



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 designated by the Chief Justice as mandatory complex business cases for assignment to a Business Court judge.

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 and a full caseload.

For more information, please see the Business Court's annual reports found at:
<https://www.NCcourts.gov/courts/business-court>.

4

LOCATIONS

5

JUDGES

FREQUENCY OF CASE TYPES FROM JULY 1, 2022 TO JUNE 30, 2023

51	Corporations, Partnerships, LLCs
14	Securities
14	Trade Secrets
13	Intellectual Property
12	Contract Dispute over \$1M
6	Controversy over \$5M
2	Contested Tax Case
2	General Receiver
1	Trademark

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

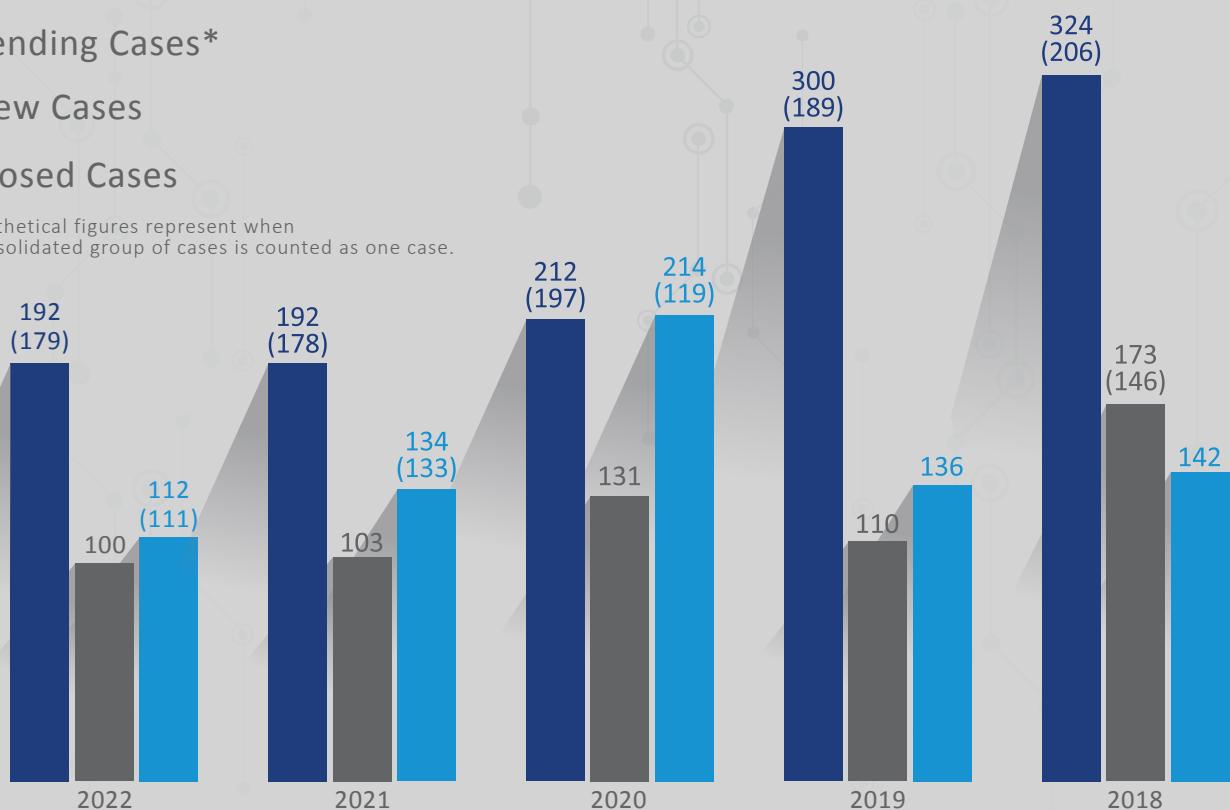
CASELOAD (CALENDAR YEAR)

