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# Annual Report

RHODE ISLAND JUDICIARY

2019

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————— 2019 —————

# Letter of Transmittal

*To the Honorable Members of the General Assembly:*

It is with pride that we present to you the 2019 Annual Report of the Rhode Island Judiciary, pursuant to G.L. 1956 (2012 Reenactment) § 8-15-7.

The pages that follow hold caseload summaries and highlight the calendars and programs that we provide daily in the interests of access to justice for the diverse litigants who pass through our doors.

As this 2019 Annual Report was going to press in the fall of 2020, our state, our nation, and indeed our entire world, were in the grips of a deadly viral pandemic that shut down many elements of our society. The economic impact of this pandemic had yet to be fully realized or understood, but our state courts responded by following the Governor's directives for social distancing while keeping open for emergency and essential matters, adapting our technology to conduct remote hearings, and developing special calendars to address the legal problems that were generated.

While you will not see caseload information related to the pandemic until next year's report, you may be assured that our hard-working judicial officers and court staff were tireless in their efforts to keep the courts accessible and the wheels of justice turning.

Indeed, our state court administrator, Joseph Baxter, was in the middle of a one-year term as President of the Conference of State Court Administrators when the pandemic struck. His position afforded him keen insight and expertise on a national level into best practices for courts during this health crisis. His own many years of experience as a court administrator contributed to the national dialog as well.

No doubt, there will be more pain and hardship to come, but we recognize our core mission is to deliver fair and timely justice, whatever the conditions. We will continue to watch the budget and be effective stewards of taxpayer dollars. We believe the detailed narrative and data on the pages that follow demonstrate how we worked diligently in 2019 to achieve cost efficiencies across the Judiciary's many functions and in all six of the courts within our unified system.

Respectfully submitted,



Paul A. Suttell  
*Chief Justice*



J. Joseph Baxter, Jr.  
*State Court Administrator*

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## I. The Evolving Mission

2019. Nearly two decades into the new millennium, the Rhode Island Judiciary continues to evolve in response to changing societal perceptions and understanding of their core mission: providing access to justice to all litigants.

The nature of court caseloads has changed markedly in the past decade. This is most evident in the Judiciary's specialty calendars in the Superior, Family, and District Courts, as well as the stark increase in the number of self-represented litigants in our unified court system.

With a significant number of criminal defendants having mental health or substance addiction issues – or both – the “warehousing” of such individuals in correctional facilities or institutions has been recognized by professionals as an ineffective measure that does not solve the problem.

In concert with initiatives from the Executive and Legislative branches, the Judiciary in recent years has answered with a variety of specialized calendars that trend toward treatment rather than imprisonment. These calendars are tailored to individual problems and needs. The Judiciary has collaborated with the General Assembly, the Governor, and federal authorities to further develop the Adult Drug Calendar in the Superior Court, develop the Veterans Treatment Calendar in the District Court, create specialized calendars for families in the Family Court, participate with the other branches of government in Justice Reinvestment to reduce prison populations, and work to refine extreme risk protection order legislation to reduce the threat of gun violence by unstable individuals.

As 2019 was ending, the Superior Court was preparing to add to this approach with a new diversion program aimed at helping low-level offenders avoid prison time and a criminal record.

Civil matters in 2019 saw expanded calendars and mediations for businesses, family relations and workers' compensation.

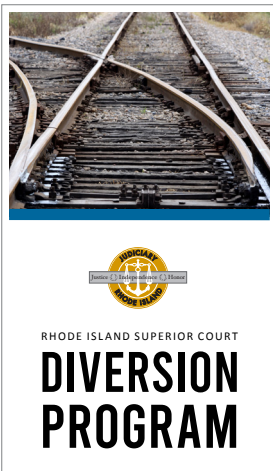


## II. Counseling and Treating the Problem

### Superior Court Diversion

During the 2019 legislative session, the Superior Court worked with the Rhode Island General Assembly to establish guidelines for a diversion program in the Superior Court. After the passage of the legislation, Superior Court rule changes were promulgated, and procedures implemented to allow for a January 2020 program commencement.

The Superior Court prepared to roll out its new Diversion Program for nonviolent offenders.



The Diversion Calendar is a specialty calendar that is scheduled to be held twice weekly. It offers an alternative path to nonviolent offenders. The program will offer supervision and services to participants instead of incarceration and/or probation. It provides eligible defendants with a framework of supervision and services to help them make informed decisions, engage in positive behavior, and reduce the risk of recidivism.

Eligible defendants are those who have not been charged with a serious disqualifying offense, have not previously been convicted or pleaded no contest to a disqualifying serious offense, or been convicted or pleaded no contest to two or more felonies within the last five years.

In addition to a single Superior Court judicial officer, the program has a coordinator and a pair of case managers. They work with an intake director and caseworkers from the Department of Attorney General. The judicial officer determines whether a defendant will be accepted into the program. Once accepted,

the defendant signs a contract that sets forth the court's expectations; the conditions imposed upon and the responsibilities of the defendant; and the treatment plan goals and strategies. If a defendant fails to abide by the program's conditions and orders, he or she may be terminated from the program by the judge or magistrate assigned to the program. If a defendant is terminated from the program, then he or she will have his or her case placed on the Superior Court criminal calendar in the county where the case originated.

A measure of the program's performance is expected to be available next year in the 2020 Annual Report.

## Adult Drug Calendar

The Superior Court's Adult Drug Calendar is another specialized approach that requires a defendant to sign a contract. It continues to be an effective diversion program for nonviolent, first-time drug offenders. It focuses on treatment while providing defendants with an opportunity to have their records cleared if they finish the program.

In 2019, the program admitted 84 new defendants and graduated 78, including some admitted in prior years. The program terminated 18 defendants, leaving 137 active participants as of December 31, 2019. Since 2006, the Adult Drug Calendar has had an average graduation rate of 73 percent. The recidivism rates of re-arrest of 12.2 percent after one year and 16.1 percent after three years reflect an effective alternative for drug offenders who are eligible.

## Termination of Probation

A specialty program in its third full year after a Superior Court rule change, the Probation Termination Calendar allows

individuals serving probation in the community to seek approval from the court to end their probation early if certain criteria are met.

Since November 2016, a total of 674 motions to terminate probation have been ruled upon. There were 282 rulings in 2019, a 30 percent increase from 2018. Of the 282 motions, 256 were granted, 21 were denied, and 5 were passed.



## Firearms Surrender

In 2019, the District Court handled 653 mental health petitions, of which 484 were submitted to the FBI National Instant Criminal Background Check (NICS), which disqualified the individuals from purchasing firearms. Since the inception of this program in 2015, the number of disqualifiers submitted has increased close to 50 percent.

Also, 1,054 domestic restraining orders were filed in the District Court in 2019. The District Court issued 822 orders to surrender firearms in these civil domestic abuse cases and 1,256 such orders to surrender firearms in criminal cases.

The Superior Court processed 31 cases in 2019 under the state's "red flag" extreme risk protection order law, ordering a temporary surrender of firearms in 29 of them. Petitions may only be filed by members of law enforcement.

