



## TRIAL COURT CASELOAD INCREASES TO OVER 10 MILLION FILINGS

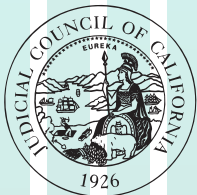
By Chris Belloli

Statewide filings in the California superior courts recently topped 10 million, resulting in a net increase of 7 percent from last year and a 20 percent increase over the past decade (figure 1). In fiscal year (FY) 2009,<sup>1</sup> the most recent year for which complete data are available, more than 10.2 million cases were filed, as reported in the recently released *2010 Court Statistics Report (CSR)* ([www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/3\\_stats.htm](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/3_stats.htm)).

Each of the three major case categories—civil, criminal, family and juvenile—experienced growth in filings over the past fiscal year; however, not all case types within these three categories had increased filings. Over the past year total civil filings statewide rose by 11 percent; criminal filings, by 7 percent; and family and juvenile filings, by 1 percent.

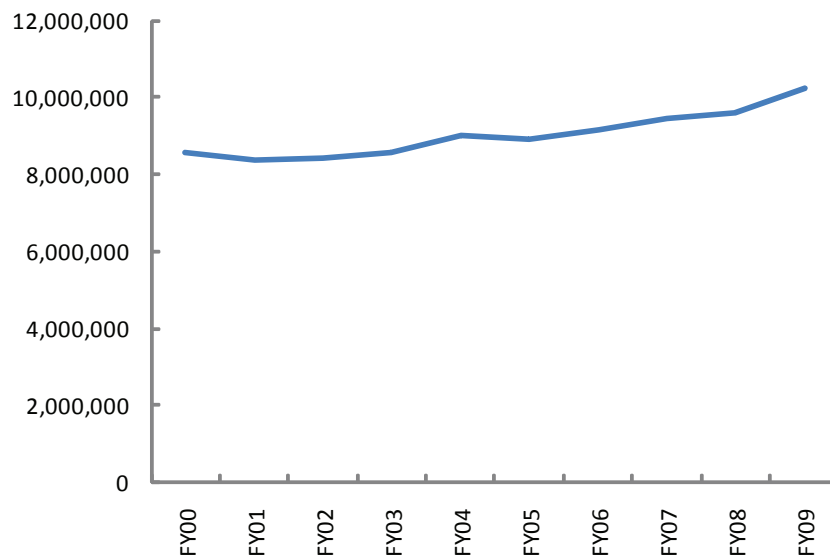
*DataPoints is produced by the AOC Office of Court Research to inform the court community about empirical trends in the California judicial branch.*

For additional information on California court research and statistics:  
[www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/resandstats.htm](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/resandstats.htm)



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Figure 1. Total Statewide Filings: FY00 through F09

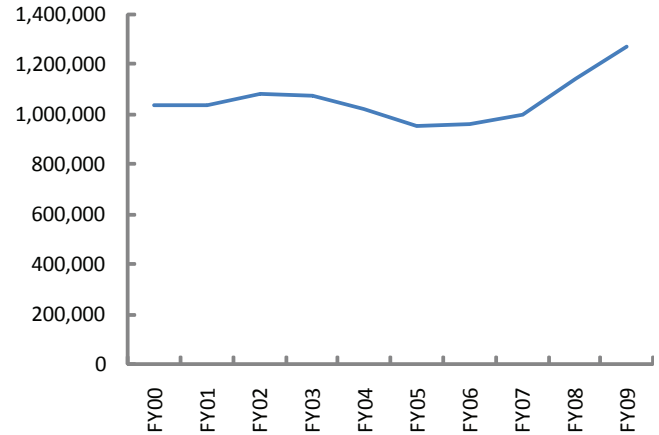


<sup>1</sup> Note that the fiscal year refers to the last of the second of the two calendar years normally used to denote fiscal year. The most recent data contained in the *Court Statistics Report* are for FY 2009, which runs from July 1, 2008 through June 30, 2009. References to the “last” or “past” year are to FY 2009.

### Civil Filings

The growth in civil filings (excluding dissolution of marriage and family law petitions, which are grouped separately with juvenile filings) continues a recent upward trend after a longer-term trend of flat and declining civil filings. Total civil filings had dipped below 1 million in FY 2005, reaching a 10-year low of about 950,000 statewide filings. Four consecutive years of strong growth now place the total number of civil filings at 1.27 million, more than one-third higher than just 5 years ago. In FY 2009 alone, total civil filings rose by more than 11 percent (figure 2).

