

Alaska Justice Statistical Analysis Center

FACT SHEET



JUSTICE CENTER

UNIVERSITY of ALASKA ANCHORAGE

May 2013, AJSAC 13-05

Alaska Superior Court Felony Case Processing, 2005-2012

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This fact sheet presents a summary of *Superior Court felony case filing and disposition* information published by the Alaska Court System (ACS) in its annual statistical reports for the period FY 2005 - FY 2012. In Alaska, Superior Court is a trial court of *general jurisdiction*, which means that there are no restrictions on the types of cases it can hear. In Alaska, as elsewhere, as a court of general jurisdiction Superior Court tends to deal with only the most serious criminal and civil matters. Thus, when it comes to criminal cases, Superior Court is the venue for felonies. (In contrast, Alaska's District Court is a trial court of *limited jurisdiction*, which means it can only hear specific types of cases. And, as in other jurisdictions, as a court of limited jurisdiction District Court adjudicates less serious criminal and civil cases.) Importantly, Alaska's

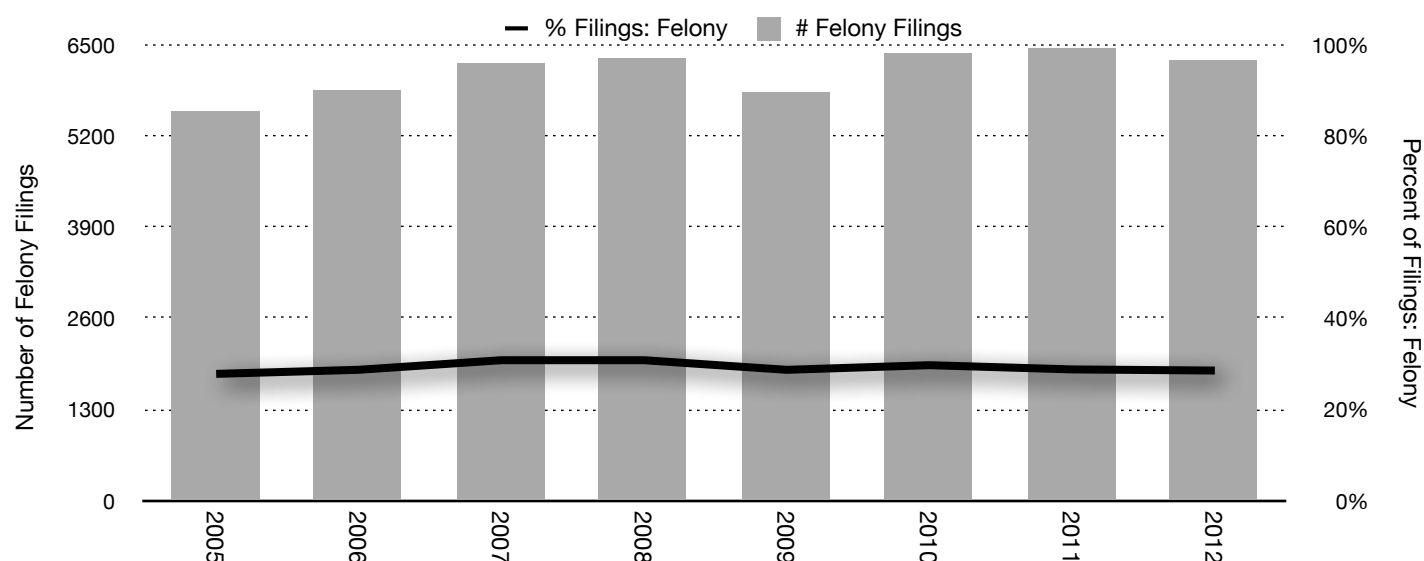
Superior Court also serves as an appellate court for both civil cases and misdemeanor criminal cases tried in District Court.

In Alaska, most felony cases are initiated in District Court; however, after an indictment by a grand jury or the filing of an information (charging document), felony cases are transferred to Superior Court for hearing and disposition.