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## Pretrial Services

The District Court is the threshold to Rhode Island's criminal justice system. Defendants charged with misdemeanors and felonies first appear in District Court for an arraignment. The District Court sets bail at the arraignment, sets the conditions of bail, and through its Pretrial Services Unit, the court monitors the compliance with those conditions. The District Court has an extensive collaborative network for referrals for substance, alcohol, and other behavioral issues.

In 2019, Pretrial Services handled 3,866 new cases. Most of these defendants, following an assessment, were ordered to mental health and/or substance abuse treatment; some were referred for monitoring in domestic violence cases. In keeping with the goals promoted by the state's Justice Reinvestment Program, Pretrial Services began using the evidence-based Domestic Violence Screening Instrument in May 2019 to assess danger level on domestic violence cases. During 2019, Pretrial Services received 1,283 new domestic violence cases to monitor. Of these new cases, 960 were felonies and 323 were misdemeanors. Approximately 584 cases were deemed high risk.

## Veterans Calendar

In 2019, 91 individuals participated in the Rhode Island Veterans Treatment Calendar, all of whom were monitored by the Pretrial Services Unit. In addition to traditional treatment programs, the veterans calendar also implements innovative alternative therapies that many participants report leads to a reduction in anxiety and overall calmness in demeanor. The veterans calendar has partnered with Veterans Count, an organization that operates a job training program that assists participants in gaining the skills needed for job searches and job retention. Several participants

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## The Veterans Treatment Calendar has celebrated 455 successful graduates since inception in 2011.

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enrolled in this innovative program. The Veterans Treatment Court has celebrated 455 successful graduates since inception in April 2011. This is an especially impressive number given the intensity and length of the program.

## Supporting Rhode Island Families

The Rhode Island Judiciary was awarded a federal Family Court Drug Treatment Program grant in 2019 from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The \$728,427 award for the Rhode Island Family Treatment Drug Calendar, overseen by the Family Court, is for three years from October 2019 through September 2022. The Family Treatment Drug Calendar was implemented in 2002 to serve families with newborns identified as substance-exposed during pregnancy. Eligibility criteria were soon expanded to include children up to age 18 in a substance-involved family. The goals and objectives of the Family Treatment Drug Calendar are to protect children whose health and welfare may be adversely affected by parental substance use; enhance parental capacity to meet their children's needs and expedite permanency for children in state care. The Family Treatment Drug Calendar accomplishes this by: identifying substance-involved parents on its court calendar and in partnership with community resources; developing comprehensive multi-disciplinary case plans in collaboration with child welfare; facilitating participants'



Cox Communications employees help the Family Court staff bucket of toiletries and household supplies for young adults leaving foster care and going out on their own for the first time.

treatment and other services; and assessing progress through intensive follow-up, service provider reports, surveys, other data collection, and frequent court supervision of court orders.

This grant will assist the Family Court in enhancing the Family Treatment Drug Calendar team services by adding a much-needed additional clinical social worker to the team. This will strengthen partnerships with medication-assisted treatment necessitated by the alarming increase in the number of opioid addicted parents coming before the court and their difficulty in getting treatment. Duties will also include data collection and input, as well as data analysis and reporting. This information will be used for internal improvement and to meet federal performance measures reporting requirements; to provide additional training to improve trauma-informed practices; to hire a toxicology specialist to assist in the drug/alcohol screening; and formalize a peer-to-peer recovery coach component by hiring a part-time certified peer specialist. The latter position will oversee volunteer recovery coaches who will develop long-term relationships (continuing after graduation) with participants, providing motivation for

parents to engage or re-engage, if necessary, in services.

These enhancements will also increase the ability to serve additional parents and their children over three years. Improving treatment access and supports increases the chances of sustained recovery and subsequent successful reunification of families with substance abuse and other disorders. The strategy will be to assimilate additional resources into the Family Court to enhance sustainability when federal dollars are no longer available.

The Rhode Island Family Court Juvenile Services Department received a three-year grant through the U.S. Department of Justice for \$397,763. The award was specific to supporting and enhancing the Juvenile Drug Calendar, a separate program from the Family Treatment Drug Calendar. Rhode Island's program has been a national model since 1999, but with new research into adolescent development, mental health findings, and evidence-based practices, the Drug Calendar positioned itself to be innovative once again.

The three main goals of the grant are to ensure equitable treatment for all youths; implement effective contingency management; and community collaboration and develop an age-appropriate peer support network for all youths entering the Juvenile Drug Calendar. To achieve these goals, the court will implement standardized evidence-based substance use disorder, mental health and risk screening measures to determine eligibility and improve equity of access to care; develop a graduated sanctions grid and initiate a Community Action Board to create incentives that outpace sanctions and develop sustainable partnerships with peer support organizations. Through these measures, the Drug Calendar staff, in collaboration with the Mental Health Clinic, will strive to have better outcomes for children and their families.



## Therapy Dogs

Some four-legged visitors began making the rounds in the corridors of two county courthouses in 2019.

The Family Court became the first to introduce professional pet assisted therapy or “therapy dogs” to the Rhode Island Judiciary in March with a two-month pilot program that subsequently was extended indefinitely.

The dogs are trained to be comfortable with people and the program’s goal is to reduce stress among litigants who are waiting for their court appearances. While the program’s focus is Family Court, litigants at the McGrath Judicial Complex in Wakefield for Superior Court and District Court appearances have also interacted with the therapy teams. Spontaneity guides the handlers as they walk the corridor, inviting people to pet the dogs, and they move on if there is no interest.

Teams of handlers and dogs spent two mornings a week at the McGrath Judicial Complex, and by the end of 2019 the program had expanded to the Family Court floor of the Noel Judicial Complex in Warwick several mornings a week.

The program was the brainchild of Windwalker Humane Organization’s Linda



Therapy dogs were introduced to litigants at the McGrath Judicial Complex in Wakefield and the Family Court corridor at Noel Judicial Complex in Warwick.

Jones and her husband, Family Court Magistrate Paul T. Jones, Jr., and had the support of Chief Judge Michael B. Forte, as well as Supreme Court Chief Justice Paul A. Suttell and the Superior and District Courts. The dogs were a hit with members of the public, attorneys and court staff.

The pet therapy teams of dogs and handlers work in the courthouse corridors and do not enter courtrooms.

Upon entering the courthouse one day in April, dog owner Ann M. Olean and her dog, KarRa, sensed “an emotional atmosphere of silent stress.” The team navigated the corridor and had about 18 individual interactions, providing momentary relief to litigants of their court appearance concerns. Many “relay their memories of past, lost and current pets,” Olean says. “Conversations vary in duration, but all include an interaction that leaves the individuals smiling, laughing and in a momentarily relaxed state.”

Says Mary Ann Lord, another facilitator and owner of Pepe, “I do feel the sessions help reduce stress and anxiety and provide a welcome distraction while the clients are waiting for their hearings.”

Dog owner Peg Schwab says she feels the encounters she and her dog, Reidy, have with people at the courthouse have an impact. One day in March, they greeted a man in his 50s who was waiting to be called into court. “His demeanor was one of sadness, yet he wanted to greet the dog,” she said. “We sat with this man for 10 minutes, just talking about his love of dogs. Reidy was receptive to the affection given by this man. At the conclusion of the meeting, the man appeared to be in a better space.”