■ Pending Cases*

■ New Cases

■ Closed Cases

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



2.5 MILLION CASES FILED STATEWIDE

213

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

560

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

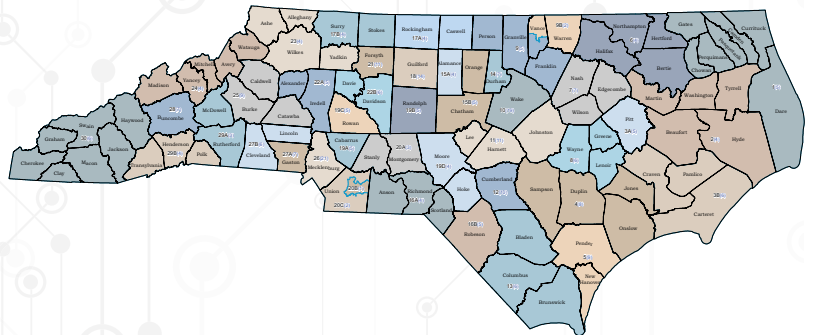
7,430

public servants

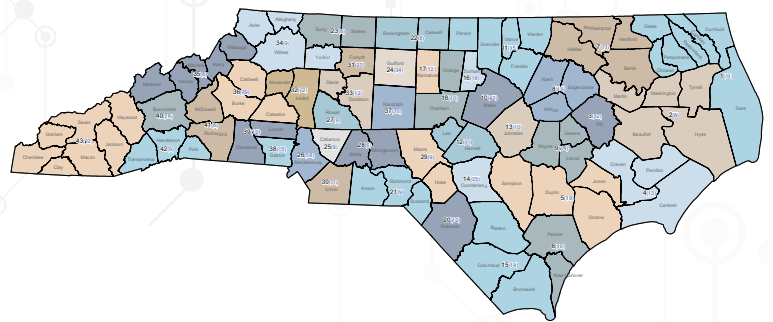
<1%

monies collected and
receipted by the courts
stays with the courts

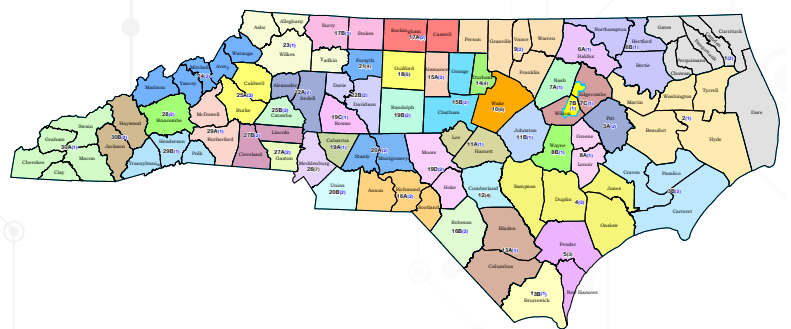
DISTRICT COURT DISTRICTS



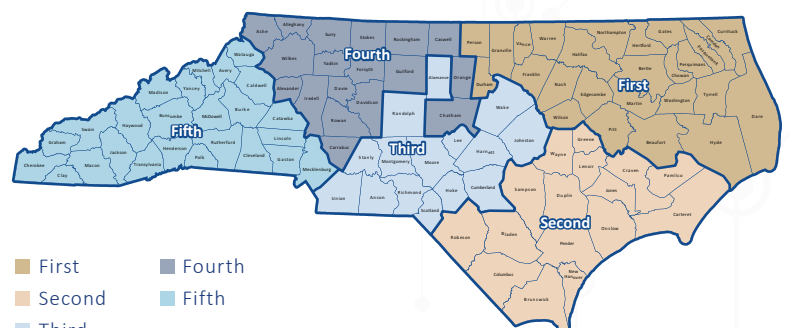
PROSECUTORIAL DISTRICTS



SUPERIOR COURT DISTRICTS



SUPERIOR COURT DIVISIONS



COURT PROGRAMS

Providing Information, Advice,
Support, and Solutions



The immersive courtroom audio video infrastructure inside the courtroom includes numerous cameras, microphones, and monitors.