Figure 1 presents the *total number* of felony cases filed each year for the period FY 2005 - FY 2012 (grey bars) and the *percentage* of all Superior Court case filings that were felonies (black line). Over the 8-year period spanning FY 2005 through FY 2012, the total number of felony case filings increased 13.1%, from 5,546 in FY 2005 to 6,274 in FY 2012. However, while the total number of Superior Court felony case filings increased, the percentage of all

FIGURE 1.

Number of Alaska Superior Court Felony Case Filings and Percentage of All Case Filings: Felony, 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, not calendar year.

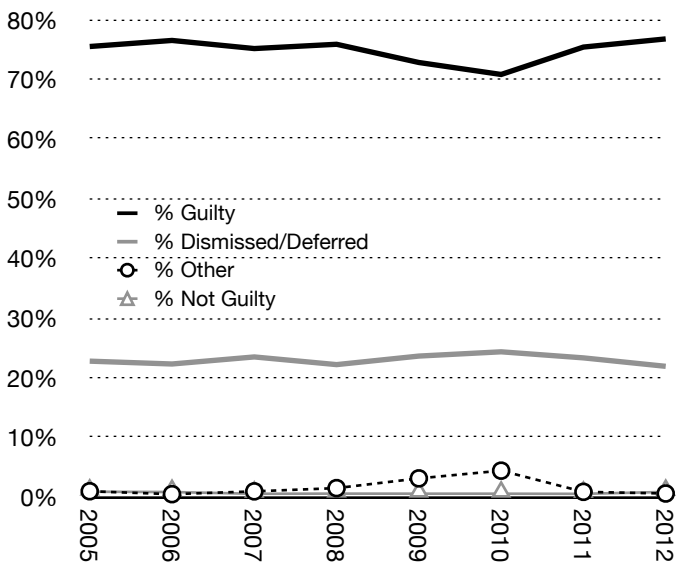
case filings that were felonies remained stable over the FY 2005 - FY 2012 period. In FY 2005 27.8% of all Superior Court case filings were felonies; in FY 2012 felony filings represented 28.5% of the Superior Court's caseload.

Composition of Felony Case Filings. The data presented in Figure 2 show the composition of Superior Court case filings for the FY 2005 - FY 2012 period. The percentage of felony case filings that were for person crimes, property crimes, drug crimes, and all other crimes combined are shown. Since FY 2005 the percentage of felony case filings for violent (i.e., person) crimes, drug crimes, and other crimes declined, while the overall percentage of felony case filings attributable to property crimes increased substantially (from 25.4% in FY 2005 to 31.6% in FY 2012).

Disposition of Felony Cases. Figure 3 (below) depicts trends in the disposition of felony cases heard in Superior Court. The specific dispositions presented include: (a) guilty (by plea, court trial, and jury trial), (b) dismissed/deferred prosecution, (c) not guilty, and (d) other, unspecified dispositions occurring after arraignment, but prior to trial.

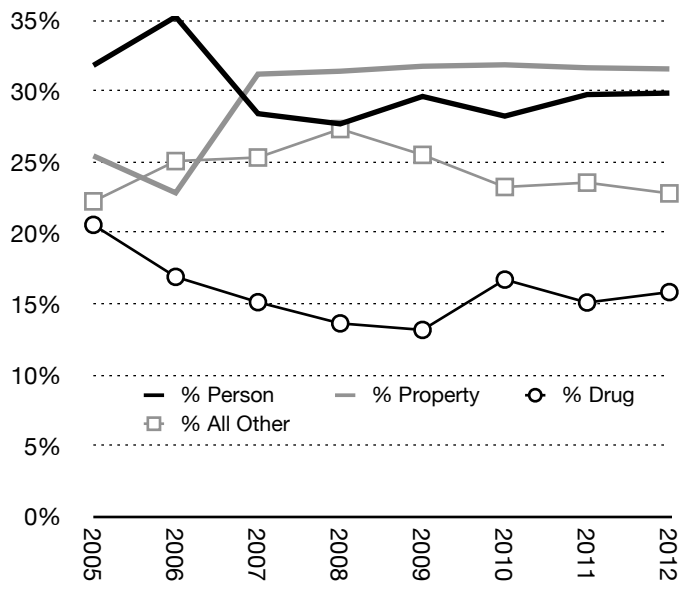
A large majority (on average, 74.8%) of Superior Court felony cases resulted in a disposition of guilty during the FY 2005 - FY 2012 period. Of those cases in which the final case disposition was guilty, the

FIGURE 3.
Superior Courts Felony Case Dispositions



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, not calendar year.

