



## Alaska Trial Court Case Filing Statistics, 2005-2012

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The Alaska Court System (ACS) is unified, centrally administered, and funded by the state. The ACS consists of trial courts (Superior Courts and District Courts) and appellate courts (a Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court). Both types of courts hear civil and criminal matters. Trial courts hear facts in a case and decide how Alaska law should be applied, while appellate courts review the legal decisions of the trial courts.

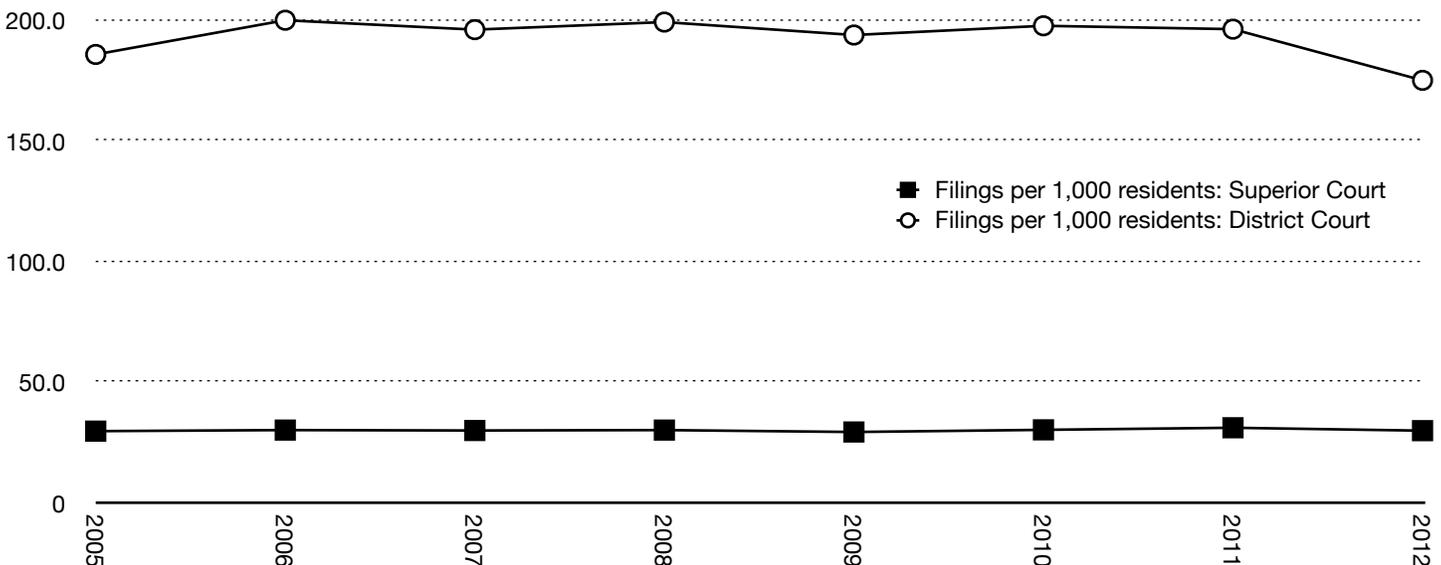
The ACS is divided into four judicial districts: The First Judicial District encompasses Southeast Alaska – including Juneau; the Second Judicial District covers the northwest area of the state and includes

Barrow, Kotzebue, and Nome. The Third Judicial District takes in Southcentral Alaska – including Anchorage, and has the highest population. The Fourth Judicial District comprises Interior Alaska - including Fairbanks, and the Yukon-Kuskowim Delta.

The statistical data discussed here describe cases filed in Alaska’s trial courts (Superior Court and District Court) during 2005-2012: Figure 1 shows the number of case filings per 1,000 Alaska residents in each court for this time period. Overall, for both courts, the rate of filings has remained relatively flat when controlling for population. While District Court filings decreased by about 9% from 2011 to 2012, it is too early to determine if this trend will continue.

**FIGURE 1.**

Number of Alaska Superior Court and District Court Filings per 1,000 Residents, 2005-2012.



Source: Alaska Court System, Office of the Administrative Director (2006-2013). *Alaska Court System Annual Report*. Anchorage, AK.  
Note: The Alaska Court System compiles case filing data by fiscal year (July 1-June 30), not calendar year.