Figure 2. Total Civil Filings: FY00 to FY09



**Unlimited civil filings**—civil cases with a value in excess of \$25,000—grew by more than 17 percent to a total of 212,289 filings in FY 2009, which is the highest point in the past 10 years. This increase in unlimited civil filings is driven primarily by nontort cases, classified as other civil complaints, and includes cases such as contract, employment, and real property. Filings of civil complaints jumped by 25 percent in FY 2009 to a total of 152,995 filings (figure 3), while civil tort filings increased by only 2 percent in the past year (figure 4).

Figure 3. Unlimited Civil Complaints

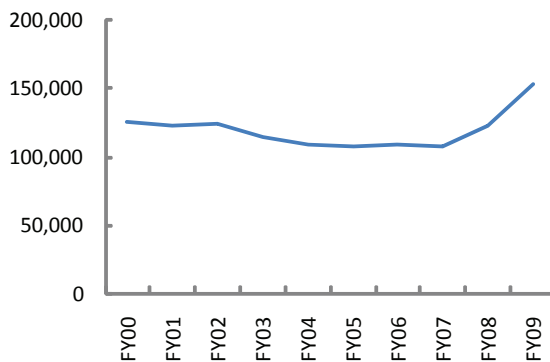
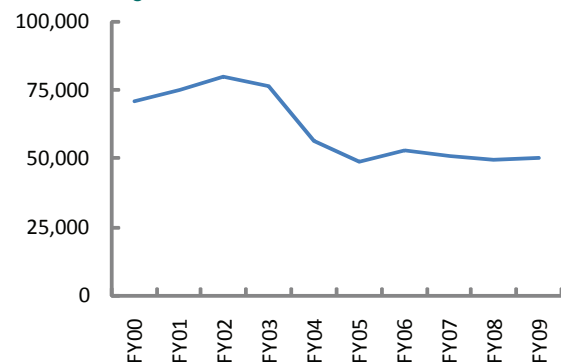


Figure 4. Unlimited Civil Torts



**Limited civil filings**—those cases with a value between \$5,000 and \$25,000—also increased in FY 2009, growing by almost 14 percent to a total of 783,863 filings. Although data on subcategories of limited civil filings are not available for all superior courts, 26 of the 58 courts have reported detailed data on this case type for a long enough period to evaluate trends. Review of these data reveals the same pattern found in unlimited civil but with even more clarity: the increase in filings is driven by nontort cases. Tort filings in the limited civil category actually declined slightly last year, while filings of limited civil contract cases in the sample courts grew by 15 percent last year and unlawful detainer cases grew by 20 percent (figures 5 and 6).

Figure 5. Limited Civil Contracts

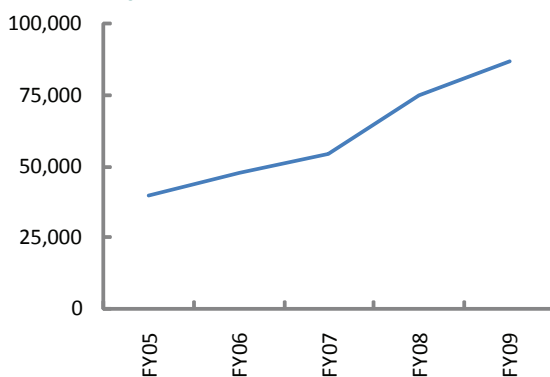
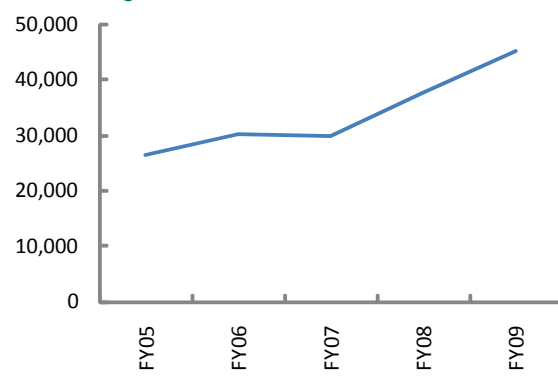


Figure 6. Limited Civil Unlawful Detainers



### Criminal Filings

Criminal case filings resumed a long-term trend of growth over the past 10 years, increasing by 7 percent in the past fiscal year to a total of 8.36 million (figure 7). However, some varying trends in filings appear among the different types of criminal cases. The number of felony filings declined by 4 percent in FY 2009, marking the second straight year of lower filings after a decade of steady growth (figure 8). Interestingly, felony jury trials sharply increased by 14 percent in the past year despite the lower number of felony case filings (figure 9). Given the significance of jury trials on a court’s operations, it is possible that this increase in felony jury trials may offset or even reverse any change in workload resulting from this lower number of felony filings.

