Ten-year Caseload Trend Report

Caseload and Workload

The key driver of the work of the court is the number and type of cases filed. Oregon commissioned studies of staff and judicial workload in order to quantify the time it takes to process different case types. This information is used to determine the judicial and staffing needs of the courts as caseloads change.

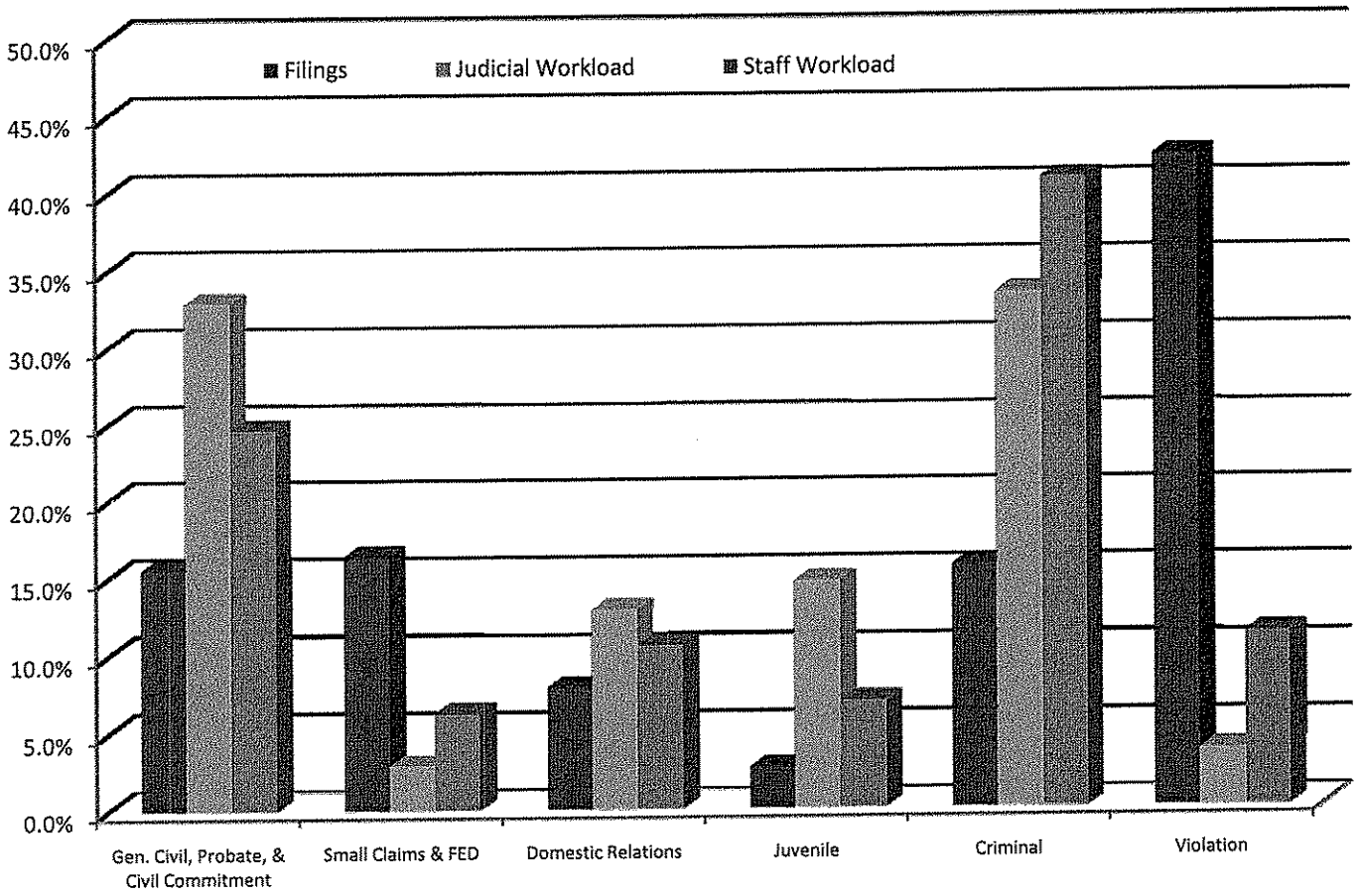
In 1999, the National Center for State Courts conducted a study of judicial workload in Oregon, producing a workload model that includes case weights for the types of cases that involve judicial time. This is critical because all case filings are not equal. For example, violations tend to drive raw case filing totals, but they consume a relatively small proportion of judicial time. Violations represented almost 43 percent of total filings in 2007, but based on the judicial workload model, they represented less than 4 percent of judicial workload that year. By comparison, criminal cases represented about 16 percent of the filings in 2007 but over 36 percent of judicial workload. Juvenile petitions represented 3 percent of case filings but over 15 percent of judicial workload.

