



Supreme Court of California
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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Supreme Court Issues Annual Report on Workload Statistics for 2014–2015

Opinions decrease, but filings increase

SAN FRANCISCO—The Supreme Court of California today released its annual workload statistics for September 1, 2014, through August 31, 2015, the official court year for statistical purposes. Overall, the number of opinions issued by the court decreased from 83 last court year to 72 in 2014–2015. Although dispositions also decreased from 7,751 to 7,473, total filings with the court increased from 7,836 to 8,024.

The statistics detail an increase in civil writ petitions, original petitions for noncapital habeas corpus relief, and State Bar of California matters. There was a modest decrease in petitions for review along with a slight decrease in actions by order on petitions for writs of habeas corpus relating to death penalty judgments. Requests for publication and depublication of Court of Appeal opinions both increased this court year.

Following the retirement of Associate Justice Joyce L. Kennard in April 2014, the court continued to assign justices from the Courts of Appeal to sit as justices pro tempore for the oral argument sessions held from September 2014 through December 2014. This practice is typically followed when a justice is not available to serve, and continues until a replacement has been appointed, confirmed, and joins the court. Justice Marvin R. Baxter's subsequent retirement, effective January 2015, was followed by the arrival of two new associate justices in January 2015. The lack of a full complement of permanent justices and the corresponding staff changes during such transitions can have an impact on the court's ability to produce and file opinions.

OPINIONS FILED

Including Death Penalty Appeals and Related Habeas Corpus Petitions

In the 2014–2015 court year, the Supreme Court held oral argument after full briefing and filed opinions in 71 cases, of which 26 involved civil matters, 31 involved noncapital criminal matters, and 14 resolved automatic appeals arising from judgments of death.

In one additional extraordinary matter, the court, without holding oral argument or full briefing, filed an opinion in a State Bar matter, abrogating its own decision from 125 years earlier that denied bar admission to the first Chinese native to practice law in America. In *In re Hong Yen Chang* (2015) 60 Cal.4th 1169, the court granted posthumous bar admission to Mr. Chang, acknowledging that his discriminatory exclusion was a grievous wrong and affirming his rightful place among the ranks of persons deemed qualified to serve.

Overall, the number of opinions filed by the court was 11 fewer than the prior court year. Opinions in death penalty appeals were 11 fewer, opinions in civil cases decreased by 7, but opinions in noncapital criminal cases increased by 6 over the previous court year.

In addition to the opinions filed during the 2014–2015 court year, the court acted by order upon 22 petitions for writ of habeas corpus relating to death penalty judgments, one fewer than the prior court year. When a petition for writ of habeas corpus is denied without the issuance of an order to show cause, the court does not issue an opinion and instead disposes of the matter by order. Nevertheless, even when no opinion results, the preparation of internal memoranda and the related disposition of death-penalty-related habeas corpus petitions draws heavily upon the court's resources. The petitions and records in such cases frequently are lengthy and complex, and are analyzed in internal memoranda that often exceed 75 to 100 pages in length.

OVERALL FILINGS AND DISPOSITIONS

Total filings increased from 7,836 in the prior court year to 8,024 in the most recent court year. Filings of petitions for review decreased from 4,138 to 4,073, civil petitions for review decreased from 1,158 to 1,146, and criminal petitions for review decreased from 2,987 to 2,927. Total filings in original proceedings rose from 2,727 to 2,802 with the balance of total filings consisting of State Bar-related matters and death penalty matters.

State Bar filings increased by 147 from 936 last year to 1,083 in the most recent court year. The largest increase was in attorney resignations, which increased by 77 from 469 to 546. The number of filings in matters arising out of disciplinary actions also increased by 44 from 391 to 435, and matters filed in the Supreme Court by individuals after their complaints to the State Bar had been rejected without action increased by 27 from 69 to 96.

Original habeas corpus petitions in noncapital matters decreased from 2,279 to 2,259. However, there was a slight increase in the number of petitions for review in these matters, which increased from 262 last year to 303 this year.