Figure 7. Total Criminal Filings

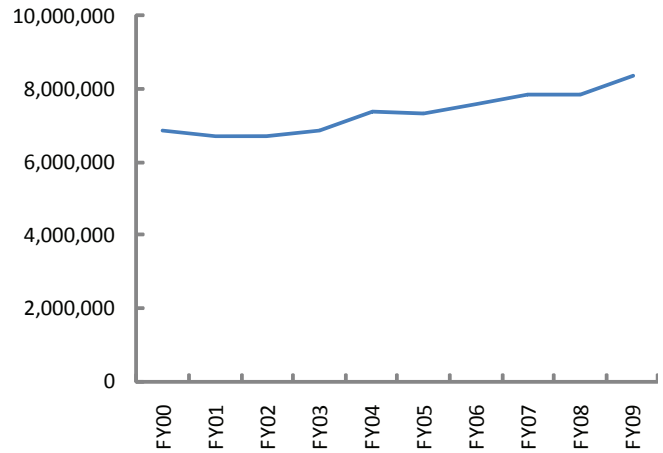


Figure 8. Felony Filings

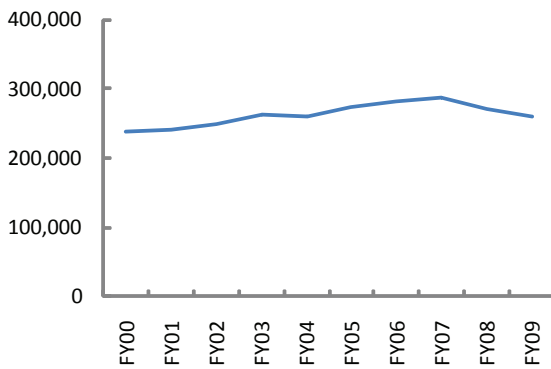
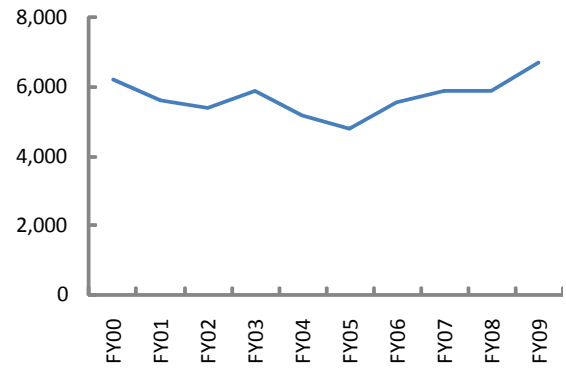


Figure 9. Felony Jury Trials

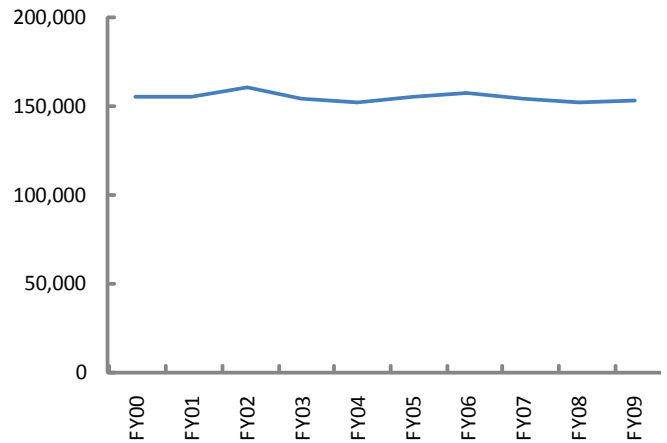


Among criminal misdemeanor and infractions cases, the traffic component of each case type increased last year while the nontraffic component declined. For misdemeanors, the decrease in nontraffic filings outweighed the increase in traffic filings, resulting in a net decline of 3 percent in the total number of misdemeanors filed in FY 2009. However, as with felonies, misdemeanor jury trials increased by 10 percent in the past year despite the decline in the number of misdemeanor filings. In infractions, the strong growth in traffic filings more than offset the lower number of nontraffic filings and fueled an overall increase of 10 percent in criminal infractions over the past fiscal year.