In 2000, the National Center for State Courts conducted a similar time study of staff workload in Oregon, producing a workload model for staffing resources. The staffing model is similar in concept to the judicial workload model and includes all types of cases that involve staff resources. Comparing the results of the two models and raw filing counts, it becomes clear that while violations are a small proportion of judicial workload (less than 4 percent at 2007 filing rates), they represent a much higher proportion of staff workload (about 11 percent), though not nearly as much as their proportion of filings (about 43 percent). As with judicial workload, criminal cases consume the highest amount of staff time – 43 percent in 2007.

The chart on the next page compares the proportion of filings with judicial and staff workload for the six major case groupings.

Oregon Circuit Courts in CY 2009

Translating Filings into Workload



Court Filings

Cases have declined over the last two years, totaling 599,605 in 2009. While violation cases decreased in 2009 they are still higher than then number filed in 2007. There was also a decrease in felony, juvenile, and small claims cases. Domestic relations and misdemeanor case numbers are higher.

In order to understand what drives court workload, violations must be looked at separately from the rest of filings. Historically, violations have represented the highest volume of filings of any category. (The category "violations" includes cases which were previously categorized as "infractions.") In 2007 and 2009, violations accounted for slightly more than 42 percent of new cases filed in the circuit courts. Violations volume has historically been tied to the number of state troopers/law enforcement and the opening or closure of Justice Courts in a jurisdiction (e.g., new Clackamas Justice Court reduced violations filed in Clackamas Circuit Court).

Table 1
Caseloads: 2007 through 2010

	2007	2008	2009	% Chg. From 2008	1st 6 mo 2010
Civil	90,898	102,116	97,235	-4.78%	51,006
Civil Commitment	8,723	8,585	8,669	0.98%	4,218
Domestic Relations	46,829	45,318	46,987	3.68%	23,588
Felony	34,630	30,461	29,479	-3.22%	14,601
Juvenile	17,917	17,152	15,700	-8.47%	7,962
Misdemeanor	63,497	62,972	63,903	1.48%	30,316
Probate	10,138	10,166	10,010	-1.53%	5,179
Small Claims	75,282	80,109	74,856	-6.56%	37,710
Violation	257,839	253,455	252,766	-0.27%	112,549
Totals	**605,753**	**610,334**	**599,605**	**-1.76%**	**287,129**

As seen in Table 1, total case filings decreased by 1.8 percent between 2007 and 2009. This is predominately due to the decrease in felony, juvenile, civil, and small claim filings during that period. Both civil and small claims cases reached record high numbers in 2007 of 90,898 and 75,282, respectively. Domestic relations cases increased by almost 2 percent. Misdemeanor filings increased by 1.5 percent.

Cases per Authorized Judicial Position

Cases filed per judge decreased from a high of 4,017 in 2001 to 3,466 in 2009. The addition of six new judicial positions effective in 2003 and four new judicial positions effective in 2007 coupled with the decline in violation case filings, resulted in the lower case-per-judge rate. When violations are removed, the number of cases filed per judge has increased from a low of 1,953 in 2004 to a high of 2,063 in 2008 that decrease to 2,005 in 2009 even with the addition of the four judicial positions in 2007.

Active Pending per Authorized Judicial Position

The number of active pending cases per judge decreased by 3.5 percent from 2000 to 2009. Violation cases decreased by 28.5 percent while all other cases increased by 6.7 percent. This increase in all other case types occurred even though there was the addition of the six judicial positions in 2004 and four judicial positions in 2007. The largest percentage increases over the time period is in general civil cases (52.7 percent increase) and civil commitment cases (194.4 percent increase).

