

Alaska Justice Information Center

FACT SHEET



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Drug Cases Filed Across the Alaska Court System, FY 2008–2017

Daniel Reinhard, M.A., Research Professional

This fact sheet presents data on drug-related court filings throughout the state of Alaska, as reported in the Alaska Court System annual reports, for fiscal years (FY) 2008 through 2017. These annual reports record cases and other relevant court data from July 1 to June 30 of the following year. The Alaska Court System annual report presents yearly overviews of the work conducted by the Alaska Court System, including court activity such as cases filed, cases disposed, and summary information about the types of cases occurring in each of the more than 40 state court locations throughout Alaska. This fact sheet explores the 10-year trend of misdemeanor and felony drug case filings for Alaska, and in the Anchorage, Palmer, Kenai and Fairbanks courts from FY 2008 to 2017. These four courts processed 68.2% of all misdemeanor drug cases filed, and 73.9% of all felony drug cases filed in the state of Alaska.

Drug cases in Alaska

Alaska Court System annual reports provide a “drug” category of cases that combines all cases related to misconduct involving a controlled substance, and the manufacture, delivery or possession of imitation controlled substances. As a result, misconduct involving marijuana and misconduct involving other narcotics or stimulants are grouped within the same classification of “drug” cases.

Proportion of drug cases

Figure 1 shows the percent of all misdemeanor and felony case filings across Alaska that were misdemeanor and felony drug cases from FY 2008–2017.

Overall, the 10-year trend for filed drug cases indicates an increase in the proportion of drug cases relative to other cases from FY 2008–2013, followed by a gradual decline from FY 2013–2015, and a substantial decline from FY 2015–2017. Misdemeanor drug cases rebound from FY 2016–2017, however, felony drug cases decline considerably from FY 2016–2017. The year with the greatest proportion of drug cases was in FY 2013, when 5.7% of statewide misdemeanor and felony cases filed were drug-related. The year with the lowest proportion of drug cases was in FY 2017, when 3% of statewide misdemeanor and felony cases filed were drug-related.

Drug case filing rate

The rates of felony and misdemeanor drug case filings are calculated per 100,000 residents. The drug case filing rates reported here are calculated using population data retrieved from the Alaska Department of

Figure 1

Drug cases as a percent of all filings, FY 2008–2017

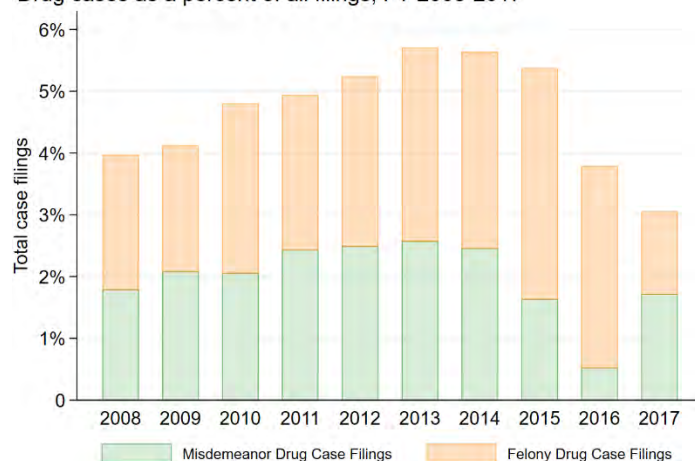
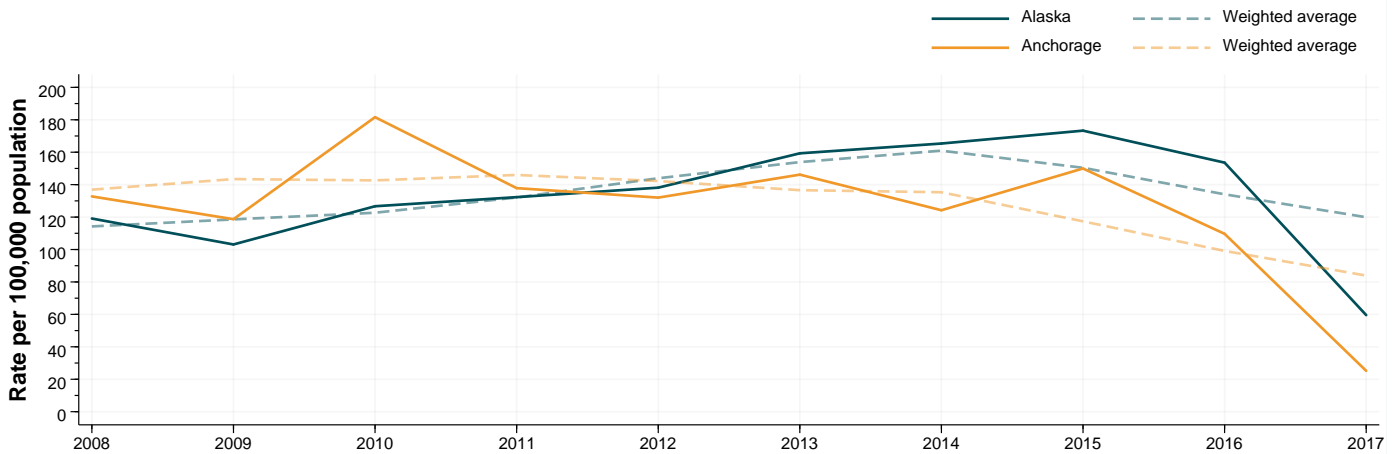