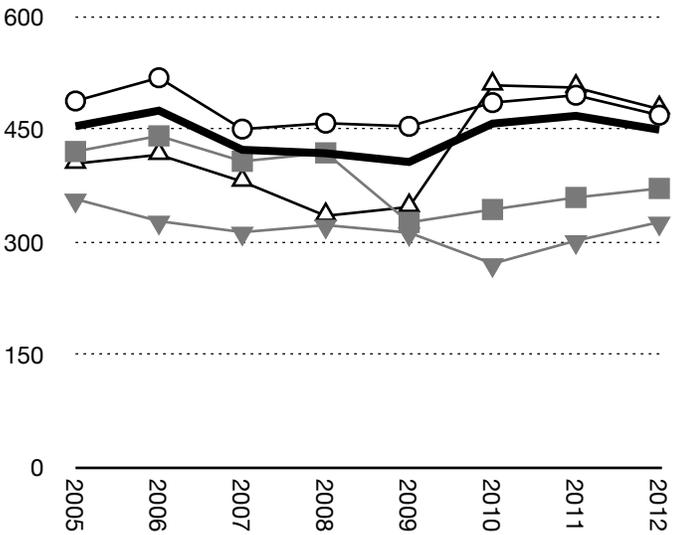
**Superior Court Filings.** Alaska Superior Courts hear felony criminal cases (where the defendant faces more than a year in jail) and civil cases. Among the civil cases Superior Courts hear are cases involving family law, probate, child abuse and neglect cases, cases where one side or the other has requested an injunction, and cases where the amount in dispute is \$100,000 or more.

As of 2012, in terms of a) number of authorized Superior Court judicial positions and b) percentage of the state's population, the Third Judicial District has 26 Superior Court judges and 6 masters, for a total of 32 Superior Court level authorized judicial positions serving 67% of the state's population; the

Fourth Judicial District has 8 judicial positions (all Superior Court judges) and 19% of the population; the First Judicial District has 6 judicial positions (5 judges and 1 master) and 10% of the population; and the Second Judicial District has 3 judges and 4% of the population.

**Superior Court Caseloads.** Figure 2 presents the number of case filings per judge both statewide and by judicial district. Between 2005 and 2012, the number of Superior Court judicial positions in the Third Judicial District increased from 26 to 32 and caseload per judge declined by about 4%, from 487.3 per judicial position in 2005 to 468.3 per judicial position in 2012. The First Judicial District has experienced a decline in case filings per judicial position of almost 12% since 2005, though this is attributable in part to the addition of a master in 2009. The Second Judicial District, which has consistently had only 3 Superior Court judges and no masters, has, after a steady decrease in filings per judicial position, seen an increase over the past two years from 270.7 in 2010 to 326.0 in 2012. The Fourth Judicial District added a Superior Court judge in 2007, but then lost three masters in 2010, resulting in a substantial increase in filings per

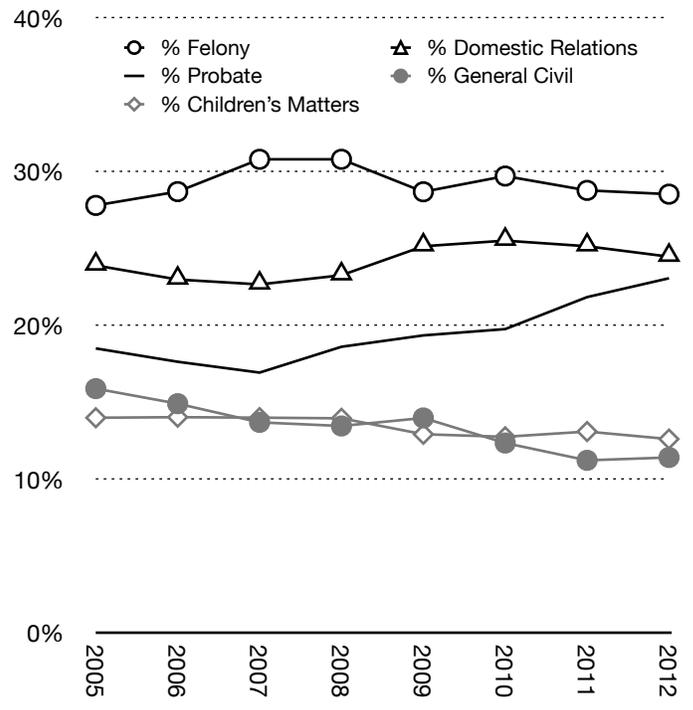
**FIGURE 2.**  
Superior Court Filings per Authorized Superior Court Judge Position, State of Alaska and Judicial District: 2005-2012.