FIGURE 2.
Superior Courts Felony Case Composition of Filings, 2005-2012.

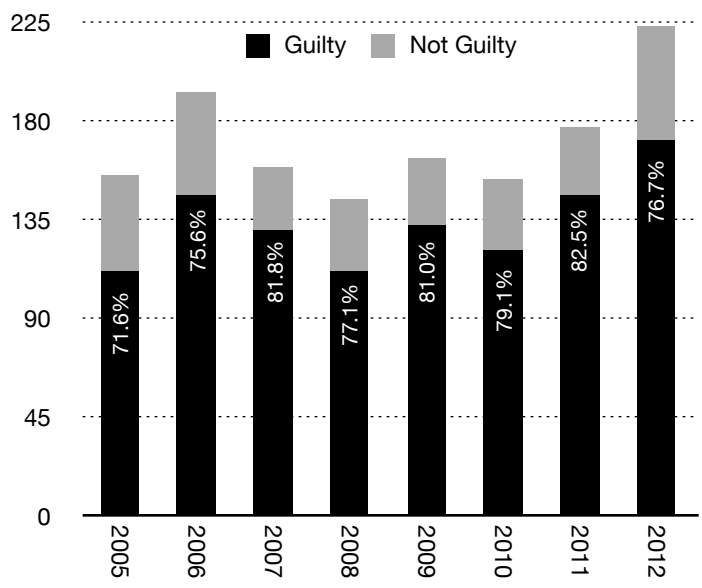


Source: Alaska Court System, Office of the Administrative Director (2006-2013). *Alaska Court System Annual Report*. Anchorage, AK. Note: The Alaska Court System compiles case filing data by fiscal year, not calendar year.

vast majority (97%) were the result of a plea (data not shown).

Only in rare instances did felony cases filed in Superior Court go to trial. Over the FY 2005 - FY 2012 period only 2.9% of all felony cases proceeded

FIGURE 4.
Superior Courts Felony Cases: Guilty vs. Not Guilty Dispositions for Cases Proceeding to Trial, 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, not calendar year.

to a court (i.e., bench) trial or a jury trial (data not shown).

Figure 4 presents the total number of felony cases that proceeded to trial (bench trial or jury trial), as well as the percentage of cases that resulted in a disposition of guilty for FY 2005 through FY 2012. Overall, the likelihood of an acquittal for defendants whose cases proceeded to trial declined slightly during this period (from 28.4% of felony cases in 2005 to 23.3% in 2012).

Summary. This fact sheet presented felony case processing statistics for the Alaska Superior Court for the period spanning FY 2005 through FY 2012. Information was presented on the total number of felony cases processed by the Superior Court, the composition (i.e., type) of felony cases handled, and the disposition of felony cases.

The data presented here show that while the total number of felony cases processed by the Superior Court has increased since FY 2005, the overall percentage of Superior Court cases that were felonies remained stable. With respect to felony case dispositions, most felony cases brought to Superior Court result in a finding of guilt - either through a plea, or through a finding arrived at by the court (via a judicial decision or jury verdict). Among guilty dispositions, nearly all (97%) were the result of a plea by the defendant. For the 8-year period examined, only 2.9% of felony cases proceeded to trial. Of those felony cases that did go to trial, nearly eight out of every ten resulted in a finding of guilt. Overall, the likelihood of an acquittal for defendants whose cases proceeded to trial declined slightly during the FY 2005 - FY 2012 period.

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.

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.

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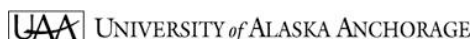
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