Figure 2

Alaska and Anchorage Felony Drug Case Filings:
Rates from FY 2008-2017



Source of data: Alaska Court System, *Annual Statistical Reports* (FY 2008-2017)

Labor and Workforce Development’s Annual Alaska Population Estimate Reports.

Overall felony drug cases filed

Figure 2 shows felony drug cases filed for Anchorage, and for the state of Alaska excluding Anchorage, from FY 2008–2017. The two solid lines show drug case filing rates per 100,000 residential population, while the dashed lines present the moving average trend line for the time series. Overall, the 10-year trend reveals that the felony drug case filing rate in Anchorage remained stable from FY 2008–2015, excluding the spike in 2010, before a substantial decline from FY 2015–2017. The 10-year trend for Alaska,

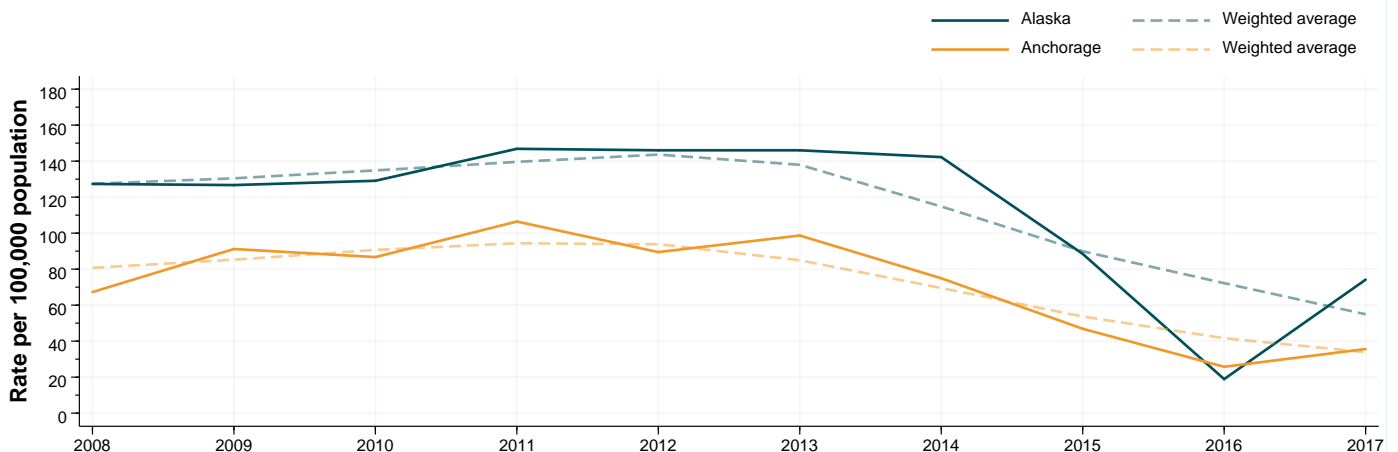
excluding Anchorage, gradually increased every year from FY 2009–2015 before a similarly substantial decline from FY 2015–2017. The highest rate in Anchorage was 181.7 in FY 2010, and lowest was 25.2 in FY 2017. The highest rate in Alaska was 163.9 in FY 2015, and the lowest was 45.7 in FY 2017. The average felony drug case filing rate over the 10-year period in Anchorage was 125.8 per 100,000 residents, and for the rest of Alaska it was 133.1 per 100,000 residents.