| Jurisdiction          | Year  |       | % Change<br>2005 - 2012 |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|-------------------------|
|                       | 2005  | 2012  |                         |
| Statewide             | 453.7 | 449.0 | -1.0%                   |
| 1st Judicial District | 420.0 | 370.8 | -11.7%                  |
| 2nd Judicial District | 356.7 | 326.0 | -8.6%                   |
| 3rd Judicial District | 487.3 | 468.3 | -3.9%                   |
| 4th Judicial District | 403.9 | 476.5 | +18.0%                  |

- Filings per authorized judicial position: Statewide
- Filings per authorized judicial position: 1st
- ▼ Filings per authorized judicial position: 2nd
- Filings per authorized judicial position: 3rd
- ▲ Filings per authorized judicial position: 4th

**FIGURE 3.**  
Proportion of Alaska Superior Court Filings Felony, Domestic Relations, Probate, Civil, and Children's Matters: 2005-2012.



Source: Alaska Court System, Office of the Administrative Director (2006-2013). *Alaska Court System Annual Report*. Anchorage, AK.  
Note: The Alaska Court System compiles case filing data by fiscal year (July 1-June 30), not calendar year.

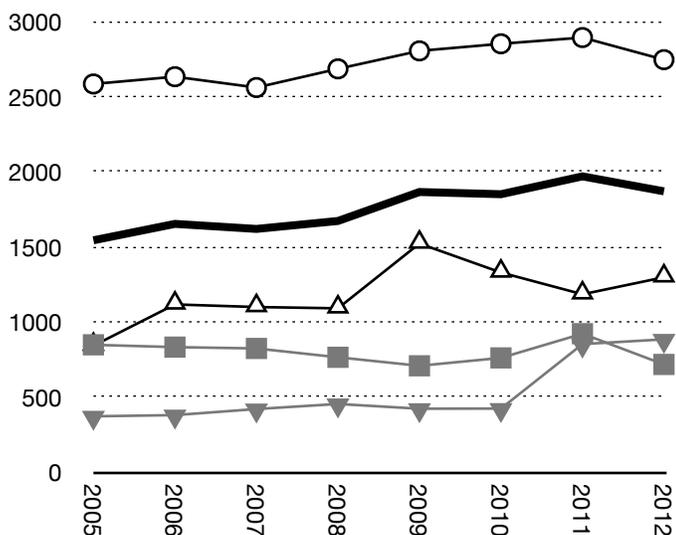
Source: Alaska Court System, Office of the Administrative Director (2006-2013). *Alaska Court System Annual Report*. Anchorage, AK.  
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judicial position that is 18% higher than in 2005 and the highest in the state.

**Types of Cases** Looking more closely at the types of cases heard by superior court judges statewide as percentages of the overall number of cases filed (Figure 3) reveals a substantial increase in the percent of probate cases filed, which now constitute 23.0% of cases filed statewide in Superior Court as compared to a low of 16.9% in 2007. The percent of “children’s matters” (which includes both Child in Need of Aid and delinquency cases) has decreased slightly from 14.0% in 2007 to 12.6% in 2012. Domestic relations (custody and divorce) cases have increased slightly as a percentage of overall caseload

**FIGURE 4.**

District Court Filings per Authorized District Court Judge Position, State of Alaska and Judicial District: 2005-2012.



| Jurisdiction          | Year   |        | % Change<br>2005 - 2012 |
|-----------------------|--------|--------|-------------------------|
|                       | 2005   | 2012   |                         |
| Statewide             | 1543.0 | 1868.9 | +21.1%                  |
| 1st Judicial District | 847.4  | 716.8  | -15.4%                  |
| 2nd Judicial District | 371.7  | 426.1  | +14.6%                  |
| 3rd Judicial District | 2583.5 | 2745.2 | +6.3%                   |
| 4th Judicial District | 841.5  | 1296.9 | +54.1%                  |

- Filings per authorized judicial position: Statewide
- Filings per authorized judicial position: 1st
- ▼ Filings per authorized judicial position: 2nd
- Filings per authorized judicial position: 3rd
- ▲ Filings per authorized judicial position: 4th

Source: Alaska Court System, Office of the Administrative Director (2006-2013). *Alaska Court System Annual Report*. Anchorage, AK.  
 Note: The Alaska Court System compiles case filing data by fiscal year (July 1 -June30), not calendar year.

over the same time period, from 22.6% in 2007 to 24.5% in 2012. Felony criminal cases, on the other hand, have decreased slightly from 2007 – down from 30.8% to 28.5% of the total Superior Court caseload. General civil cases (personal injury, property, and debt, etc.) have also declined – from 13.7% of cases in 2007 (and 15.9% in 2005) down to 11.4% of cases in 2012.