INCREASING ACCESS TO JUSTICE THROUGH PROGRAMS & SERVICES

5,342

district court cases
settled in mediation and arbitration

8,581

child custody
cases mediated

44,567

civil domestic cases filed
in family court districts

17,027

children represented
by GAL program

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 attorney advocates and trained child advocate volunteers to represent the best interests of children in abuse and neglect cases in every North Carolina county. Advocates represent the children in trial and appellate courts to ensure their rights are protected and their voices are heard. GAL attorneys and child advocate volunteers strive to identify safe, permanent homes for abused and neglected children within the confines of applicable laws.



VOLUNTEER WITH US!
North Carolina



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

1-800-982-4041
www.volunteerforgal.org

**BE A VOICE FOR THE
CHILDREN IN OUR COMMUNITY**



COURT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

TOP MOST REQUESTED LANGUAGES FOR COURT INTERPRETERS:

- Spanish
- Arabic
- Vietnamese
- Mandarin
- Burmese

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.

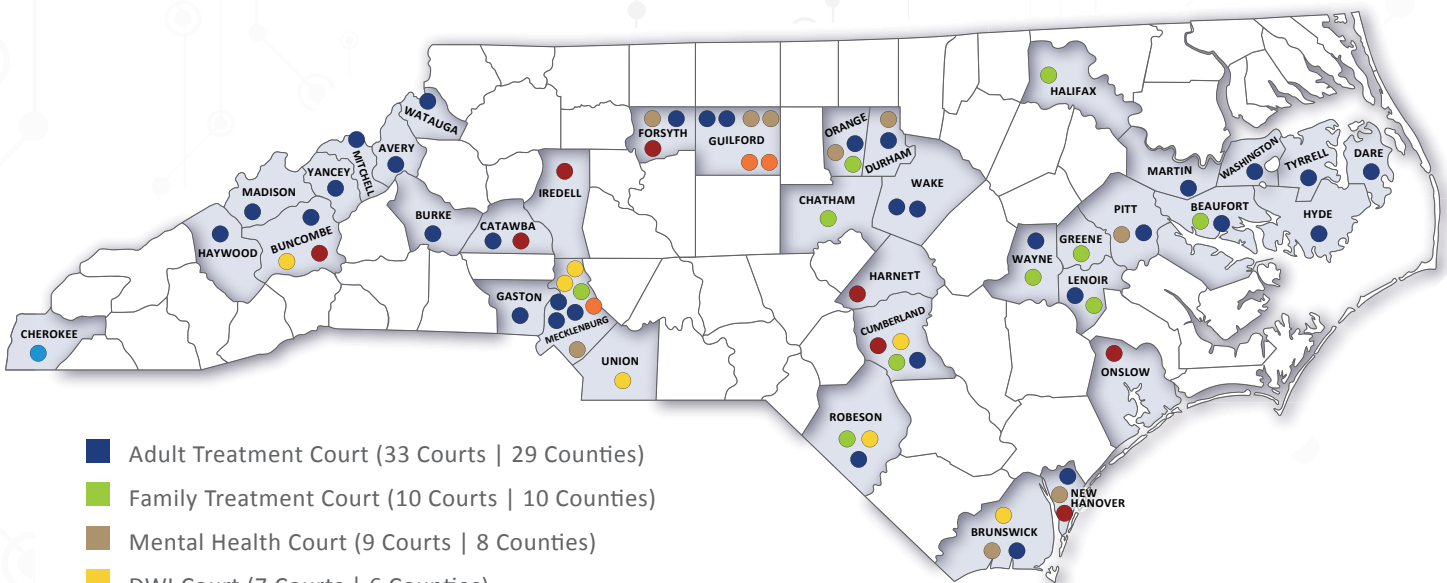
The work of this program helps ensure children are placed in permanent homes within one year, each family receives the individual attention necessary to make effective decisions for the child, and each child and each parent are afforded due process and effective legal representation.

LANGUAGE ACCESS SERVICES provide court interpreters for more than 77 different languages. Court interpreters are an essential public service, assuring due process for limited English proficient individuals.