Caseload Trend

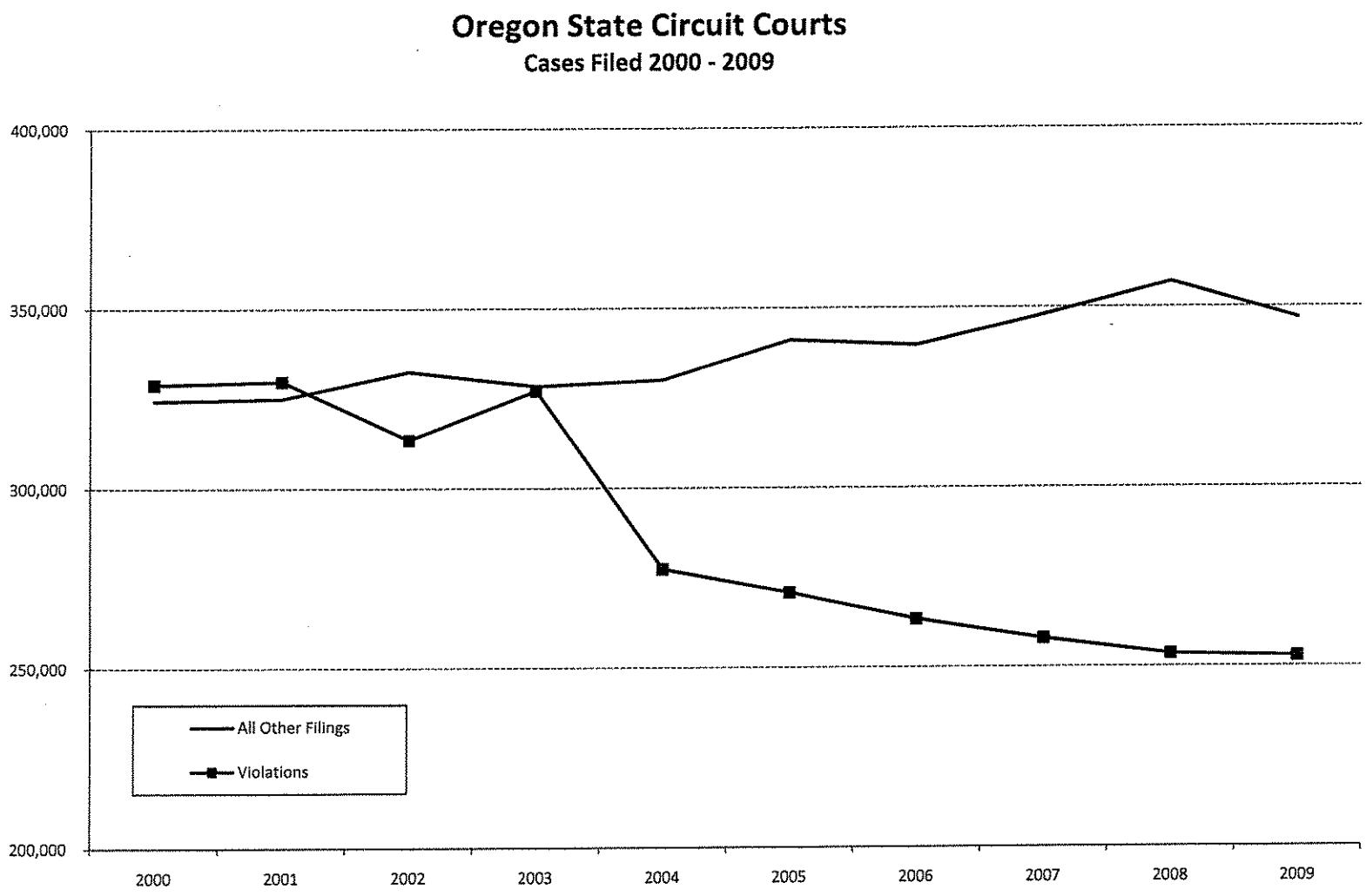
Total filings in the circuit courts decreased 8.2 percent in calendar year 2009 compared to filings in calendar year 2000. While there is an overall decrease in caseload, there have been significant increases in general civil cases (40.3 percent), small claims (16.9 percent), and civil commitment (50.8 percent) in calendar year 2009 compared to filings in calendar year 2000.