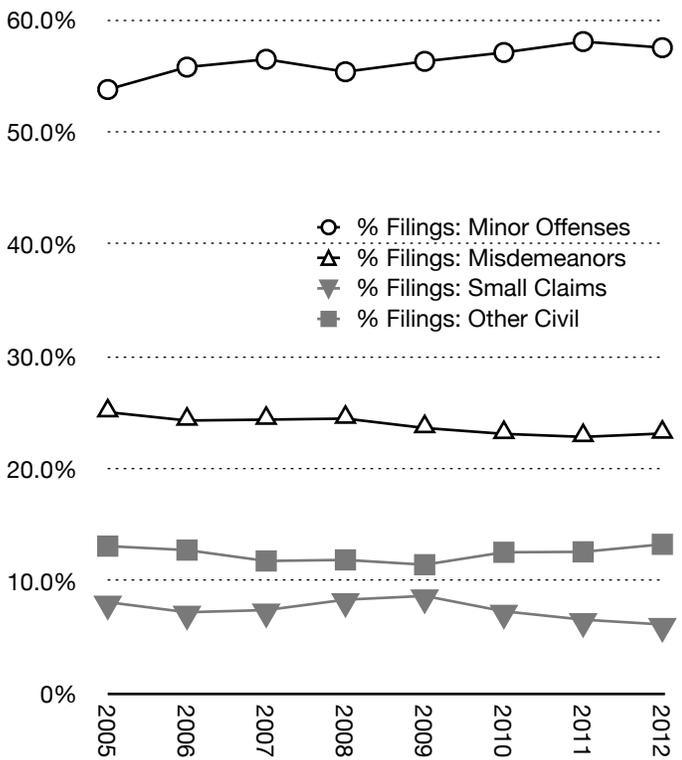
**District Court Filings.** District Courts in Alaska handle misdemeanor criminal cases – cases where the potential jail time is less than one year – and civil cases. On the civil side, District Courts hear small claims cases (cases worth less than \$10,000), evictions, protective orders, and cases with up to \$100,000 in damages. District Court cases can be heard by both District Court judges and magistrates. In 2012, the Third Judicial District had 34 such authorized judicial positions (16 District Court Judges and 18 magistrates). The First Judicial District had 3 District Court judges and 11 magistrates in 2012. The Second Judicial District had 4 authorized District Court judicial positions, all magistrates. And the Fourth Judicial District had 17 authorized judicial positions at the District Court level – 4 judges and 13 magistrates.

**District Court Caseloads.** Although half of the District Court level judicial positions in the state are located in the Third Judicial District, this number does not meet the needs of the 67% of the state’s population that lives in this region of Alaska. District Court caseloads have fluctuated somewhat based on the number of authorized judicial positions, but as shown in Figure 4, District Court filings in the Third Judicial District are consistently close to twice as high as any other judicial district. In 2012, the Third Judicial District had 2,745.2 filings per each of its 34 authorized judicial positions, compared to 2,583.5 in 2005 for 35 authorized judicial positions, an increase of about 6% per authorized judicial position. The next closest judicial district in terms of filings is the Fourth Judicial District, which in 2012 had 1,296.9 filings per authorized judicial position. This represents an increase of over 54% from 2005 (841.5 filings per authorized judicial position), a change in large part attributable to the loss of seven magistrate positions in 2009. Two more magistrates have been added subsequently. Similarly, the Second Judicial District experienced a doubling of filings per authorized judicial position in 2011 (from 423.1 to 852.3) when it lost four magistrates that year. The

First Judicial District, which has had a consistent number of authorized judicial positions at the District Court level from 2005 to 2012, has seen its number of filings per position remain relatively constant, though the 716.8 filings per authorized judicial position in 2012 was a low for the time period analyzed.