RECOVERY COURTS AVAILABLE IN NORTH CAROLINA

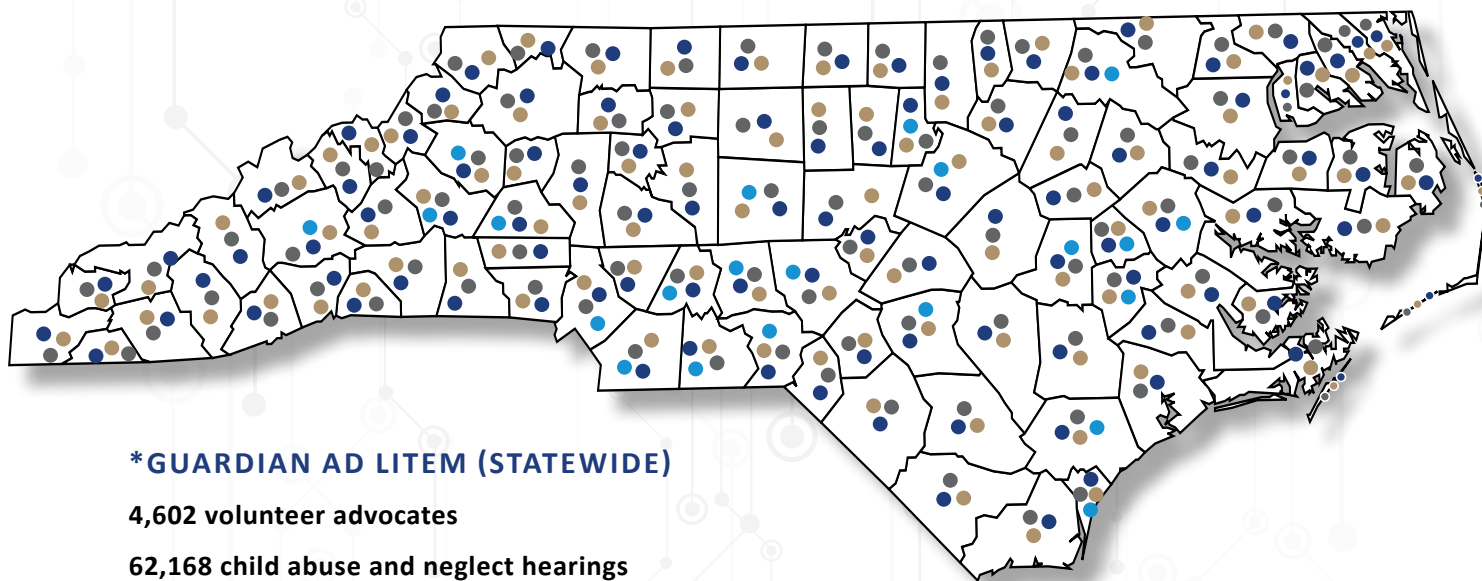
71
COURTS

37
COUNTIES



- Adult Treatment Court (33 Courts | 29 Counties)
- Family Treatment Court (10 Courts | 10 Counties)
- Mental Health Court (9 Courts | 8 Counties)
- DWI Court (7 Courts | 6 Counties)
- Veterans Treatment Court (8 Courts | 8 Counties)
- Youth Drug Treatment Court (3 Courts | 2 Counties)
- Tribal Court (1 Court)

COURT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES AVAILABLE BY COUNTY



*GUARDIAN AD LITEM (STATEWIDE)

4,602 volunteer advocates

62,168 child abuse and neglect hearings

17,027 children received legal representation

ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

2,227 family financial cases completed

3,726 arbitration cases completed

5,342 mediated settlement cases completed

CHILD CUSTODY MEDIATION (Statewide)