The program was expected to grow over time.





## III. Advancing Technology

### A Clearer Picture of Caseloads

By 2019, the Judiciary was five years into the operation of its new case management system with electronic case filing. With the successful conversions of criminal and civil cases, including domestic relations and workers' compensation, the Judiciary has looked to enhance software features and tangential operations, such as jury management, attorney registrations, and Bar admissions. In 2019, the Rhode Island Judiciary Public Portal was updated for the public and attorneys, as well as data exchanges with the courts' justice partners that include multiple police departments, municipal courts and eight state agencies: the Department of Human Services, the Department of Corrections, the Department of Administration, the Department of Attorney General, the Department of Labor and Training, the Division of Motor Vehicles, the State Police, and the Parole Board. This results in greater efficiency and accountability.

Electronic case filing can occur 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and often does. In 2019,

the number of registered users of the system jumped 60 percent from 11,972 in 2018 to 19,215. The range of the average number of filings, depending on the day of the week, went from 1,700-2,000 per day in 2018 to 2,000-2,340 per day in 2019, an increase of 14 percent.

Some 2.4 million documents were added to the case management system in 2019, just a slight increase over the prior year. There were 534,391 court hearings for the year. (A breakdown of cases by court and type and other statistics can be found on pages toward the back of this report.)

At the Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal, 66,878 summonses were processed electronically, with 24,040 of them paid online, resulting in 36 percent of citations requiring no in-person interaction with the court.

The Judicial Technology Center has upgraded the secure wireless Internet network with increased bandwidth and coverage to allow attorneys to conduct all aspects of judicial business while they are

in any Rhode Island state courthouse.

The Technology Center has been raising cybersecurity awareness and intrusion prevention protection for the courts. It has continued to enhance cost savings by retiring legacy systems and equipment.

## National Recognition

Each year, the Supreme Court's Judicial Planning Unit submits caseload data for all state courts to the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) Court Statistics Project (CSP). Annually, the CSP recognizes states that have applied the leadership and resources necessary to improve the quantity and quality of their reported caseload data. In 2019, Rhode Island was one of seven states to receive the award following the 2018 data submission.

The Judicial Planning Unit, with custom scripts from the Judicial Technology Center and working with the lower courts on data quality and cleanup, was able to increase the publishable incoming caseload data reported to the NCSC for both the general and limited jurisdiction courts. Publishable data increased from 66 percent for 2017 data to 86 percent for 2018 data for all the trial courts (lower courts) combined, and from 35 percent for 2017 data to 85 percent for 2018 data relative to the limited jurisdiction courts.

In addition, the Judicial Planning Unit resubmitted the caseload data back to 2012 with the same level of publishable data. This was the second consecutive year Rhode Island received the Reporting Excellence Award from CSP. In 2018, Rhode Island was one of five states to receive the award and was recognized for the dramatic increase in the amount of publishable appellate court data. The Judicial Planning Unit worked with the Judicial Technology Center and the Supreme Court to increase their



The Superior Court clerk's counter at the Licht Judicial Complex in Providence.

publishable caseload data from 20 percent in 2015 to 97 percent in 2017.

## Conversion Overview

The ongoing conversion to the Odyssey case management system with the electronic filing component has been the single largest record-keeping project the Judiciary has undertaken in modern times. It was the culmination of 10 years of planning, research, and designating funds for what is a transformation in the way lawyers, litigants, and court staff conduct business from the law office to the clerk's office to the courtroom.

The conversion involved two separate systems. The first, the File & Serve electronic filing system, is operated by the Judiciary's partner, Tyler Technologies of Plano, Texas. File & Serve is designed to streamline customer interaction, and it provides attorneys with the ability and convenience to file case documents from anywhere with Internet access, any day and any time. Attorneys also have remote access to their own cases.

The second is Odyssey, the case management system, which is operated by the courts. Attorneys and law office

staff have been trained to use File & Serve, which sends pleadings and other court documents into the case management system. Self-represented litigants have the option to use electronic filing as well.

The electronic filing capability means that once documents have been filed remotely via the Internet, court clerks can review these filings and accept them immediately, instantly building a case file. Judicial officers can now find documents on their computers, rather than paper, and can sign orders electronically before returning them to the case management system, where attorneys and clerks can retrieve them.

Odyssey replaced an antiquated case management system. It includes features such as judge assignment, mass docketing, case file tracking, time standards, scheduling, and forms generation. It provides clerical employees with a single application with which to capture, maintain, and access all electronic content. This content includes pleadings, notices, motions, orders, exhibits, briefs, judgments, writs of execution, and other papers typically filed with the court. There is also a financial component giving court administrators improved management of monetary transactions such as funds held in escrow, receipt of costs and fines, and bail.

With Odyssey, remote viewing of case dockets or registers of actions has been available to the public for three years, although court documents may only be viewed at the courthouses. Remote access for the public does not require any registration. Members of the public have also been able to make online payments and search for hearings for a similar period.

## Next Step

The Judiciary continues to upgrade its network infrastructure to support the new

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As courtrooms in the 90-year-old Licht Judicial Complex in Providence have been renovated one-by-one over the past several years, the infrastructure and technology have been updated to meet the modern demands of a system that will serve our citizens well. The Judicial Technology Center has made substantial security updates to protect the courts' networks from intrusion.

Projects that are planned for implementation in 2020 include e-filing for the Supreme Court; software allowing attorneys to easily redact confidential information from public filings; a new updated portal for the courts' justice partners, attorneys and the public; and, a jury management system for Kent, Newport, and Washington counties.

In the planning stages for 2020 are District Court e-filing and e-charging, which will involve interfaces with state and local police departments, and a "Guide and File" system in the Family Court, designed to assist the large percentage of self-represented litigants by simplifying the process of generating and completing court forms and filing certain case types. It is hoped that such a tool will expand access to justice in the Family Court and provide more self-service channels for litigants to help them understand how to start a case and move it forward through each phase of the legal process.



## IV. Court Services

### Language Access

In 2019, the Office of Court Interpreters provided language services in rare languages, such as Armenian, Greek, Hmong, Kinyarwanda, and Nepali, among others. Language services were provided in 37 languages in 10,834 events. The five most requested languages were Spanish (9,411), followed by Cape Verdean (409), Portuguese (295), Arabic (175), and Mandarin (98).

Services were provided by 4 certified staff interpreters, 2 qualified staff interpreters, 24 bilingual staff, 25 individual contractors, and 32 interpreters employed by three corporate contractors approved on the state's Master Price Agreement List.

The 10,834 events were in all counties and courts in Superior, Family, District, Workers' Compensation, and Traffic Tribunal. Services were offered in 6,867 civil matters and 3,967 criminal matters. In addition to services in courtrooms, interpreters also provided language services in ancillary offices such as Juvenile Services, Pre-Trial Services, mediation,

court visitations, and probation.

During the 2019 calendar year, the office provided four trainings to court staff, including judges, front-line clerks, bilingual staff, and interpreters who provide services to the Judiciary.

