

**KING COUNTY
SUPERIOR COURT**

**1999
ANNUAL REPORT**

Message from the Presiding Judge

Brian D. Gain

I am pleased to present the King County Superior Court Annual report for 1999. This past year brought a great deal of change and opportunity as the Superior Court prepared for the new millennium.

Major changes in the bench took place in 1999. Two of our judges are now Supreme Court Justices – Justice Faith Ireland who was elected to the Supreme Court, and Presiding Judge Bobbe Bridge, who was appointed to the Supreme Court by Governor Gary Locke. Judge Marsha Pechman was appointed to the United States District Court, and Judge George Finkle resigned to enter the private dispute resolution field.

The King County Superior Court faced a number of challenges in 1999. Most significant was the increase in criminal case filings. Although these filings have increased over the past several years, the full impact was felt in 1999 as pending caseloads began to have an effect on the Court's case management system. To address this additional workload, two new judicial positions were created in the 2000 budget which was adopted in November. Department 50 will begin in July, 2000, and Department 51 in January of 2001. Another challenge was making sure that the Court's automated systems were prepared for Y2K, and thanks to the Computer Services staff, the transition was trouble-free.

1999 was also a year of opportunity, and several important activities were implemented or initiated:

- A work group led by retired Judge Charles V. Johnson published a report with a series of recommendations to streamline and build upon improvements in the Juvenile Court case management process. Chief Juvenile Judge Laura Inveen is leading the effort to implement those recommendations.
- Building on the positive impact of the Drug Court project for felony cases, a Juvenile Drug Court project was launched, over which Judge Inveen presides.
- As part of the effort to respond to the increase in drug case filings, Chief Criminal Judge Michael Spearman initiated a special track for drug cases which emphasizes early dispositions by focusing the resources of the court and attorneys at the front end of the process, rather than at trial.
- In what may be one of the most significant changes in recent years, a plan was approved to merge the juvenile probation and screening operations into the Superior Court's operations, which was made possible by the dissolution of the Department of Youth Services. This will be one of the major priorities facing the Court in the coming year.

Change and opportunity have been the hallmarks of the Superior Court in 1999, as the judges, commissioners and staff have worked hard to serve the citizens of King County. I look forward to reporting to you the results of the work that has begun this year and which will carry forward for years to come.

Letter from the Court Administrator

Michael D. Planet

Preparing for change is the theme that perhaps best describes the work and activities of the staff of the Superior Court in 1999. In this annual report, much of the focus is on administrative operations and the programs and departments that work daily to serve the thousands of King County citizens who come to the Court. You will learn about programs, staffed by people with great commitment and enthusiasm, which provide valuable services to people most in need of access to justice. You will also read about the caseload that drives the activities and workload of the judges, commissioners and court staff.

The staff has been challenged in 1999 by a number of major projects that will come to fruition next year and in subsequent years:

- The merger of juvenile probation and screening operations into the Superior Court is a major change requiring an enormous planning effort to ensure that the transition is as smooth as possible and without disruption in services.
- Planning for a new Family Court Operations department which will combine staff and programs from the Court Operations and Social Services departments into one unit which coordinates the delivery of programs and services in family law cases.
- Preparation for Y2K, which involves not only making sure that the Court's automated systems are compliant, but that there are sufficient manual back-ups in the event that systems fail.
- The involvement and participation of key staff in major system-wide initiatives including the Juvenile Justice Operational Master Plan, the Courthouse Seismic project, the Unified Family Court, and the Juvenile Justice Wide Area Network Replacement projects, to name just a few of the high-profile projects underway this year.

Each of these important projects aims toward improving the quality of justice by streamlining, re-engineering, and revising the way court services are provided. They enable the Court move forward in response to new trends, issues, ideas and opportunities. And, they build on the Court's mission to "serve the public by ensuring justice through accessible and effective forums for the fair, just, understandable and timely resolution of legal matters."

King County Superior Court

is a general jurisdiction trial court with responsibility for:

- ◆ Civil cases
- ◆ Family law including dissolutions, child support, and adoptions
- ◆ Felony criminal cases
- ◆ Juvenile offender matters; and
- ◆ Juvenile dependencies, including abused and neglected children, children in need of services, at-risk youth, and truancies.