17,656 people attended orientation

8,581 child custody cases mediated

9,312 mediation sessions held

3,983 parenting agreements drafted

FAMILY COURT

44,567 domestic cases filed

68.6% of pending domestic cases < 1 year

LANGUAGE ACCESS INTERPRETERS

Spanish	76	Hmong	3
Russian	11	Polish	2
Vietnamese	10	Tagalog	2
Mandarin	9	Lao	2
Arabic	8	Bosnian /Serbian / Croatian	2
French	7	Somali	1
Portuguese	6	Turkish	1
Korean	4	Khmer	1
Haitian Creole	4	*Includes certified and conditionally qualified interpreters available from in and out of state.	
Cantonese	4		

NOT ALL PROGRAMS ARE AVAILABLE IN EACH COUNTY

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

*Note: During FY 22-23, the N.C. Judicial Branch was migrating to an updated data reporting system. Any discrepancies in the data have been addressed by the N.C. Guardian ad Litem program.

JUDICIAL BRANCH HIGHLIGHTS

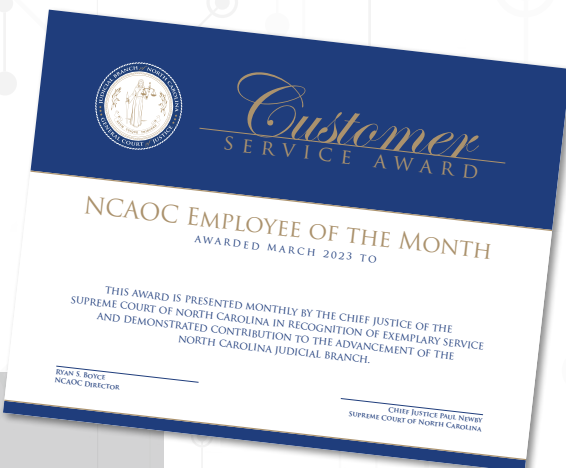


The Judicial Branch has launched the CRAVE (Courtroom Audio Visual Experience) Project to further enhance the capability to safely and securely hold remote court proceedings.

NCAOC CUSTOMER SERVICE AWARD

The North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC) Customer Service Award was launched in January 2021 by Chief Justice Paul Newby. Each month an NCAOC employee who demonstrates outstanding performance and exemplifies excellent customer service while performing work for the courts is honored and recognized.

“Chief Justice Newby has always stressed service and how important it is to serve the needs of the North Carolina court system,” said NCAOC Director Ryan Boyce. “This award is one way to recognize individuals who go above and beyond in their service.”



Recipients are recognized in the following ways:

- Presented a certificate of recognition by the NCOAC Director
- Name and photo displayed in the lobby area of the North Carolina Judicial Center
- Congratulated with an article in a staff-wide email and employee intranet.

This fiscal year the following were recognized for their service with the award:

Adam Aldrich, Christin Connor, Mike Jordan, Belinda Keller, Charles Keller, Tony McKinney, Kip Perry, Cindy Roberts, Lisa A. Smith, and the Salary Administrative Team in Human Resources (Michele Canfield, Traci Dixon, Shilda Lawrence, Samika Lewis, Kristie Lovette, Shannon Mears, Maegen Rogers-Harsh, and Debbie Tant, who manages the team).

Congratulations to all of this year's recipients.



SUPREME COURT OF NORTH CAROLINA HELD SESSION AT HISTORIC 1767 CHOWAN COUNTY COURTHOUSE

The Supreme Court of North Carolina held its October 2022 session of court at the Historic 1767 Chowan County Courthouse in Edenton and heard a total of five cases. Under state law, the Supreme Court can meet in only two other cities outside of Raleigh: Edenton and Morganton. The justices received a warm welcome from the Edenton community and the sessions were well attended by interested parties, local civic clubs, and student groups. In addition, the two day session was live streamed on the NCCourts YouTube channel.



RYAN BOYCE NAMED DIRECTOR OF NCAOC



Director Ryan S. Boyce
North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts

On April 4, 2023, Ryan Boyce became the Director of the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC). Chief Justice Paul Newby made the appointment following the departure of former Director Andrew Heath.

“Ryan Boyce’s experience and record of success within the Judicial Branch and state government make him an excellent choice to lead the modernization of our state courts,” said Chief Justice Newby.

Boyce previously served as NCAOC deputy director.