The Office of Court Interpreters continues to partner with community agencies and other related agencies to identify individuals with abilities to become qualified/certified interpreters, especially in those languages considered rare. The office also continued its partnership with neighboring states to recognize reciprocity for the use of qualified and certified interpreters. The office also continued proctoring the National Center for State Courts certification examination twice in 2019. During the first certification module in May, 29 candidates took the written exam and 19 candidates took the oral examination. During the second certification module in November, 15 candidates registered to take the written examination and 12 candidates registered to take the oral examination. The Rhode Island Judiciary qualified 16 interpreters and certified 2 in 2019.

## Mediation

Alternative dispute resolution – or mediation – has expanded in the Judiciary to the point where it is now established in four of the six courts in the unified system. It is a concept that has been around for many years, but its use in court cases can be of tremendous benefit to litigants in savings of time and money, and to the court system itself in the saving of time and court resources.

In the Supreme Court, 44 cases were deemed eligible for appellate mediation in 2019, a decrease of 32 percent from the prior year. The top four case types eligible for mediation were personal injury, civil appeals, real property and contract cases. The number of cases that were withdrawn or dismissed at some stage in the mediation process increased to 11 percent. Of those cases that were mediated, the percentage of cases that were settled decreased from 46 percent in 2018 to 29 percent in 2019.

Approximately one-third of mediation participants agreed to take a survey about the program. While settlements were down, participants continued to rate the mediators highly, bringing the highest rating ever in 2019, with 100 percent of respondents indicating they would use the same mediator again and would recommend the program to others. The average point rating for a participant's overall experience increased slightly to the highest ever at 8.9, up from 8.7 a year earlier, on a scale of 10. Consistent with past years, when asked the reasons why the case did not settle, participants said "problems too severe" most often (21 percent). Interestingly, only 1 percent of the surveys indicated that a basis for the case not settling was "not everyone willing to try." Last year, this reason was cited in 25 percent of the surveys.

Two new retired judges joined the Appellate Mediation Program in 2019

at no additional cost to the state: retired Associate Justice Bennett R. Gallo of Superior Court and retired Associate Judge Janette Bertness of Workers' Compensation Court.

In addition to conducting trials, the Superior Court administers the successful Court-Annexed Arbitration Program in which the objective is to significantly reduce the time to disposition for less complex civil cases involving \$100,000 or less. Matters such as contract disputes, personal injury claims, and property damage suits may be certified to this alternative dispute resolution program. During an arbitration hearing, evidence is presented in an informal setting to an experienced attorney/arbitrator who, after considering the same, makes an award in the case, usually within 10 days of the hearing. Arbitration not only expedites case resolution, it results in substantial savings to litigants and taxpayers alike by eliminating many of the costs associated with formal trials.

In 2019, the Arbitration Program processed nearly 1,100 cases (a 10-year high) and settled well over 40 percent of those matters within the year. More than 100 arbitrators participated in the process. The program has seen consistent, annual growth. Also administered through the Superior Court Arbitration Office is the annual "Settlement Week," held in December of each year, during which hundreds of civil cases are identified for potential resolution through one-hour mediation. This intense one-week event routinely results in settlement rates of over 60 percent.

The Workers' Compensation Court's Mediation Program saw continued success and further expansion in 2019. Matters pending before the court can be referred to this alternative dispute resolution program by the trial judge with agreement from the opposing parties. Mediation sessions are conducted by retired or active



Workers' Compensation Court judges. In 2019, 144 cases were referred to the mediation program, a 24 percent increase from last year. Of those referred, 112 cases were successfully mediated, 18 cases saw no resolution and returned to trial, and 14 were still pending an outcome to the mediation process. Cases which saw a conclusion to the mediation process (settlement or return to trial) in 2019 attained a remarkable 86 percent settlement rate.

In late 2019 at the direction of Chief Judge Robert Ferrieri, the court held its first Mediation Week proceedings. This addition to the court's mediation program allowed parties who did not have matters pending before the court to enter mediation proceedings that were held over a one-week period in mid-December. Active and retired judges mediated 16 matters over that week, with 13 cases attaining settlement, 1 concluding with no agreement, and 2 pending an outcome.

## Community Outreach

Courthouse tours for school groups were suspended for a fourth straight year in 2019 out of concerns for the troubling decline in the number of active sheriffs assigned to court buildings. Still, the Judiciary's Office of Community Outreach and Public Relations and other courts and departments continue to support in-school activities.

The courts participated in several on-site career fairs at schools across the state. In May, the courts joined with the Rhode Island Bar Association for the annual Law Day outreach event. Most court calendars were suspended that day, allowing judges and magistrates to pair with lawyers in visits to more than 30 schools throughout Rhode Island to talk about topics in the law that are timely and relevant to students.

The Office of Community Outreach and Public Relations promotes civics education in general and familiarity with the courts specifically through the national iCivics project founded by retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. Created in 2010 as a teaching tool firmly rooted in the digital age, the program uses video games and competitions to make civics education fun. Civics education gained a prominent foothold during 2018, thanks in part to increased student activism across the country, including Rhode Island, in the wake of social and legal issues that made the headlines. The iCivics program now reaches more than 6.7 million students nationwide, and it heads a coalition that grew from 67 education and policy organizations focused on expanding and improving civics education in the United States in 2018 to 115 such organizations in 2019.

Over the last school year (2018-2019), the number of registered iCivics teachers in Rhode Island increased by 33 percent to 1,315. iCivics games have been played more than 232,000 times by Rhode Island students, and what's more, iCivics is used in 35 of Rhode Island's 36 regular and regional school districts; 23 of its 27 charter and other state operated schools and 27



National Adoption Day in the Family Court ranks as the happiest of court events.



private schools. In the first half of the 2019-2020 school year, 82,188 Rhode Island students had interacted with iCivics.

The top ten school districts in the use of iCivics in 2019 were, in order, Providence Public Schools, Cranston Public School District, East Providence School District, Warwick Schools, Cumberland School Department, Pawtucket School Department, North Providence School Department, Bristol Warren Regional School District, Lincoln Public Schools, and South Kingstown School Department.

The Family Court finalized 20 adoptions with 18 families at its 16th Annual National Adoption Day. These festivities were supported by many community sponsors and agencies. There was a touching presentation in November of the first “Hope Award” in memory of Nick Cardi. Chief Judge Michael B. Forte presented the award to Ron and Pete Cardi in honor of their brother Nick. The award is for selfless generosity, compassion, loyalty and unwavering commitment to Rhode Island families in need. The Cardi brothers for years have been generous sponsors of many charities that benefit children, including National Adoption Day.

## Facilities, Operations and Security

The Judiciary recognizes that each of the court facilities are significant capital assets of the State of Rhode Island, and the Department of Facilities, Operations and Security is proud of its responsibility for the care and preservation of these buildings. The department strives to provide economical, efficient, and well-organized maintenance services to all of the Judiciary with professionalism, courtesy and proficiency; and to provide the highest level of security and safety for all employees of the Judiciary and the various state agencies

located in our buildings as well as the citizens we serve.