King County Superior Court:

- ◆ Is the largest of the 30 superior court districts in Washington State.
- ◆ Handles a caseload of about 65,000 new cases per year.
- ◆ Operates at five sites, including the King County Courthouse, Juvenile Court, and mental illness court at Seattle locations, the Regional Justice Center in Kent, and an Ex Parte calendar at Bellevue District Court.
- ◆ Has 49 judges and 11 commissioners
- ◆ Is supported by 238 Superior Court staff and 223 staff in the Department of Judicial Administration

In 1998, the Court handled 64,665 new cases, including:

- ◆ 10,130 criminal cases
- ◆ general civil cases
- ◆ domestic civil cases
- ◆ 7,419 juvenile offender cases
- ◆ 5,266 juvenile dependency cases
- ◆ 1,916 mental illness cases
- ◆ 6,936 other case types

SERVING JUSTICE

JUDICIAL OFFICERS

JUDGES

Judges of the King County Superior Court serving as of December 1999 appear below. The year appointed (A) or elected (E) to the bench is shown in parentheses.

Richard M. Ishikawa (1979, E)
Anthony P. Wartnik (1980, A)
Jim Bates (1981, A)
George T. Mattson (1981, A)
Patricia Aitken (1982, A)
Donald D. Haley (1983, A)
Faith Ireland (1983, A)*
John Darrah (1985, E)
Sharon Armstrong (1985, A)
Norma Smith Huggins (1988, A)
Marsha J. Pechman (1988, A)*
Steven Scott (1988, A)
R. Joseph Wesley (1988, A)
Michael J. Fox (1988, A)
J. Kathleen Learned (1988, E)
Dale B. Ramerman (1989, E)
Carol A. Schapira (1989, E)
William L. Downing (1989, A)
Joan E. DuBuque (1989, A)
LeRoy McCullough (1989, A)
George A. Finkle (1989, A)*
Bobbe J. Bridge (1990, A)*
Robert H. Alsdorf (1990, A)
Janice Niemi (1990, E)
Larry A. Jordan (1991, A)
Ann Schindler (1991, A)
Peter D. Jarvis (1991, A)
Charles W. Mertel (1992, A)
Deborah D. Fleck (1992, A)
Laura C. Inveen (1992, A)
Michael C. Hayden (1992, E)
Brian D. Gain (1993, E)
Harriett M. Cody (1993, E)
Michael S. Spearman (1993, E)
Richard A. Jones (1994, A)
Linda Lau (1995, A)
Richard D. Eadie (1995, A)
Nicole K. MacInnes (1995, A)
Jeanette Burrage (1995, E)
Michael J. Trickey (1996, A)
Glenna Hall (1996, A)

Jeffrey M. Ramsdell (1996, E)
Philip G. Hubbard, Jr. (1996, E)
Suzanne M. Barnett (1996, E)
Jay V. White (1996, E)
Jim Street (1996, E)
Patricia Clark (1998, A)
Dean S. Lum (1998, A)
Ronald Kessler (1999, A)
Terry Lukens (1999, A)
Palmer Robinson (1999, A)
Helen Halpert (1999, A)

COMMISSIONERS

Commissioners of the King County Superior Court who served during 1999 are listed below. Their year appointed is shown in parentheses.

Stephen M. Gaddis (1981)
Carlos Y. Velategui (1986)
Bonnie Canada-Thurston (1993)
Kimberley D. Prochnau (1994)
Eric B. Watness (1995)
James A Doerty (1995)
Hollis Holman (1996)
Nancy Bradburn-Johnson (1998)
Leonid Ponomarchuk (1998)
Marilyn Sellers (1998)

* Judges who left the Court in 1999.

ENHANCED

CASE MANAGEMENT

Drug Court

Implemented in August 1994, King County Drug Court was the twelfth drug court in the country and now serves as a national mentor to the more than 400 drug courts operating across the nation.

Drug Court is a pre-sentencing program that provides eligible defendants the opportunity to receive drug treatment in lieu of incarceration.

Eligible defendants can elect to participate in the program or proceed with traditional court processing. Participants come under the court's supervision and are required to attend treatment sessions, undergo random urinalysis, and appear before the Drug Court judge on a regular basis.

Drug Court provides eligible defendants the opportunity to receive treatment in lieu of incarceration. Since 1994, 313 defendants have successfully completed the requirements.

The Drug Court Program accepts cases in which the defendant has been arrested on felony drug possession charges and has no prior adult convictions for sex or violent offenses. Defendants with current drug delivery charges are ineligible.