“I’m honored to continue my service to the Judicial Branch as the next director,” said Director Boyce. “It is a privilege to lead the NCAOC in its mission to assist and equip our state courts as they administer timely and impartial justice.”

Director Boyce served as NCAOC deputy director since January 2021. He previously led NCAOC’s governmental affairs under two former NCAOC directors. Director Boyce has held several other leadership roles in state government including general counsel at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and deputy general counsel at the North Carolina Department of Transportation. Prior to attending law school, he spent three years as a staffer in the United States House of Representatives. He earned a Bachelor of Arts from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a Juris Doctor from the Charleston School of Law, and is currently pursuing an LL.M. in international legal practice.

His role will be to manage and oversee the administrative services provided to the Judicial Branch’s more than 7,000 employees and hundreds of courthouses and facilities in every county of the state.



APPELLATE COURT INVESTITURES

Three investitures to the appellate courts took place during this reporting period including one to the Supreme Court of North Carolina and two to the North Carolina Court of Appeals.



TREY ALLEN was formally invested as associate justice of the Supreme Court of North Carolina during a swearing-in ceremony in the Supreme Court courtroom on Wednesday, January 4, 2023. Prior to his investiture, Justice Allen was a faculty member of the UNC Chapel Hill's School of Government and also served as general counsel for the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts.



DONNA S. STROUD was formally invested as Chief Judge of the North Carolina Court of Appeals during a swearing-in ceremony in the Court of Appeals courtroom on Monday, January 9, 2023. Chief Judge Stroud was elected to the North Carolina Court of Appeals in November 2006 and re-elected without opposition in 2014. She was initially appointed as Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals effective January 1, 2021.



ALLISON RIGGS was formally invested as judge of the North Carolina Court of Appeals during a swearing-in ceremony in the Court of Appeals courtroom on Thursday, February 9, 2023. Judge Riggs was appointed to the court by Governor Roy Cooper after serving as the co-executive director and chief counsel for voting rights at the Southern Coalition for Social Justice. Previously, she was a staff attorney and senior staff attorney at the Southern Coalition for Social Justice.



ANDREW BROWN NAMED GENERAL COUNSEL

Andrew Brown has been named as general counsel for the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC). Brown replaces Trey Allen who served as NCAOC general counsel from January 2021 to the start of his term with the Supreme Court of North Carolina.

Brown is no stranger to the Judicial Branch. In 2013, he served as a law clerk to former Associate Justice Robert H. Edmunds, Jr. He then served as chief of staff and administrative counsel to former Chief Justice Mark Martin, and later as the founding director of the North Carolina Judicial Fellowship, which provides independent legal research and writing support to North Carolina's superior and district court judges.

In 2018, Brown left the Judicial Branch for private practice. He practiced with a boutique litigation firm in Raleigh before joining the law firm of Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough. Brown began his role as NCAOC general counsel in mid-January 2023.



Andrew Brown
General Counsel
North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts

NORTH CAROLINA COURTS BEGIN UPGRADE TO DIGITAL CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM



eCourts

EXPANDING ACCESS TO JUSTICE

The North Carolina court system began the upgrade to a new digital case management system on February 13, 2023, launching in four pilot counties: Harnett, Johnston, Lee, and Wake.

The transition to the Enterprise Justice (Odyssey) platform, commonly known as eCourts, in these counties was the first track of a statewide rollout. For the first time, court records in these pilot counties are searchable online at no-cost to the public through Portal, and attorneys and self-represented parties can file court documents electronically via File & Serve (eFiling). The access to justice tool, Guide & File, which assists self-represented parties with legal filings through user-assisted interviews, also allows electronic filing.

“This vital effort to transform our state courts and deliver digital access to the justice system for millions of North Carolinians continues to progress thanks to the tireless work of local officials and the legal community,” NCAOC Director Ryan Boyce said.

Improvements to system speed and stability, refinements of programming integrations, and standardization of new business processes have been key accomplishments during the pilot phase that prepared the platform for deployment in future counties.