By 2019, Courtroom 4C at the Garrahy Judicial Complex in Providence, the state’s busiest District Court

courtroom in the state’s busiest courthouse, was in desperate need of a facelift. The courtroom was stripped of wallpaper and repainted. The carpet was replaced, and all woodwork was stripped and stained. During this time, the lights were also upgraded to LED lights.

At the Licht Judicial Complex across town in Providence, Superior Court trial courtrooms 2 and 8 were rehabilitated and returned to a period-specific aesthetic. During this process, the layers of paint were peeled back to determine the original color of the walls. All woodwork was stripped, repaired and stained. The carpet was replaced and multiple technological, climate control and electrical upgrades were made in the process. Every time a courtroom at the circa-1930 Licht complex has been refurbished, upgraded technology has been installed while floors and other spaces were exposed.

At the Noel Judicial Complex in Warwick, all interior spaces were painted in a project that took approximately eight months to complete. Most of the public space as well as offices had not been painted since the building opened in 2006. The canned lighting in all courtrooms and public hallways were upgraded to LED technology. Additionally, a new surface parking lot was completed. This lot is used



Facilities and Operations staff work day and night to keep court-houses clean and functioning well.

by members of the Sheriff's Department to alleviate crowding in the public garage.

The Judiciary recently completed the migration of the remaining analog telephone lines from Verizon to Cox Communications that began in 2017. As of December 31, 2019, the Judiciary has over 1,100 IP telephones and 70 analog lines. This change was needed since the Verizon equipment was almost 20 years old and lacked the technology that is warranted today. The installation was at no charge to the Judiciary.

## State Law Library

In 2019, the State Law Library continued to improve library services by achieving five goals: public outreach to the legal community, collaboration with other educational institutions, preservation of library collections, participation in professional activities, and formalized instruction in library resources. Public outreach to the legal community was accomplished by the law librarian taking part along with other court staff who welcomed visiting Attorneys General from the state of New Mexico. These Attorneys General were visiting the state as part of an orientation program.

The New England Law Library Consortium (NELLCO) held its Annual Conference in Providence in 2019. The State Law Librarian was a member of the host committee as well as a presenter who toured with a group of conference attendees the State Law Library, showcasing the library's expansive collection, exceptional setting and up-to-date technology.

The library's collaboration with Roger Williams University School of Law continued in a robust fashion in 2019 with the librarian's renegotiation of the online public access catalog (OPAC) agreement. This extended contract allows the library

to continue utilizing the innovative interface technology to search both libraries' catalogs and shared resources. This OPAC agreement fosters continued usage of a cloud-based storage medium to ensure the safety and security of cataloged materials. Circulation processes and serials organization are collectively handled in this one system as well.

In spring of 2019, Roger Williams University Law presented a program, First Women Lawyers in the Law in Rhode Island. Our library was proudly recognized for contributing some of the detailed research and historical information on these outstanding individuals as well as attending the program in Bristol.

## Judicial Records Center

The Judicial Records Center stores more than 6.5 million cases. The center in 2019 inventoried thousands of old Supreme Court and Superior Court cases, plus more than 100 boxes of Superior Court criminal case exhibits and evidence. The staff flat-filed 14,335 documents in 2,867 cases for preservation, including cases from the 18th and 19th centuries.

The staff also conducted 2,500 background checks for the FBI for the issuance of handguns in 2019.

## Mandatory Continuing Legal Education

Judicial education programming for calendar year 2019 included a variety of topics to enhance the judicial excellence among veteran and newly appointed jurists on all levels of state courts. Two annual in-house conferences, one held at the URI Narragansett Bay Campus, and a second held at Roger Williams University School of Law, a five-part Concepts of Justice in

literature series, as well as attendance at the annual Rhode Island Bar meeting, were offered. The content for the two annual in-house conferences included sessions on marijuana use and regulation, drug abuse programs, immigration issues, cognitive bias and court interpreter services.

The Mandatory Continuing Legal Education office hosted the New England Conference of State Court Administrators in Newport for its annual two-day conference in October, as well as coordinated an orientation for appellate clerks and clerks assigned to the law clerk department. In addition, the MCLE Commission office worked with delinquent attorneys to assist them with achieving compliance, creating compliance plans and meeting the compliance standards for delinquent years.



The “chambers clerks,” as they are known, are law clerks who assist the five justices of the Supreme Court with legal research and writing.

## Law Clerk Department

Overall, the law clerks assist the Judiciary by contributing their legal research and writing skills wherever they are needed. These law clerks promote the important work of the Judiciary and at the same time hone their skills as future practicing attorneys.

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## Enhanced electronic communication and filing has enabled law clerks to work on more assignments or remotely assist judges and clerks who are in another courthouse.

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In 2019, the law clerks worked on case assignments encompassing civil, criminal, and administrative law with greater utilization of the expanded electronic case filing system. This system enabled law clerks to obtain documents and case materials quickly and accurately. Law clerks could assemble a complete file for the judges and work on a greater number of assignments both at their assigned courthouse or remotely from another courthouse. Additionally, reaching outside the court, law clerks assisted the Judiciary, participating with Law Day activities at local schools and preparing materials for presentations and articles.

During 2019, the law clerks significantly increased the use of electronic communication with the judges regarding the status of law clerk research and writing. Enhanced communication between the law clerks and the Judiciary facilitated the tracking and timely completion of assignments. Also, law clerks on the general trial calendar assisted the special calendar and county law clerks with assignments as necessary. Greater coordination of law clerk assignments between the Providence and the county courthouse law clerks has effectively addressed the balancing of workloads in response to the work demands of the different rotations that can vary with trial schedules.