Since the program's inception:

- 1572 defendants have entered treatment
- 424 are currently active in the program
- 313 have graduated.

Of those who graduated:

- 13% were facing a state prison sentence
- 6% were 1 charge away from a state prison sentence
- 20% were 2 charges away from a state prison sentence

Defendants who meet the requirements of each of three levels of Drug Court graduate from the program and the charges are dismissed. Those who fail to make progress are terminated from the program and sentenced on their original charge.

Independent evaluation results have shown that one year following Drug Court involvement, 9 percent of drug court graduates had new felony charges compared to 25 percent of those who declined or failed the program.

VUCSA Court

Controlled substances cases ("drug cases") comprise a significant portion of the criminal caseload in King County Superior Court. In 1999, nearly half of all criminal filings designated to be heard in Seattle were drug cases. Delays in providing information to defendants and their counsels, significant continuances of court appearances, and delayed plea opportunities have served as impediments to moving these cases through the court system.

To improve management of drug cases, in October 1999 the Court piloted a special track for drug cases, called VUCSA Court.

VUCSA Court features earlier appointment of counsel; earlier delivery of discovery, criminal history and a plea offer to defense counsel; judicial resources for combined hearings; and assignment to a judge when the trial date is set.

The drug track eliminates unnecessary hearings while providing judicial resources for earlier resolution. For cases ready for a guilty plea, the arraignment hearing also serves as the disposition hearing.

The pilot project has reduced the average time from filing to sentencing by 36 days, a significant reduction. The average number of hearings has also

VUCSA Court decreases the court time needed to resolve drug-related cases and the length of jail stays.

decreased, from 4.1 to 3.5 hearings per case. Though the trial rate has remained essentially the same (about 4% of cases), trials occur sooner from filing. The drug track has also resulted in a significant decrease in the length of jail stays, which is projected to save the jail about \$300,000 in 2000.

The Mandatory Arbitration Program provides an equitable, less expensive and faster means of resolving civil disputes while reducing court congestion, case processing costs, and litigants' expenses. Implemented in October 1980, the program was initially limited to civil cases involving monetary judgments of less than \$10,000; this limit has been raised several times and now reaches \$35,000 per claim. In 1999, 2,282 cases were resolved by arbitration.

Interpreter Services has assisted people with interpreters at the downtown courthouse, Regional Justice Center, and Juvenile Court since 1992. The staff of five, including two court-certified Spanish interpreters, is responsible for scheduling interpreters for all foreign spoken languages and American Sign language for hearings, trials and court-related programs in criminal, civil and family law matters. As the number of languages serviced has grown to over 90, the number of interpreters

associated with the office is more than 200.

Guardianship-Probate Program volunteers are available four days per week to help guardians and estate representatives to resolve delinquent cases or bring them into compliance with court requirements. The program maintains a pool of about 40 volunteer attorneys and paralegals who commit to six months of service in exchange for CLE training in guardianship and probate matters.

SERVING FAMILIES

COURT PROGRAMS

Volunteer Attorneys Conduct Family Law Settlement Conferences

The court-annexed Settlement Conference Pilot Project, established in 1997, consists of a panel of nearly 100 premier family law attorneys who act as Magistrates for family law settlement conferences. The conferences occur in both the Seattle and Kent courthouses.

After three years, the pilot project is viewed as a resounding success. At no cost, parties obtain the insight and objective advice of an attorney experienced in this complex area of the law. Cases are more likely to be settled fairly and with an eye to important detail. The parties save the expense, both emotional and financial, of a trial. The court is also well served when cases that can be settled are in fact settled.

The project's success is due to the hundreds of hours donated by the family law bar. Each attorney donates up to a half-day of their time three or more times per year, assisting both represented and unrepresented parties in their settlement efforts. Since the inception of the program, attorneys have conducted over 1,000 settlement conferences.

The project was started and continues with extremely limited administrative assistance. The King County Bar Association, attorney Larry Besk, the firm of Curran Mendoza, and an extern from the Department of Judicial Administration have contributed administrative services to the project.

Family Court Services was established in 1950 to provide professional evaluation services to assist judges and commissioners in making decisions in the best interest of children and families. In addition, social workers provide and recommend intervention services that move families from litigation and conflict escalation to mediation and conflict resolution. Services provided include: parenting plan mediation and evaluation, parent seminars, domestic violence assessments, conciliation counseling, independent adoption oversight, and marriage waiver assessment. In 1999, FCS completed 1,265 cases, representing 1,454 children, and served 1,152 parents through its parenting seminar.