Cases Filed in State Circuit Courts

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Civil	69,317	69,329	72,627	76,963	78,231	80,345	80,120	90,898	102,116	97,235
Small Claims	64,054	66,609	68,220	59,232	64,644	73,030	75,768	75,282	80,109	74,856
Domestic Relations	52,568	51,912	51,851	50,544	46,164	46,080	44,832	46,829	45,318	46,987
Juvenile	20,704	19,644	18,294	17,707	18,962	19,699	18,225	17,917	17,152	15,700
Probate	9,891	10,102	10,031	10,146	10,020	9,966	9,786	10,138	10,166	8,669
Civil Commitment	6,636	6,940	8,004	8,270	8,054	7,721	8,863	8,723	8,585	10,010
Felony	35,749	37,646	37,905	36,508	38,397	40,758	37,808	34,630	30,461	29,479
Misdemeanor	65,486	62,803	65,549	69,055	65,602	63,456	64,132	63,497	62,972	63,903
Violation	328,962	329,837	313,475	327,149	277,465	270,891	263,312	257,839	253,455	252,766
Total	**653,367**	**654,822**	**645,956**	**655,574**	**607,539**	**611,946**	**602,896**	**605,753**	**610,334**	**599,605**
Judicial Positions	163	163	163	167.5	169	169	169	173	173	173
Filings Per	4,008	4,017	3,963	3,914	3,595	3,621	3,567	3,501	3,528	3,466
Active Pending Per	836	834	889	898	802	801	792	807	760	760

NOTES:

1. Judicial positions are those statutorily authorized. Positions authorized to begin mid-year are prorated. Prorated amount are used in calculating calculating the number of cases filed per authorized judicial position. Total positions at year end are used in calculating the number of active pending cases per position.
2. Juvenile cases are not included in the active pending per judicial position data. Juvenile pending data are not available.


Oregon State Circuit Courts
Cases Filed 2000 - 2009
400,000
350,000
300,000
250,000
200,000
2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
2008
2009
All Other Filings
Violations

Cases Terminated in State Circuit Courts

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Civil	71,702	68,234	68,803	76,622	80,391	80,409	80,587	85,173	101,953	95,375
Small Claims	63,602	65,979	68,011	57,790	67,557	71,918	74,549	75,541	82,574	73,722
Domestic Relations	53,115	51,517	51,794	51,971	46,577	46,269	44,463	46,903	45,377	45,971
Juvenile	20,247	19,877	18,461	16,583	18,200	19,366	19,352	18,685	18,432	17,120
Probate	10,089	9,470	9,676	9,681	10,153	10,433	9,755	10,032	10,398	10,658
Civil Commitment	6,633	6,892	7,862	8,108	8,105	7,704	8,587	8,689	8,489	8,841
Felony	35,394	36,615	36,253	36,228	37,593	39,425	40,235	37,716	33,404	30,854
Misdemeanor	62,618	61,662	64,853	69,970	67,464	66,719	66,830	65,202	67,600	66,184
Violation	332,281	334,879	309,437	326,372	289,720	284,217	267,472	257,244	265,165	255,818
Total	**655,681**	**655,125**	**635,150**	**653,325**	**625,760**	**626,460**	**611,830**	**605,185**	**633,392**	**604,543**

Active Cases Pending at Year End in State Circuit Courts

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Civil	20,577	21,361	24,378	24,429	22,829	23,490	24,321	30,250	30,173	31,423
Small Claims	16,723	17,360	17,505	19,119	16,473	17,591	18,876	18,722	16,400	17,486
Domestic Relations	11,907	12,145	12,056	10,518	10,021	9,959	10,504	10,580	10,651	11,751
Juvenile	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Probate	19,746	20,429	20,871	21,394	21,347	20,985	21,157	21,351	21,198	20,659
Civil Commitment	287	338	462	649	578	629	895	917	1,011	845
Felony	11,068	11,594	12,088	12,240	11,607	12,193	11,135	10,108	8,936	8,640
Misdemeanor	15,018	14,638	15,260	14,688	13,304	12,605	12,525	12,008	11,507	11,416
Violation	40,936	38,033	42,233	48,742	39,456	37,922	34,481	35,628	31,637	29,249
Total	**136,264**	**135,898**	**144,853**	**151,779**	**135,615**	**135,374**	**133,894**	**139,564**	**131,513**	**131,469**

NOTE:

1. Data on juvenile petitions are not available.