## **Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring**

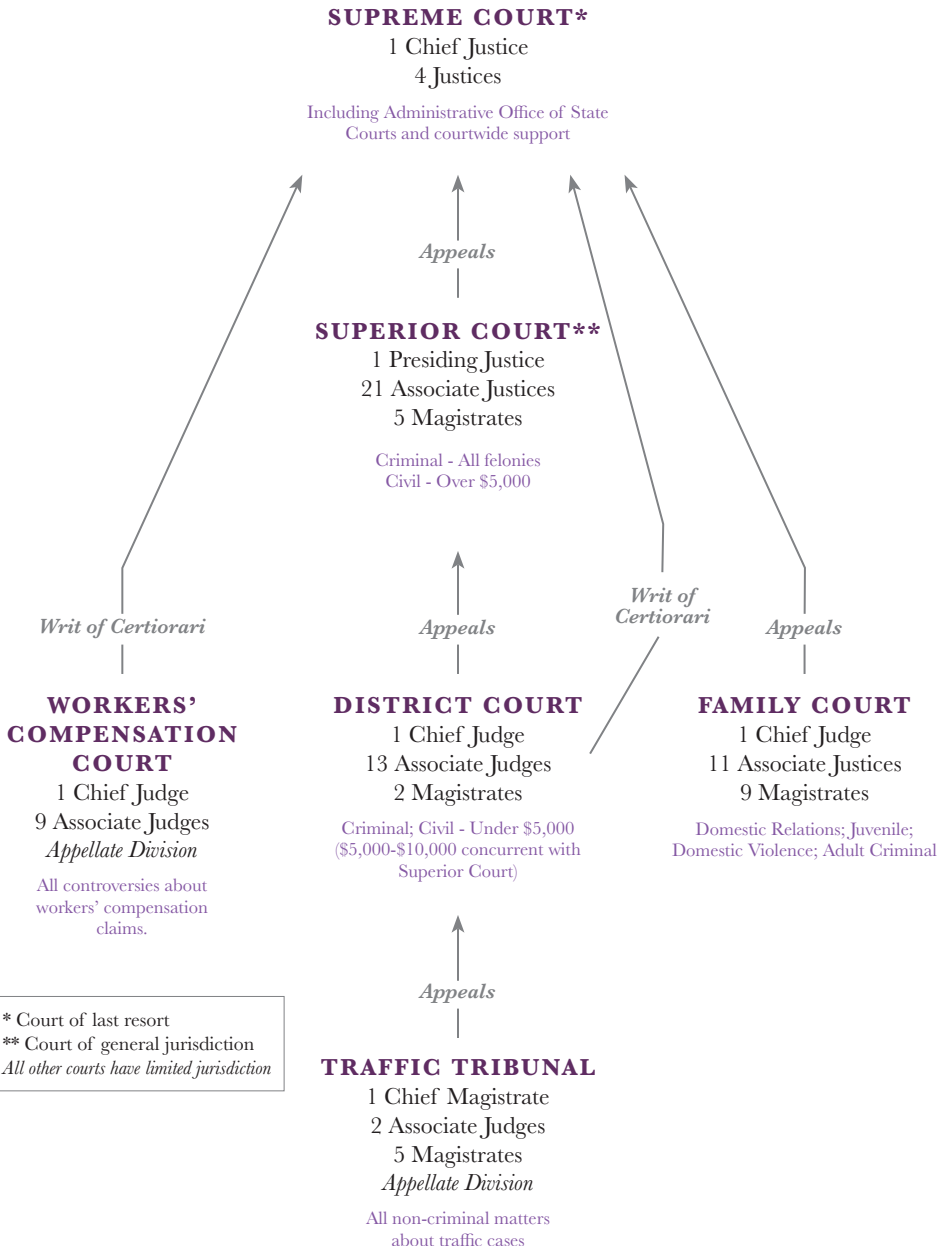
In 2019, the Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit (DVTMU) distributed approximately 8,000 of its new Victim Information and Safety Planning pamphlets to the state's law enforcement agencies. The unit started the process of having the pamphlets translated into two additional languages: Arabic and Mandarin Chinese. The pamphlets were expected to be available the early part of 2020.

As an active member of the Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault Law Enforcement Training Curriculum Committee, the DVTMU director assisted in the domestic violence/sexual assault classroom and role play trainings for the spring and fall sessions of the Rhode Island Municipal Police Training Academy (RIMPTA) and role play trainings for the State Police. She was a trainer for the Providence Police Academy, for Block Island, Little Compton and Portsmouth Police Departments' in-service trainings and for a statewide training for police department dispatchers. She also helped train 28 new trainers for the Curriculum Committee and was an active participant on the state's Sexual Assault Task Force.

With the assistance of two summer interns, the DVTMU processed domestic violence/sexual assault forms a total of 22,339 times during 2019. (With a three-stage process to properly enter information in the database, some individual forms are counted more than once and up to three times.)

# V. Navigating the Court System

## Rhode Island Court Structure



## VI. Court Governance and Administration



### CHIEF JUDICIAL OFFICERS

The chief judicial officers of the six courts in Rhode Island's unified judicial system are, from left, Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal Chief Magistrate Domenic A. DiSandro III, Family Court Chief Judge Michael B. Forte, Superior Court Presiding Justice Alice Bridget Gibney, Supreme Court Chief Justice Paul A. Suttell, District Court Chief Judge Jeanne E. LaFazia, and Workers' Compensation Court Chief Judge Robert M. Ferrieri.



### COURT ADMINISTRATORS

The administrators of the six courts in Rhode Island's unified judicial system are, from left, Steven C. Waluk (District Court), Dennis Gerstmeyer (Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal), J. Joseph Baxter, Jr. (Supreme Court), Marisa P. Brown (Superior Court), Ronald J. Pagliarini (Family Court), and John F. McBurney IV (Workers' Compensation Court).





## SUPREME COURT

With Chief Justice Paul A. Suttell, seated, from left to right, Maureen McKenna Goldberg, William P. Robinson III, Francis X. Flaherty, and Gilbert V. Indeglia.



## SUPERIOR COURT

Bottom, left to right: Stephen P. Nugent, Michael A. Silverstein (retired), Robert D. Krause, Alice Bridget Gibney (Presiding Justice), Melanie Wilk Thunberg, Netti C. Vogel, Susan E. McGuirl.  
 Second row, left to right: Brian Van Couyghen, Kristin E. Rodgers, William E. Carnes, Jr., Jeffrey A. Lanphear, Daniel A. Procaccini, Allen P. Rubine (retired), Bennett R. Gallo, Brian P. Stern, Sarah Taft-Carter.  
 Top, left to right: Richard D. Raspallo, John F. McBurney, III, Patricia Lynch Harwood, Maureen B. Keough, Joseph A. Montalbano, Luis M. Matos, Richard A. Licht, Melissa A. Long, Patrick T. Burke, John J. Flynn.  
 Not pictured: Melissa E. Darigan



## FAMILY COURT

Bottom, left to right: Karen Lynch Bernard, Debra E. DiSegna, Stephen J. Capineri, Michael B. Forte (Chief Judge) Lauren D'Ambra, John E. McCann III, Patricia K. Asquith.  
 Top, left to right: Paul T. Jones, Jr., Charles J. Levesque, Edward H. Newman, Jeanne L. Shepard, Feidlim Gill, Rossie Lee Harris, Jr., Sandra A. Lanni, Lia N. Stuhlsatz, Richard A. Merola, Angela M. Paulhus, Armando O. Monaco, II, Andrea M. Iannazzi, Alberto Aponte Cardona.



## DISTRICT COURT

Bottom, left to right: Anthony Capraro, Jr., Pamela Woodcock Pfeiffer, Elaine T. Bucci, Jeanne E. LaFazia (Chief Judge), Madeline Quirk, Mary E. McCaffrey, Joseph T. Houlihan, Jr.  
 Top: left to right, Joseph P. Ippolito, Jr., Christopher Smith, Brian A. Goldman, Stephen M. Isherwood, Christine S. Jabour, Colleen M. Hastings, James J. Caruolo, Melissa DuBose, J. Patrick O'Neill.



## WORKERS' COMPENSATION COURT

Bottom, left to right, Robert E. Hardman, Dianne M. Connor, Robert M. Ferrieri (Chief Judge),  
George T. Salem, Jr., Michael J. Feeney.

Top, left to right, Keith A. Cardoza, Jr., Stephen A. Minicucci, Alfredo T. Conte, Susan P. Fay.



## RHODE ISLAND TRAFFIC TRIBUNAL

Bottom, left to right, Lillian M. Almeida, Domenic A. DiSandro, III (Chief Magistrate), Edward C. Parker.