Dispositions Decrease

In the 2014-2015 court year, the court disposed of 7,473 petitions for review, petitions in original proceedings, and actions arising out of State Bar Court disciplinary proceedings. That amounts to 278 fewer matters than were disposed of in the prior court year.

Disposition of petitions for review decreased by 255, from 4,074 to 3,819, and dispositions in original proceedings decreased by 119, from 2,712 in the prior court year to 2,831 in the most recent court year.

The court must decide whether or not to grant a petition for review within 60 days, with a possible extension of an additional 30 days, or it loses jurisdiction and the matter is deemed denied. As has been the case for many years, the court did not lose jurisdiction in any matter governed by these time constraints.

The number of dispositions in noncapital-case original criminal habeas corpus petitions decreased by 9 percent, from 2,289 in the prior court year to 2,084 during the most recent court year.

An increase occurred in attorney discipline dispositions, which rose from 909 in the prior court year to 1,024 in the most recent court year. Although most State Bar matters do not require substantial internal conference memoranda, the number and variety of matters in which such memoranda were prepared have increased significantly over the past few years.

Publication and Depublication Orders

Beginning in the 2001–2002 court year, the [*Court Statistics Report*](#), published by the Judicial Council of California, has included information concerning depublication and publication orders issued by the Supreme Court. In 2014–2015, one opinion of the Appellate Division of the Superior Court and 14 Court of Appeal opinions were ordered depublished by the Supreme Court. Measured from the 2002–2003 court year, the number of Court of Appeal opinions ordered depublished has ranged from 31 last court year to a record low of 10 in 2007–2008. In contrast, depublication orders regularly exceeded 100 per year in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The Supreme Court ordered publication of two Court of Appeal opinions, one fewer than the previous court year. The number of opinions ordered published depends in large part upon the number of requests to publish received by the Supreme Court. The court rarely orders publication of a Court of Appeal opinion without such a request; it is more likely to depublish without a specific request to do so.

OTHER INFORMATION

For several years, as part of its outreach and education efforts, the court has annually heard oral argument at a location other than its courtrooms in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Sacramento, and engaged the participation of local high school students, local media, and the public for these occasions. In October 2014, the court piloted an in-house special student outreach session, inviting students from a local high school, a community college, and a university to participate in a televised special oral argument session in its San Francisco courtroom.

This special session was the last special session at which Justice Marvin R. Baxter sat before his retirement. After Justice Baxter announced that he would not stand for retention to a new twelve-year term, Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr., nominated Mariano-Florentino Cuéllar to stand for retention in his stead. Following confirmation by the Commission on Judicial Appointments and retention by the voters in the general election in November, Justice Cuéllar was sworn into office on January 5, 2015. On November 24, 2015, Governor Brown appointed Leondra R. Kruger to fill the vacancy created by the earlier retirement of Justice Joyce L. Kennard. Following confirmation by the Commission on Judicial Appointments, Justice Kruger was also sworn into office on January 5, 2015.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Beginning in 1996, the California Supreme Court has issued statistics utilizing a reporting period of September 1 through August 31. The court designated this period as the official court year for statistical purposes after determining that this period best corresponds with the flow of the court's opinion production and best facilitates consistency in monitoring the pace of the court's work. Fiscal year figures are also separately developed and used for budgeting and other purposes.

The court releases these statistics following the usual interval in July and August during which the court does not regularly calendar oral argument. These figures are not the same as those released as part of the statistics report for the entire branch, which are based on the fiscal year. During the months in which no oral argument is held, the court continues to issue opinions in matters argued at the court's oral argument sessions in April, May and June, and to hold its regular weekly conferences at which it decides which cases to grant for review. The court resumed oral argument on September 2, 2015.

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The Supreme Court of California is the state's highest court and its decisions are binding on all other California state courts. The court's primary role is to decide matters of statewide importance and to maintain uniformity in the law throughout California by reviewing matters from the six districts of the California Courts of Appeal and the fifty-eight county superior courts (the trial courts). Among its other duties, the court also decides all capital appeals and related matters and reviews both attorney and judicial disciplinary matters.