Overall misdemeanor drug cases filed

Figure 3 shows misdemeanor drug cases filed for Anchorage, and for Alaska excluding Anchorage, from FY 2008–2017. The two solid lines present the actual

Figure 3

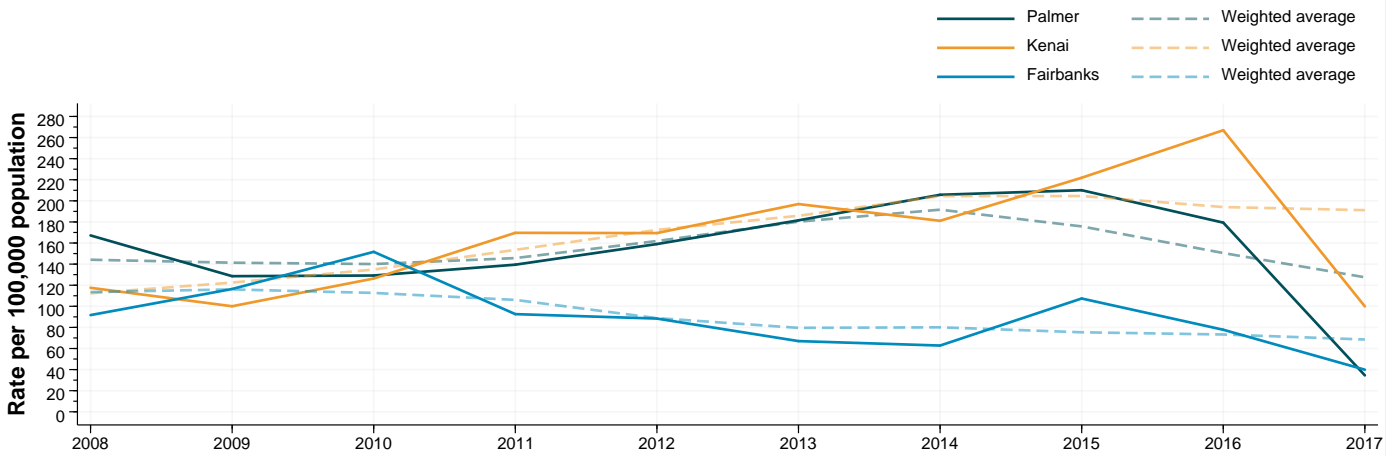
Alaska and Anchorage Misdemeanor Drug Case Filings:
Rates from FY 2008-2017



Source of data: Alaska Court System, *Annual Statistical Reports* (FY 2008-2017)

Figure 4

Palmer, Kenai and Fairbanks Felony Drug Case Filings:
Rates from FY 2008-2017



Source of data: Alaska Court System, *Annual Statistical Reports* (FY 2008-2017)

data on the drug case filing rates, while the dashed lines present the moving average trend line for the time series. Overall, the 10-year trend reveals that the misdemeanor drug case filing rate in Anchorage remained relatively stable or increased from FY 2008–2013, before a substantial decline from FY 2013–2016. There was a slight rebound in the misdemeanor drug case filing rate in Anchorage from FY 2016–2017. The 10-year trend for Alaska excluding Anchorage, has remained stable or gradually increased every year from FY 2008–2014 before a substantial decline from FY 2014–2016. The rest of the state experienced a more pronounced misdemeanor drug case filing rate increase from FY 2016–2017 compared to Anchorage. The highest rate in Anchorage was 106.4 in FY 2011, and lowest was 25.7 in FY 2016. The highest rate in Alaska was 146.8 in 2013, and the lowest was 18.9 in FY 2016. The average misdemeanor drug case filing rate over the 10-year period in Anchorage was 72.3 per 100,000 residents, and for the rest of Alaska it was 114.6 per 100,000 residents.