**Types of Cases.** As shown in Figure 5, the vast majority of cases handled by District Courts are what are termed “minor offenses” – primarily traffic infractions such as speeding, other improper driving behavior, and so on, but also including minor fish and game violations and illegal possession of alcohol offenses. Such cases comprised 53.8% of the District Court caseload in 2005 and increased moderately to 57.5% of District Court cases in 2012. Misdemeanor criminal offenses experienced a slight decline from 25.0% of cases in 2005 to 23.1% of cases in 2012. After a brief dip, the number of “other civil” cases (which includes domestic violence actions, evictions, and debt or contract disputes) went from 13.1% in 2005 to 13.3% in 2012. The number of small claims cases as a percentage of overall caseload increased slightly from 13.1% in 2005 to 13.3% in 2012.

**FIGURE 5.**  
Proportion of Alaska District Court Filings Minor Offenses, Misdemeanors, Small Claims, and Other Civil: 2005-2012.



Source: Alaska Court System, Office of the Administrative Director (2006-2013). *Alaska Court System Annual Report*. Anchorage, AK.  
Note: The Alaska Court System compiles case filing data by fiscal year (July 1-June 30), not calendar year.

**Summary.** Despite occasional claims that society has become more litigious, the number of case filings in Alaska Superior and District Courts has remained relatively constant, both when measured against the number of residents in the state and the number of authorized judicial positions, though the case filings per authorized judicial position fluctuates with changes in the number of positions. In terms of the types of cases heard, the percentage of probate cases has increased in the Superior Courts, but other types of cases have remained relatively constant or declined slightly. The percentages of types of cases heard at the District court level have not changed significantly from 2005 to 2012, though the Third Judicial District continues to have a disproportionately high caseload per authorized judicial position.

**Note:** As specified by AS 22.20.310, the Administrative Director of the Alaska Court System (ACS) is required to submit an annual report to the Alaska Legislature that presents comprehensive statistical data on: justices, judges and magistrates, court administration (including descriptions of court facilities, programs and personnel), court operations, case filing and disposition information, and “other information and data relevant to aiding the public and the legislature in understanding the organization, administration, caseload, disposition of cases, and accomplishments of the court system.”

The data analyzed and presented in this fact sheet were extracted from data tables presented in each of the ACS’s annual statistical reports that were published for the period FY 2005 - FY 2012.

ACS annual reports for FY 2007 - FY 2012 are available to the public free of charge on the Alaska Court System website: <http://courts.alaska.gov/annualrep.htm>. ACS annual reports for FY 2005 - FY 2006 are available through the Alaska State Court Law Library at <http://courts.alaska.gov/library.htm>.

Readers should be aware that occasional changes in the manner in which cases are reported/recorded by the Alaska Court System may account for some changes in case filing totals over time for specific courts/jurisdictions. For purposes of this report, however, such changes to reporting/recording processes are not likely to substantially impact the overall case filing/disposition trends presented.

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# The Alaska Justice Statistical Analysis Center

## About

The Alaska Justice Statistical Analysis Center (AJSAC) was established by Administrative Order No. 89, signed by Governor William Sheffield on July 2, 1986. Since that time the AJSAC has been housed within the University of Alaska Anchorage Justice Center. The AJSAC assists Alaska criminal justice agencies, as well as state and local governments and officials, with the development, implementation, and evaluation of criminal justice programs and policies through the collection, analysis, and reporting of crime and justice statistics.

Since 1972, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and its predecessor agency, the National Criminal Justice Information and Statistics Service, has provided support to state and territorial governments to establish and operate Statistical Analysis Centers (SACs) to collect, analyze, and report statistics on crime and justice to federal, state, and local levels of government, and to share state-level information nationally. There are currently 53 SACs located in the United States and its Territories. The AJSAC is a member of the Justice Research and Statistics Association (JRSA), a national nonprofit organization comprised of SAC directors, researchers, and practitioners dedicated to policy-oriented research and analysis.

## Contact Information

### Location

The Alaska Justice Statistical Analysis Center (AJSAC) is housed in the University of Alaska Anchorage Justice Center, which is located on the second floor of the UAA/APU Consortium Library, Suite 213.

### Mailing Address

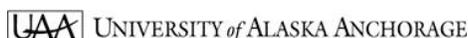
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## On The Web

To learn more about the AJSAC research, please visit our website at: <http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/ajsac/>



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