Programming the complex nuances of the state’s legal system into a new platform presents challenges for software developers and users in early stages, but the transformation has delivered on the dire need to provide access to justice online in North Carolina.

In addition to providing electronic filing solutions for attorneys and self-represented litigants through File & Serve and Guide & File, the generational shift for the Judicial Branch includes a range of other new platforms. The transition is shifting local procedures for paper records to statewide cloud-based software platforms for criminal

processes (eWarrants), traffic tickets and other infractions (Brazos / Enforcement Mobile), free online records search (Portal), and the Integrated Case Management System (ICMS) known as Enterprise Justice (Odyssey).

A large network of IT and software systems teams from NCAOC supports the eCourts transition through on-site assistance, remote monitoring, and help desk response for the pilot sites. A number of eCourts platforms already operate statewide, including eWarrants, Enforcement Mobile, and a dual form of Guide & File. eWarrants went live statewide in July 2022 and replaced the North Carolina Statewide Warrant Repository (NCAWARE) electronic warrant system. eWarrants is a component of the ICMS and maintains detailed information about criminal processes, such as warrants, magistrate orders, citations that lead to an arrest, criminal summonses, orders for arrest, release orders, and appearance bonds.

The eCourts pilot counties have successfully accepted over 200,000 electronic filings, saving an estimated 1 million sheets of paper. Statewide, more than 25,000 interviews have been completed to create a court filing in Guide & File, and over 10,000 electronic searches are conducted each day through Portal, saving countless trips to the courthouse with free digital records access for the public.

Unlike many states that manage electronic court systems at the local level, North Carolina has a unified court system that is integrated across all 100 counties with other agencies such as law enforcement and the Department of Motor Vehicles. The statewide rollout of eCourts will continue with Mecklenburg County in October 2023, followed by additional county groupings and is planned for completion by the end of 2025.

Visit [NCCourts.gov/ecourts](https://nccourts.gov/ecourts) to register for eCourts platforms, learn to navigate the systems with user guides, and learn more about North Carolina courts’ digital transition.

“We are proud of the progress North Carolina courts are making to fulfill our constitutional mandate that the courts ‘shall be open’ by upgrading paper processes to deliver digital access to the courthouse with a 21st century justice system.”

- NCAOC Director Ryan S. Boyce

DO YOUR CAREER JUSTICE RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN

Each day, North Carolina's courts help provide safety for our communities, prosperity for our economy, and protection for the rights, liberties, and freedoms that sit at the foundation of our state and federal constitutions thanks to the more than 7,000 elected officials and employees who make up our workforce. North Carolina Judicial Branch position vacancies rose with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. While we have made great strides in creating incentives to retain members of our workforce, we turned our focus to recruiting new talent to fill vacancies in our courthouses and offices across the state during this reporting period. To make the Judicial Branch more competitive with the private sector and other state agencies in recruiting talented job seekers, the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC) launched the "Do Your Career Justice" talent recruitment campaign created in partnership with the NCAOC Human Resources Division and the Communications Office.

The campaign includes a package of digital and print materials that can be displayed in courthouses on digital signs, in jury assembly rooms, elevators, and placed at public counters. Other aspects of the campaign include social media graphics and videos, as well as short audio commercials that air between segments of our All Things Judicial podcast. Improvements were also made to our website so our Careers page is more visible and accessible. Chief Justice Paul Newby also recorded a short video to help attract job seekers.

DO YOUR CAREER JUSTICE

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE STATEWIDE

- Competitive Salaries
- Generous Insurance Options
- Retirement Package
- Flexible Benefits
- Vacation, Sick, Parental Leave
- Paid Holidays
- Longevity Pay

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DO YOUR CAREER JUSTICE

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SCAN THE QR CODE OR VISIT THE LINK BELOW TO VIEW CURRENT POSITIONS AVAILABLE.