Top, left to right, Erika Kruse Weller, Joseph A. Abbate, William T. Noonan, Alan R. Goulart,  
Michael DiChiro, Jr.

# VII. Recognition

*Appointed in 2019*



**Honorable  
Melissa E. Darigan**  
Associate Justice  
SUPERIOR COURT



**Honorable  
Richard A. Merola**  
Associate Justice  
FAMILY COURT



**Honorable  
Christopher Smith**  
Associate Judge  
DISTRICT COURT



**Honorable  
Melissa DuBose**  
Associate Judge  
DISTRICT COURT



**Honorable  
Susan Pepin Fay**  
Associate Judge  
WORKERS' COMPENSATION  
COURT



**Honorable  
Keith Cardoza**  
Associate Judge  
WORKERS' COMPENSATION  
COURT



**Honorable  
Alberto A. Cardona**  
Magistrate  
FAMILY COURT



**Honorable  
Michael DiChiro, Jr.**  
Magistrate  
TRAFFIC TRIBUNAL



## VII. Recognition

### *Retirements*



**Honorable  
Bennett R. Gallo**  
Associate Justice  
SUPERIOR COURT



**Honorable  
John E. McCann III**  
Associate Justice  
FAMILY COURT



**Honorable  
George N. DiMuro**  
Magistrate  
FAMILY COURT

### *In Memoriam*



**Honorable  
Donald F. Shea**  
Associate Justice (Retired)  
SUPREME COURT



**Honorable  
Joseph F. Rodgers Jr.**  
Presiding Justice (Retired)  
SUPERIOR COURT



**Honorable  
John E. Orton III**  
Associate Justice (Retired)  
SUPERIOR COURT



**Honorable  
Joseph A. Keough**  
Magistrate (Retired)  
SUPERIOR COURT







# VIII. Caseload Data Charts

## AT A GLANCE

### Judicial Officers

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65 Judges  
(5 Vacancies)  
27 Female  
5 Minorities

20 Magistrates  
(1 Vacancy)  
5 Female  
1 Minority

### Employees

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FTE Count  
726.3 Authorized  
685.9 Average Filled

### Facilities

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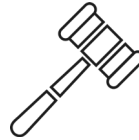
6 Courthouses  
(2 Administrative  
Buildings)

79 Courtrooms  
(4 Grand Jury Rooms,  
2 Mental Health  
Courtrooms)



**180,865**

Total Filings in 2019



**163,197**

Total Dispositions in 2019

# Supreme Court

## 2019 Appellate Filings

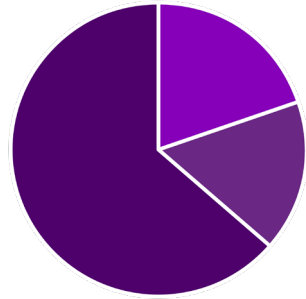
|                    |            |
|--------------------|------------|
| Criminal           | 68         |
| Civil              | 149        |
| Miscellaneous      | 273        |
| <hr/>              |            |
| <b>Total Filed</b> | <b>490</b> |



■ CIVIL ■ CRIMINAL ■ MISCELLANEOUS

## 2019 Appellate Manner of Disposition

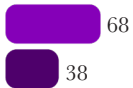
|                            |            |
|----------------------------|------------|
| Permission Denied          | 96         |
| Disposed Prior to Decision | 80         |
| Decided on the Merits      | 305        |
| <hr/>                      |            |
| <b>Total Disposed</b>      | <b>481</b> |