The Family Law Facilitator Program was piloted in 1993 and became a permanent part of court operations in 1994. The Facilitator Program provides procedural and referral information to pro se litigants, to help them prepare their case for a hearing before a commissioner or judge. Assistance in obtaining and understanding required forms and complying with local rules improves litigants' access to the court and reduces the time judges and commissioners spend on their cases. To further enhance services, in 1998 the RJC Facilitators office opened the Family Law Information Center.

Unified Family Court, at the Regional Justice Center, provides case management services for selected families that have multiple Title 26 & 13 court cases or issues such as domestic violence, mental illness, substance abuse, or child abuse or neglect. Cases managed by the UFC are assigned to one judge and one commissioner. Case management coordinates cases and services, identifies procedural issues, and encourages alternative dispute resolution. Each case in the UFC is monitored for compliance with court ordered services and evaluations. Since 1997, the UFC has provided case management for more than 150 families. Additionally, the UFC Training Oversight Committee has provided more than 40 presentations on issues affecting families and children.

The Family Law Court Appointed Special Advocates (Family Law CASA) program was established in 1983 to protect the best interests of children in custody and visitation disputes. The Family Law CASA Program provides qualified, trained volunteers to conduct independent investigations and submit unbiased recommendations

to the Court. A CASA is appointed in family law cases with allegations of sexual, substance, and/or physical abuse, third party custody proceedings or when a child has reach the age of discretion. In 1999, volunteers were appointed to 221 new cases, serving 342 children.

AND CHILDREN

COURT PROGRAMS

Court Takes Responsibility for Juvenile Probation

To improve the delivery of services and supervision of juveniles under the Court's jurisdiction, the Court and the King County Executive began transferring responsibility for juvenile probation services to the Court in 1999. The reorganization, to be completed by January 2000, separates the former Department of Youth Services into probation and detention operations so that each service can be tailored to the population served and to permit specialized training and support for the respective work forces.

Detention services will be moved to the Department of Adult Detention, renamed the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention. Detention and probation will continue to work closely together and with other agencies that provide treatment, social services, and alternatives to secure detention.

The reorganization gives Juvenile Court judges greater control over the supervision of youth through probation, which is expected to improve the coordinated delivery of rehabilitative services for young people. The Court will continue to approve detention screening criteria and any population management strategies, including alternatives to detention. A collaborative effort will also be initiated with the Department of Human and Community Services to ensure that additional services for youth are available.

The reorganization also changes the role of Juvenile Probation Counselors, resulting in less time spent in court and greater emphasis on being in the community supervising youth and working with providers to arrange services for youth and their families. The delivery of services under the new structure will be reviewed by the Criminal Justice Council in 2001.

The Dependency Court Appointed Special Advocates (Dependency CASA) program trains volunteers to represent the best interests of abused and neglected children in juvenile dependency cases. Established in 1977, this program was the first of its kind and has served as a national model for involving community volunteers in court proceedings. Volunteers spend thousands of hours each year investigating cases, interviewing parties involved in cases, monitoring compliance with court orders, and attending court hearings. In 1999, 1,700 children were served by the program.

The Partnership for Youth Justice program is an alternative to the formal court process for youth who are charged with misdemeanor offenses. The goals are to hold youth accountable, provide restitution to the victim, and assign consequences to prevent the youth from entering the formal court process. The Community Accountability Boards that conduct the process consist of specially trained volunteers from the youth's local community, operating under the supervision and support of court staff. In 1999, community volunteers served about 3,500 youth outside of the court process.

The Truancy Program is assisting 19 King County school districts to develop community truancy boards and other school-based intervention program, to implement the Court's responsibilities under the Becca Law. Truancy boards create powerful partnerships between schools, courts and communities and provide an alternative to appearing in court on a truancy petition. Court representatives work with the King County Truancy Steering Committee and present regular truancy workshops.

Juvenile Drug Court, implemented in July 1999, was funded by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) as a 24-month pilot project. As a pre-sentencing program for eligible youth offenders, the project's purpose is to demonstrate the effectiveness of intense treatment modalities when combined with weekly, bi-monthly, or monthly status hearings. Under the leadership of the presiding juvenile court judge, a team of the prosecutor, defender, probation and community treatment staff work together to apply immediate graduated sanctions and strategic incentives. This intensive approach motivates participants to progress through mandatory treatment, school, employment, community service and other court-ordered conditions. Juvenile Drug Court can enroll up to 50 participants at any given time.