### Family and Juvenile Filings

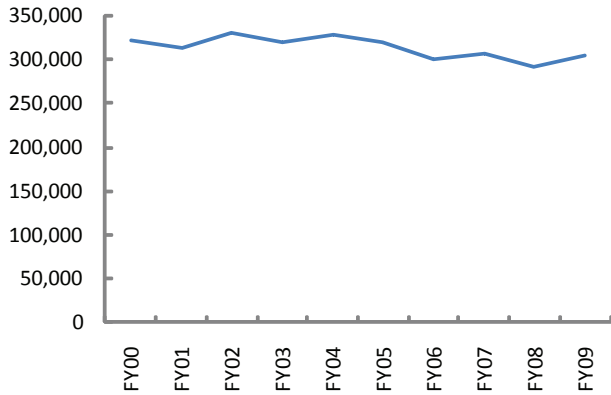
The small increase in the number of family and juvenile filings in FY 2009 was driven entirely by family law cases as both major categories of family law filings were up slightly in the last fiscal year. The number of petitions for divorce and other forms of dissolution increased by 1 percent to 153,206 in FY 2009 (figure 10). The category of other family law petitions—which includes domestic violence restraining orders, adoption and paternity petitions, and Department of Child Support Services petitions for the enforcement of child support orders—increased by

Figure 10. Family Law Filings (Marital)



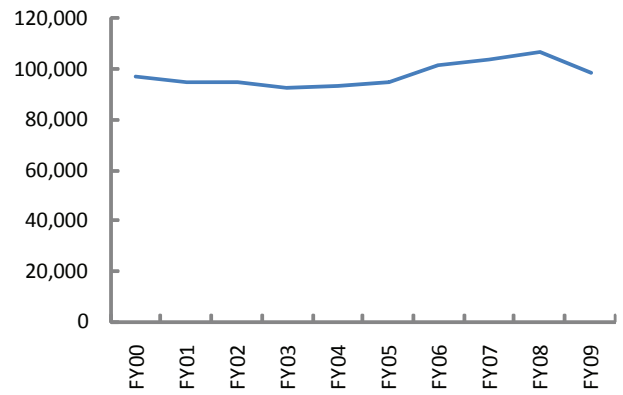
5 percent in the past year, reversing a slight downward trend over the past decade (figure 11).

Figure 11. Family Law Petitions



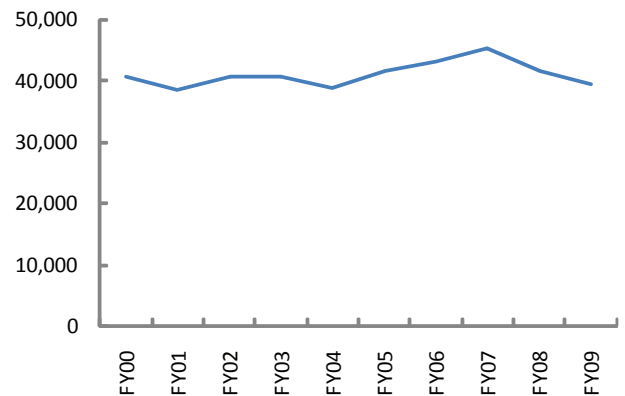
but decreased by 5 percent to 39,529 filings in FY 2009 (figure 13).

Figure 12. Juvenile Delinquency Filings



Both juvenile delinquency and juvenile dependency filings decreased in FY 2009. After a slow and gradual increase over the past five years, the number of juvenile delinquency filings fell by more than 7 percent to 98,431 filings in the past fiscal year (figure 12). This recent decrease in juvenile delinquency filings in California is consistent with the national trend as reported recently by the Office of Justice Programs (<http://ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/230168.pdf>). Nevertheless, given the growth in filings before the past year, juvenile delinquency filings are still 4 percent above their level five years ago. The number of juvenile dependency filings has been relatively flat over the past decade

Figure 13. Juvenile Dependency Filings



*Business intelligence is the merger of data and analysis in support of organizational goals. The Office of Court Research produces business intelligence for the California judicial branch to inform strategic planning, policy development, and program evaluation. For more information, visit us at [www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/resandstats.htm](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/resandstats.htm).*

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