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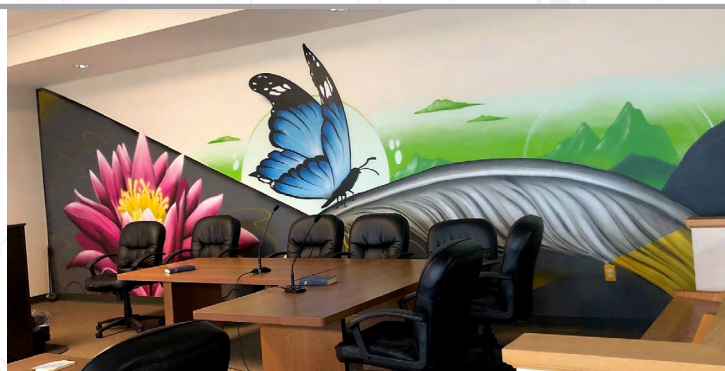
ROWAN COUNTY COURT MAKES COURTROOM KID FRIENDLY

Rowan County court officials installed a mural in courtroom number five of the Rowan County Courthouse to help make court less intimidating for children, youth, and families. Courtroom number five is where matters concerning children and families involved with the Department of Social Services (DSS) foster care system are heard. The courtroom is uniquely designed for juvenile abuse / neglect / dependency and termination of parental rights cases, featuring three tables instead of the two typically seen in other courtrooms: one for the Guardian ad Litem (GAL), one for the parent and parent attorney, and one for DSS.

Motivation to pursue the artwork resulted from a site visit by experts from the National Council for Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ). The experts recommended that artwork be added to the otherwise sterile courtroom environment to make the space less intimidating for children and youth, so Chief District Court Judge Beth Dixon applied for a local grant to fund this transformative work. The court was awarded a \$5,000 grant for the project from the Salisbury-Rowan Community Foundation through the Foundation for the Carolinas, a nonprofit community foundation serving donors and a broad range of charitable purposes in North and South Carolina.

Local artist Shane Pierce, who goes by the moniker Abstract Dissent, was hired to paint the mural. Images painted on the walls were intentionally designed to be calming, soothing and represent renewal and strength: the lotus flower grows out of mud, butterflies transform, bird feathers are shed as new ones grow, and storks bring new life. These themes symbolize the collaborative efforts that transpire in courtroom number five.

In addition to the mural, Judge Dixon also applied for and received a grant for 1,000 books (17 titles) from Penguin Young Readers. A bookshelf filled with children's books now sits in front of the bench so children can approach and select a book to keep each time they appear in the courtroom. Extra books are stored in one of the judges' chambers.



The mural makes the courtroom more kid friendly for children and youth involved in court.



Images in the mural are calming, soothing, and represent renewal and strength.



The bookshelf in the courtroom holds free books for children to take and keep.

"We are delighted with how the mural turned out. The courtroom is now a friendlier space for children and youth. The books are an added bonus that helps create a friendly environment while promoting reading and learning."

- Rowan County Chief District Court Judge Beth S. Dixon

CHIEF JUSTICE PAUL NEWBY COMPLETES HIS HISTORIC 100-COUNTY TOUR



Chief Justice Paul Newby completed his historic 100-county courthouse tour in Dare County.

Chief Justice Paul Newby and his wife Macon completed his historic 100-county courthouse tour from Murphy to Manteo, with final stops in Chowan and Dare counties, with Dare being the 100th county.

Newby greeted judges and courthouse staff at each of the courthouses to thank them for their hard work and dedication in keeping courts operational and accessible to North Carolinians. Judges and courthouse staff are essential in fulfilling the Judicial Branch's constitutional "open courts" mandate to provide equal justice to all in a timely manner.

"I embarked on this tour to express appreciation to local judges, clerks, and courthouse personnel and to gain a better understanding of the unique challenges faced by each courthouse," Chief Justice Newby said. "This tour has been instrumental in learning how we can best support local judicial leadership to further our mission and to meet our Constitutional mandate to deliver justice without favor, denial, or delay, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic."

The tour began in May 2021 with a visit to Cherokee County. Newby is the first sitting chief justice of the Supreme Court of North Carolina to visit all of North Carolina's courthouses, completing his tour from Murphy to Manteo.





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