The Victim Inclusion Project was launched in 1999, to incorporate the philosophy of balanced justice into the juvenile court system. The project's components include Victim Outreach, to provide information to victims about their case, answer questions, troubleshoot problems with restitution, and offer the opportunity to participate in a Victim Impact Panel; Victim Impact Panels, forums where property crime victims talk to a group of youth offenders about the emotional and financial harm that the juvenile causes when committing a crime; and Mediation, which brings crime victims and youth offenders together so that the youth can learn about the impact of the crime on the victim.

JUDICIAL CASELOAD

1999 CASE FILINGS

In 1999, the total number of cases filed with King County Superior Court was 64,665¹ and the overall caseload declined by 1.6% from 1998. Criminal filings, however, rose by 5.8%, continuing a trend of several years. Since 1994, annual criminal filings have increased by approximately 29%. Probate filings also increased significantly in 1999. Juvenile offender filings declined by more than 14% and were the lowest number filed in the past six years.

Case Type	1999 Filings	Change from 1998
Civil	19,325	-0.5%
Criminal	10,130	5.6%
Family Law	13,673	-2.6%
Probate	6,936	7.1%
Juv. Dependency	5,266	-5.5%
Juvenile Offender	7,419	-14.2%
Mental Illness	1,916	-3.8%

1999 CASE RESOLUTIONS

The Court resolved a total of 63,929² cases in 1999, a decrease of nearly 4% from 1998. The decrease was due almost entirely to the 2,840 fewer juvenile dependency resolutions. The number of resolutions increased for criminal and probate cases, mirroring the growth in these caseloads. The pending caseload at the end of 1999 was 23,896 cases, an increase of 4% from 1998.

Case Type	1999 Resolutions	Change from 1998
Civil	19,192	1.2%
Criminal	9,627	9.8%
Family Law	13,983	0.2%
Probate	6,828	6.1%
Juv. Dependency	4,791	-37.2%
Juvenile Offender	7,631	-13.1%
Mental Illness	1,877	-4.7%

1999 CRIMINAL CASELOAD

	1999 Filings	Change from 1998
Homicide	65	-1.5%
Assault	1,498	61.1%
Robbery	391	-1.0%
Burglary/Theft	1,848	2.3%

¹ An additional 7,821 civil matters were filed with the Superior Court Clerk.

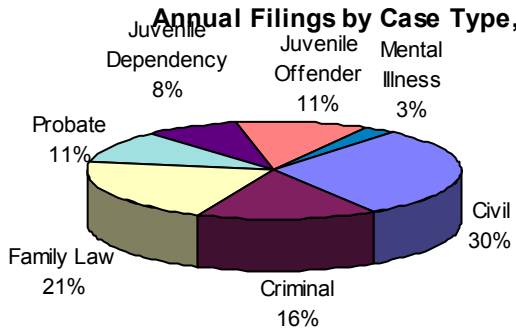
² An additional 7,823 civil matters were resolved by the Superior Court Clerk.

Motor Vehicle	499	18.5%
Controlled Substance	3,833	2.2%
Sex Crime	409	-5.5%
Other	1,593	-10.9%