■ CIVIL ■ CRIMINAL ■ MISCELLANEOUS

## 2019 Appellate Caseload

Criminal



Civil



Miscellaneous

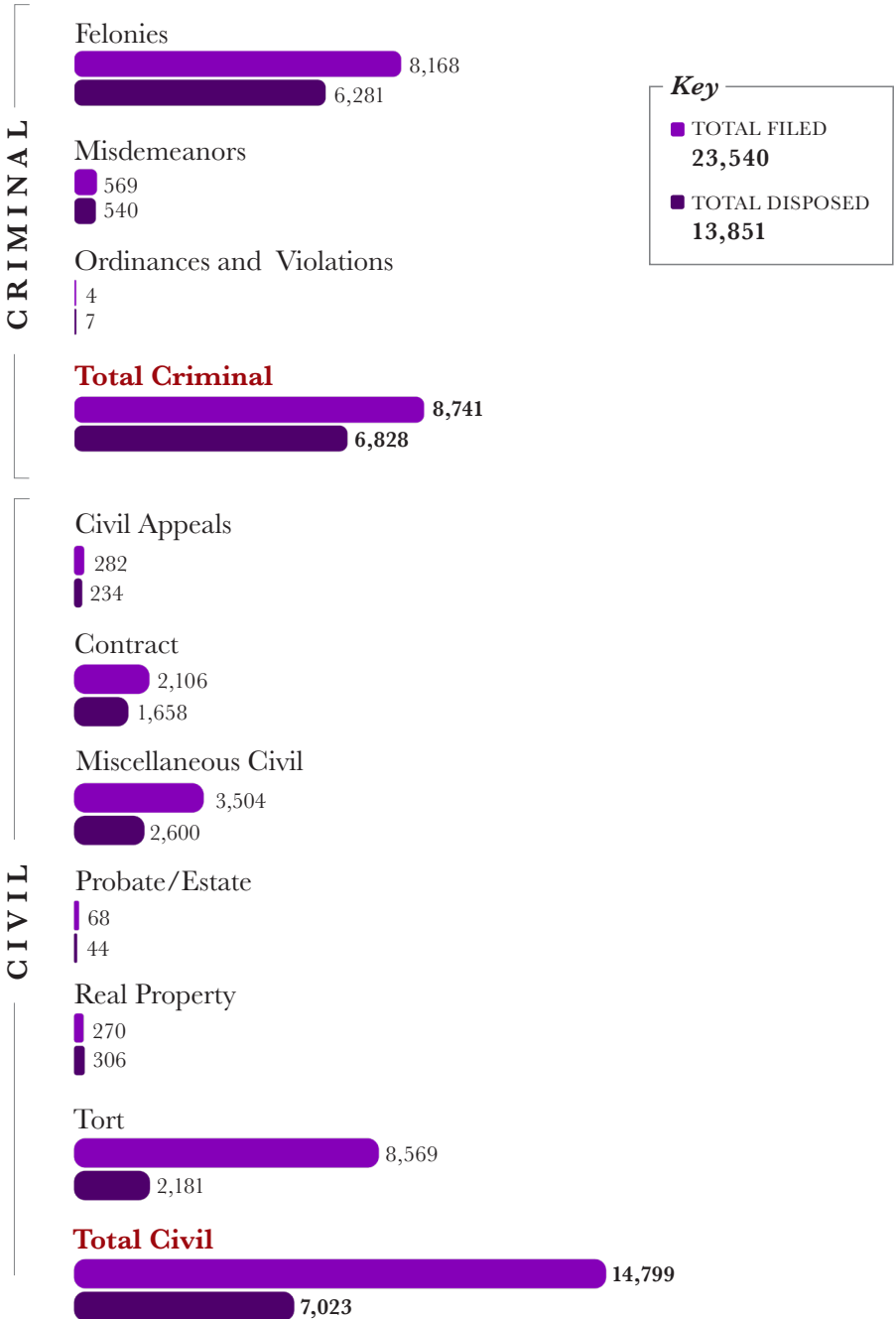


### Key

- TOTAL FILED  
490
- TOTAL DISPOSED  
481

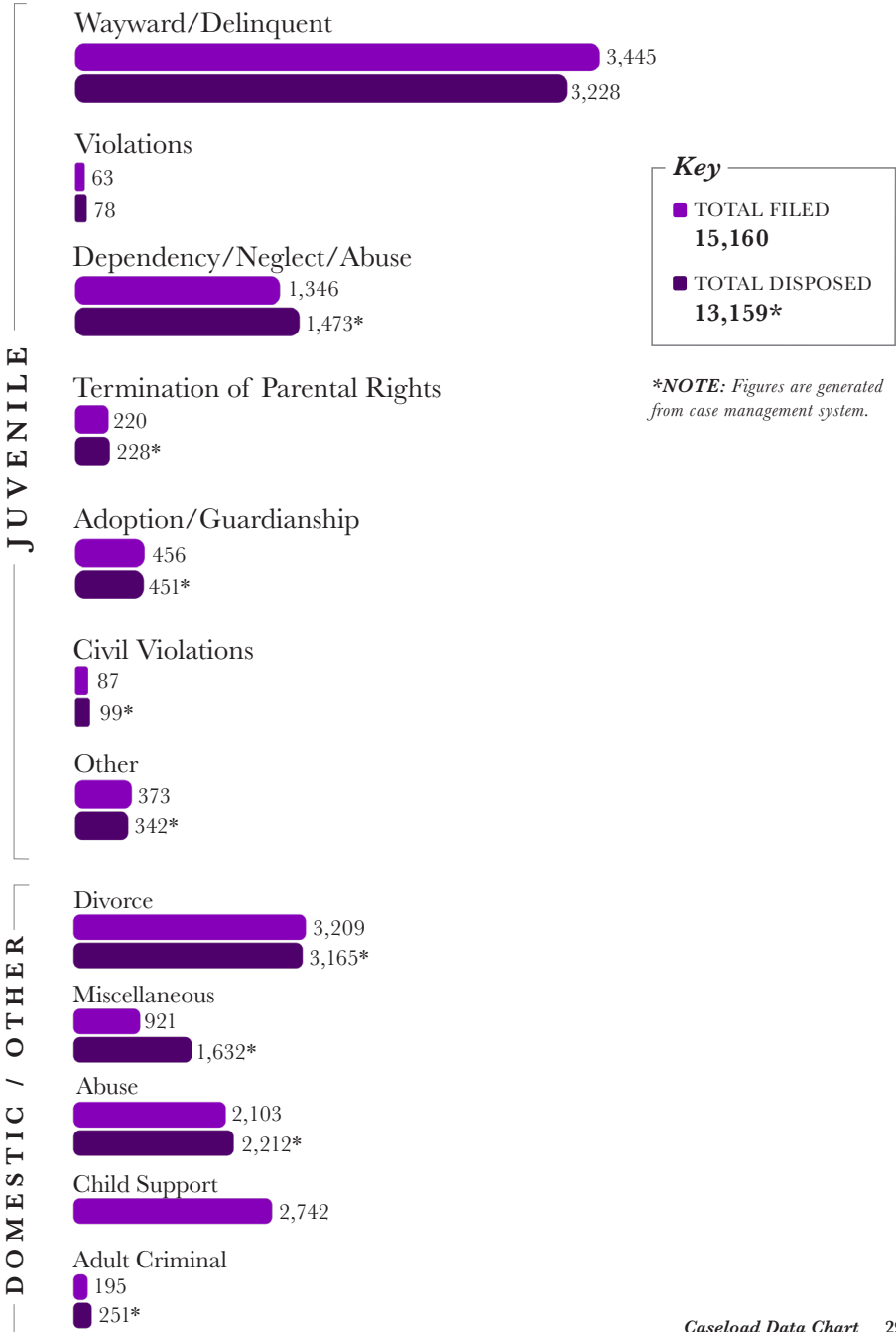
# Superior Court

## 2019 Superior Court Caseload



# Family Court

## 2019 Family Court Caseload



JUVENILE

DOMESTIC / OTHER



# District Court

## 2019 District Court Caseload

### Misdemeanors



### Felonies



### Civil Violations



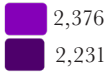
### Violations



### Ordinances



### Small Claims



### Civil



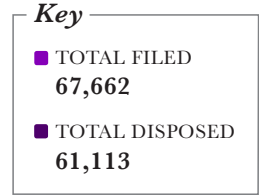
### Abuse



### Administrative Appeals



### Mental Health Hearings



# Workers' Compensation Court

## 2019 Workers' Compensation Caseload

### Employee Petitions to Review



### Employer Petitions to Review



### Lump Sum Settlement



### Miscellaneous Petitions



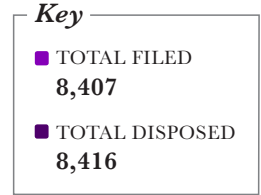
### Original Petitions



### Petitions for Medical



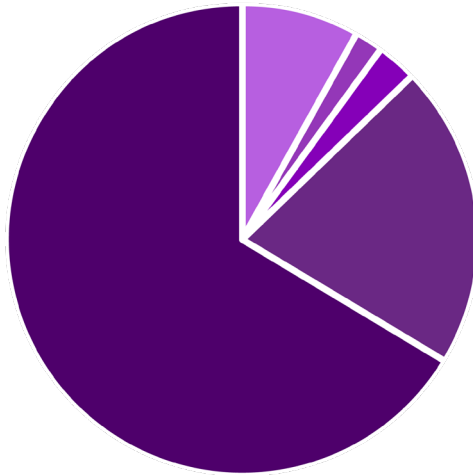
### Petitions to Enforce



# Traffic Tribunal

## 2019 Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal Caseload

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| <b>Traffic Tribunal Summonses Issued</b>         | <b>65,606</b> |
| Insurance  | 7,547         |
| Marijuana  | 1,721         |
| Breathalyzer                                     | 2,628         |
| Speeding   | 19,222        |
| Other  | 61,315        |
| <hr/>  |               |
| <b>Total Violations</b>                          | <b>92,433</b> |
| <b>Total Traffic Tribunal Summonses Disposed</b> | <b>67,066</b> |



■ OTHER ■ SPEEDING ■ INSURANCE ■ MARIJUANA ■ BREATHALYZER REFUSALS

*NOTE: All figures are estimates generated from the case management system.*

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### **PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS**

Cover – Courtroom 8, Licht Judicial Complex, Craig Berke

Page 19 – Supreme Court, Holly Hitchcock

Page 20 – Family Court and District Court, Craig Berke and Jasmin Chery

Page 21 – Workers' Compensation Court, Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal, Craig Berke

Candid photographs by Craig Berke and Jasmin Chery

*Office of Community Outreach and Public Relations*



## **RHODE ISLAND JUDICIARY**

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