Other courts' felony drug cases

Figure 4 shows the rate of felony drug cases filed for the Palmer, Kenai and Fairbanks courts from FY 2008-2017. The three solid lines present the drug case filing rate per 100,000 residential population, while the dashed lines present the moving average trend line for the time series. Overall, the 10-year trend reveals that the felony drug case filing rate in Palmer

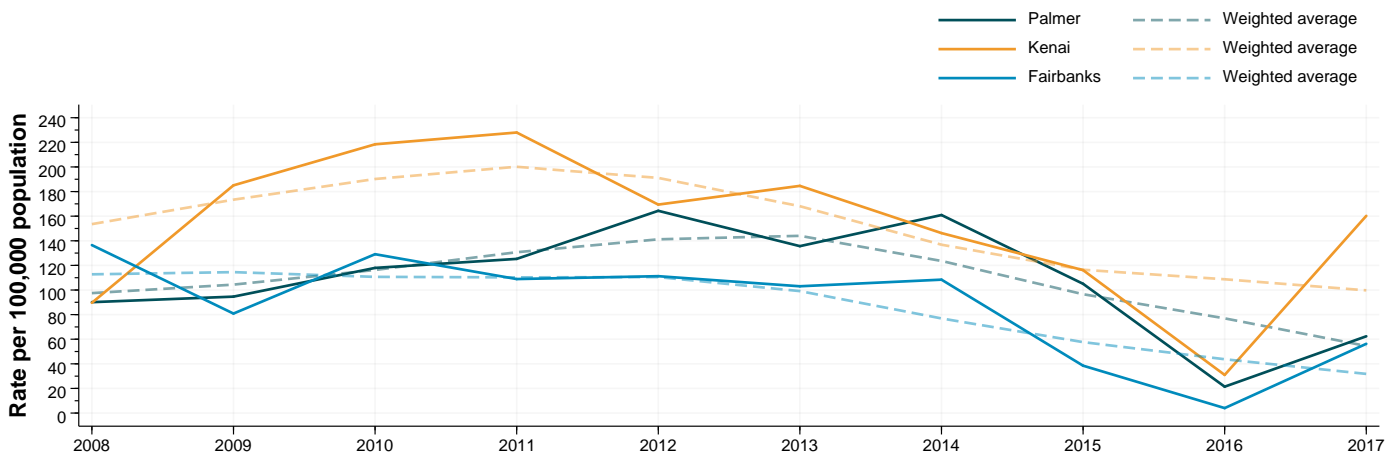
gradually increased from FY 2009–2015 before a slight decrease from FY 2015–2016 and a substantial decline from FY 2016-2017. The Kenai court remained stable or increased every year from FY 2009–2016 before a substantial decline from FY 2016–2017. The Fairbanks court maintained an overall downward trend from FY 2008–2017, despite an increase from FY 2014–2015. The highest rate in Palmer was 210.1 in FY 2015, and the lowest rate was 34.5 in FY 2017. The highest rate in Kenai was 266.9 in FY 2016, and the lowest was 99.9 in FY 2017. The highest rate in Fairbanks was 151.6 in FY 2010, and the lowest rate was 39.9 in FY 2017. The average felony drug case filing rate over the 10-year period in Palmer was 153.4, for Kenai it was 164.9, and for Fairbanks it was 89.5, all per 100,000 residents.