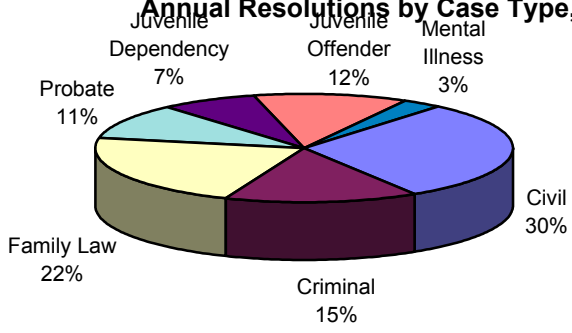
1999 TRIAL ACTIVITY

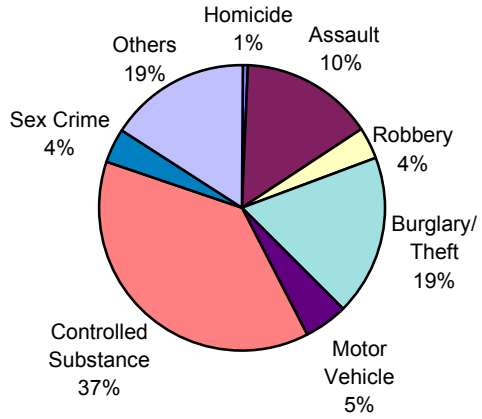
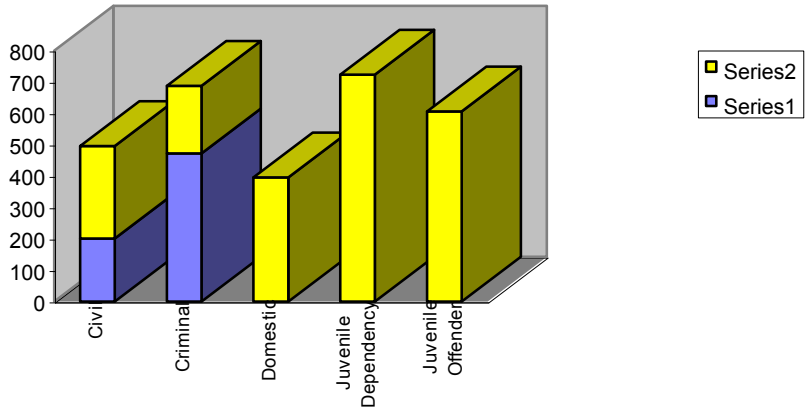
Superior Court Filing Trends, 1994-1999

Annual Filings by Case Type, 1999

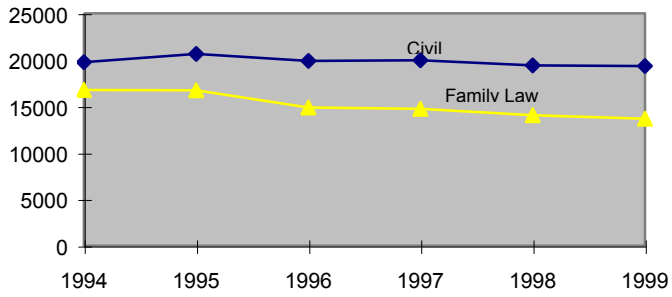
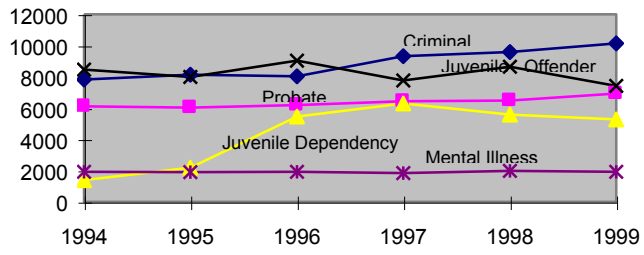


Annual Resolutions by Case Type, 1999





Filings by Case Type, 1994-1999



BUDGET

1999 FUNDING

In 1999, King County Superior Court received a total of \$24,147,348 from county, state, and grant sources. The majority of the Court's funding (88%) came from King County. The State of Washington provided a total of \$1,392,245. A combination of federal, state and private grants provided a total of \$1,496,479 (6.2%). The State also directly paid for half of the 49 judges' salaries and benefits, as well as the State's share of arbitrator and pro tem judge payments.

1999 EXPENDITURES

Operating costs include salaries for judges, bailiffs, court reporters and support staff, as well as payments to jurors and interpreters. Other expenditures include:

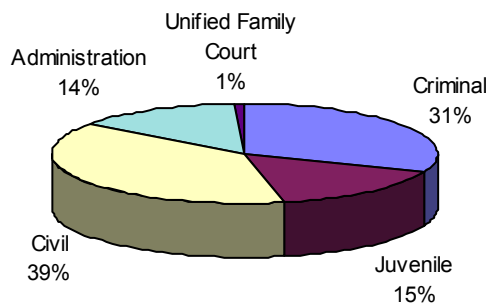
Civil: Family Court Services, Family Law Coordinator, Family Law CASA, Arbitration, and Family Law Facilitator programs.

Juvenile: Partnership for Youth Justice, Dependency CASA, juvenile court operations

Administration: Court Administrator, Presiding Judge, department directors, personnel, computer services, and support staff for payroll, purchasing, facility, accounts payable and clerical services.

Unified Family Court: Case Manager for UFC, staff for the Family Law Information Center, and some expenses of the child care center.

1999 Superior Court Expenditures



1999 Superior Court Funding by Source