Other courts' misdemeanor drug cases

Figure 5 shows the rate of misdemeanor drug cases filed for the Palmer, Kenai and Fairbanks courts from FY 2008–2017. The three solid lines present the drug case filing rate per 100,000 residential population, while the dashed lines present the moving average trend line for the time series. Overall, the 10-year trend reveals that the misdemeanor drug case filing rate in Palmer increased from FY 2008–2014 before decreasing from FY 2014–2016 and rebounding FY 2016–2017. During this period, the Kenai court increased from FY 2008-2011 before a steady decrease from FY 2011–2016 preceding an upturn from FY

Figure 5

Palmer, Kenai and Fairbanks Misdemeanor Drug Case Filings:
Rates from FY 2008-2017



Source of data: Alaska Court System, *Annual Statistical Reports* (FY 2008-2017)

2016–2017. The Fairbanks court remained largely stable from FY 2008–2014, then decreased from FY 2014–2016 and increased FY 2016–2017. The highest rate in Palmer was 164.3 in FY 2012 and the lowest rate was 21.4 in FY 2016. The highest rate in Kenai was 228 in FY 2011, and the lowest was 31 in FY 2016. The highest rate in Fairbanks was 136.4 in FY 2008, and the lowest rate was 4 in FY 2016. The average misdemeanor drug case filing rate over the 10-year period in Palmer was 107.7, for Kenai it was 152.8, and for Fairbanks it was 87.6, all per 100,000 residents.

SUMMARY

This fact sheet presents data on both felony and misdemeanor drug case filings reported in Alaska from FY 2008–2017. The raw count data is available through the Alaska Court System annual reports. The court system count data was turned into rates

using population data from the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development to allow for a comparison between locations with different numbers of residents.

Overall, the felony drug case filing rates remained stable or increased in all locations until FY 2015 or FY 2016, before decreasing dramatically from FY 2016–2017. The exception is the Fairbanks court, which maintained an overall decrease in felony drug case filing rates during the 10-year period. The misdemeanor drug case filing rates, regardless of whether they increased or decreased between FY 2008–2014, decreased in all locations from FY 2014–2016 before increasing from 2016–2017. The year with the lowest felony drug case filing rate, for all locations, was in FY 2017. The lowest misdemeanor drug case filing rate, for all locations, was in FY 2016.

Notes

REFERENCES

All population estimates were retrieved from the State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development at: <http://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/index.cfm> (1960 to present).

As specified by AS 22.20.310, the Administrative Director of the Alaska Court System 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 Alaska Court System’s annual statistical reports published for the period FY 2008–2017. Alaska Court System annual reports are available to the public free of charge at:

<http://www.courts.alaska.gov/admin/index.htm#annualrep> (FY 2007–2017)

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.

CALCULATING RATES

Rates per 100,000 populations are calculated by dividing the number of specified events by the total population and then multiplying the total by 100,000. For example, to determine the misdemeanor drug case filing rate in Anchorage for 2016, the total count of misdemeanor drug case filings reported in Anchorage for 2016 (77), is divided by the total estimated city population for 2016 (299,037), and then multiplied by 100,000 to reach the misdemeanor drug case filing rate of 24.7 per 100,000 residents $[(77 \div 299,037) * 100,000 = 24.7]$. Due to Alaska’s small population, small changes in the number of reported drug possession arrests can lead to substantial fluctuations in rates.

COURT CASE FILING DEFINITION

The felony and misdemeanor court cases presented here are criminal charges that are brought to the attention of law enforcement and then pursued by district attorneys. Not all offenses are brought to the attention of law enforcement. Among offenses that the police know about, discretion is used when filing reports; similarly, district attorneys ultimately decide if a possible case is a violation of law, if sufficient evidence exists for prosecution of the case, if the resources are available to process the case, and so forth. The cases presented here are also not indicative of the final verdict; some cases are later dismissed and some cases are reduced in severity or the charge(s) changed.

Alaska Justice Information Center



ABOUT

The Alaska Justice Information Center (AJiC) was established in 2015, with a mission to compile, analyze, and report on criminal justice topics to policymakers, and practitioners in order to improve public safety, to increase criminal justice system accountability, and to reduce recidivism. In 2017, AJiC merged with the Alaska Justice Statistical Analysis Center (AJSAC), which was designated as Alaska's statistical analysis center in 1986 by Governor William Sheffield. The fact sheet series was previously published under the AJSAC masthead.

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 Alaska SAC 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 Information Center (AJiC) 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

Alaska Justice Information Center
University of Alaska Anchorage
3211 Providence Dr.
Anchorage, Alaska 99508

Phone/Email

Daniel Reinhard
Research Professional
(907) 786-1809
dreinhard@alaska.edu

ON THE WEB

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

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