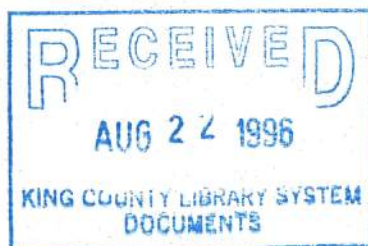




# KING COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT

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## 1995 ANNUAL REPORT





*To the Judges, Commissioners and Staff of the Superior Court, Elected Officials and Citizens of King County:*

*I am pleased to present to you the 1995 Annual Report for King County Superior Court. This past year, the court maintained its focus on improving the management of its growing caseload, at the same time looking to the future by undertaking various innovative projects, a few of which are summarized in the paragraphs to follow.*

**IC Transition-***In 1995, the court prepared for the transition of its civil caseload to an Individual Calendar (IC)-based system, expanding the original pilot project initiated in 1989. The IC system places greater emphasis on focused management of case processing, monitoring case progress against measurable time standards, and establishing hearing date certainty. The court's full transition to an IC system will occur in early 1996.*

**Juvenile Court Improvements-***The court undertook a backlog reduction/enhanced case management effort for its juvenile offender caseload as well. Over the course of a six-month period, the case backlog was virtually eliminated, thanks in large part to the leadership of the chief juvenile court judge, the infusion of additional judicial resources by district court and senior judges serving as judges pro tem, and hard work and commitment of staff to the undertaking. Juvenile court personnel and judges also took on an active role in monitoring the flow of cases through the system, setting up a case setting process where trial dates are set early in the life of a case, and pre-assigning cases to a specific judge. Case processing time from filing to disposition has been reduced from 6 months to 3 months in 90% of all cases. The court also achieved the goal of obtaining 79% of all guilty pleas at or before case setting (1-2 weeks post-arraignment).*

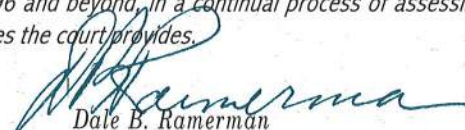
**Family Court Services Backlog Reduction-***Significant changes, implemented in 1993, continue to positively impact case management and effectively eliminate cases needing parenting plans from languishing in a backlog. Fees for services and the mandatory four-hour parent seminar deter those that are not serious about their parenting plan disputes from taking social worker time. In addition, others learn enough at the parent seminar to settle their differences without the need for further social worker intervention.*

**Drug Court-***Initiated in August, 1994, the Drug Court project went into full operation in 1995. Designed to expedite case processing as well as divert defendants to treatment, an evaluation of the first year of the project found that the program was a success.*

**Regional Justice Center (RJC) Planning-***With the opening of the Kent Regional Justice Center fast approaching (set for February 1997 as of this writing), the court has been busily preparing for this transition to a operating a regionalized court facility. Judges, commissioners, and staff have been working tirelessly to analyze caseloads and calendars to determine optimal operational levels, procedures, and staffing at the new facility, both at opening and at various stages of build-out. Case assignments indicating venue with either "SEA" or "KNT" case number extensions were initiated this year, allowing the court to refine volume projections and to plan for the transfer of active cases to the RJC in 1997.*

**Unified Family Court (UFC)-***With the project's first phase completed, Phase II efforts were directed toward refining recommendations regarding the integration of youth and family-related court proceedings. Task forces worked to develop action plans for the implementation of recommendations in four key issue areas: infrastructure/services, infrastructure/administration, organization and caseload, and human resources. Task force reports detailed next steps for key players to take in order to put the recommendations into practice.*

*These activities represent but a sampling of the various projects undertaken by the court over the course of the past year. We plan to continue these efforts in 1996 and beyond, in a continual process of assessing our performance and striving for excellence in the services the court provides.*

  
Dale B. Ramerman  
Presiding Judge

## 1995 Court Programs: Serving The Community

**FAMILY COURT SERVICES** — Family Court Services (FCS) was established in 1950. Its purpose is to furnish the bench with social information to assist judges and commissioners in making decisions in the best interests of children and families by providing professional evaluation services. In addition, the social workers are to provide and recommend intervention services that move families from litigation and conflict escalation to mediation and conflict resolution. This is intended to reduce court time and costs and, more importantly, reduce family disintegration. Services provided include: parenting plan mediation and evaluation, parent seminars, domestic violence assessments, independent adoption oversight, and marriage waiver assessments. Services are provided on a sliding fee scale basis, except for domestic violence assessments, for which there are no fees; \$282,607 was generated this year as revenue from service fees. In 1995, FCS handled 1,348 families referred to mediation services, of which 75% reached full or partial agreement; 347 families referred for evaluation; 1,155 individuals who participated in parent classes; and 349 independent adoptions. In addition to the 21 staff at FCS, an additional 2,440 volunteer hours were contributed by Master's level student interns.

**COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE (CASA) PROGRAM** — The CASA Program of King County Superior Court was developed 12 years ago to protect the best interests of children in custody and visitation disputes. The goal of the CASA Program is to provide qualified, trained volunteers to conduct independent investigations and submit unbiased recommendations to the Court. A CASA is appointed in Family Law cases where there are allegations of sexual, substance, and/or physical abuse, third party custody proceedings, or when a child has reached the age of discretion. In 1995, CASA staff trained 78 new volunteers, and by the year's end, there were 231 active CASA's. The total number of new cases processed in 1995 was 247, in which CASA volunteers represented 392 children. CASA volunteers submitted 339 reports to court. Additionally, CASA volunteers and program staff, together, attended 227 hearings and 78 trials in 1995.

**CONFERENCE COMMITTEE DIVERSION PROGRAM** — The Conference Committee Diversion Program receives minor and first offenders diverted from the formal court process. The goals of the program are to provide prompt, sure, and just punishment that protects the rights of youth and provides an avenue for the community to show its concern for youth. community-based panels comprised of trained volunteers meet with the youth referred to the program and their parents, and have the authority to impose sanctions such as restitution to crime victims, community services hours and counseling. In 1995, 26 neighborhood-based Conference Committees comprised of a total of 400 volunteers were active in King County; 3,180 children/cases were referred to these panels in 1995. Offenders have a 92% completion rate with the program. In addition, the program generated \$250,000 in revenue via participation fees.

**GUARDIAN AD LITEM (GAL) PROGRAM** — The GAL Program is responsible for training volunteers to represent the best interests of abused and neglected children in juvenile dependency cases. This program serves as a national model for involving community volunteers in court proceedings. Volunteers spend thousands of hours each year investigating cases, interviewing parties involved in cases, monitoring compliance with court orders, and attending court hearings. In 1995, 349 new cases involving 526 children were assigned GAL's. A total of 377 volunteers are currently active in the program, which represents 2,000 children annually.

**MANDATORY ARBITRATION** — The Mandatory Arbitration Program was implemented in King County Superior Court in October, 1980. The program was designed to provide an equitable, less expensive and faster means of resolving civil disputes while reducing court congestion, case processing costs to the Court, and litigants' expenses. The program was initially limited to civil cases involving monetary judgments of less than \$10,000; this limit has been raised several times and now the monetary limits are \$35,000 per claim. A total of 3,469 cases were managed by the Arbitration Program in 1995, including 2,652 new filings and 817 cases carried over from 1994. Cases disposed either by settlement, award, or return to the trial calendar totaled 2,583 in 1995. Currently, the program has 1,200 active arbitrators available for assignment of cases.

**FAMILY LAW FACILITATOR PROGRAM** — The Family Law Facilitator Program was initiated in King County Superior Court in 1993 as a pilot program, and was made a permanent part of court operations in 1994. The program is designed to provide procedural and referral information to litigants involved in Family Law actions without representation by an attorney. Services are focused on providing litigants with the information and tools they need in order to get their case heard before a commissioner or judge, including locating required forms and complying with local rules and procedures. In 1995, over 4,800 people were assisted by the office.

**INTERPRETER SERVICES** — Created in 1992, the Office of Interpreter Services assists the growing number of non-English speaking people coming to the court for services. The office staff are responsible for providing interpreter services for Spanish-speaking litigants (two of the office staff are state-certified Spanish interpreters), scheduling interpreters in all foreign languages and for the deaf and hard of hearing for court hearings and trials, recruiting and training new court interpreters, and providing referral information to outside agencies throughout the state. In 1995, interpreters representing over 60 languages were utilized in hundreds of court hearings and trials. In addition, office staff conducted court orientation sessions for interpreters, judges, and court staff.



## Superior Court 1995 Budget

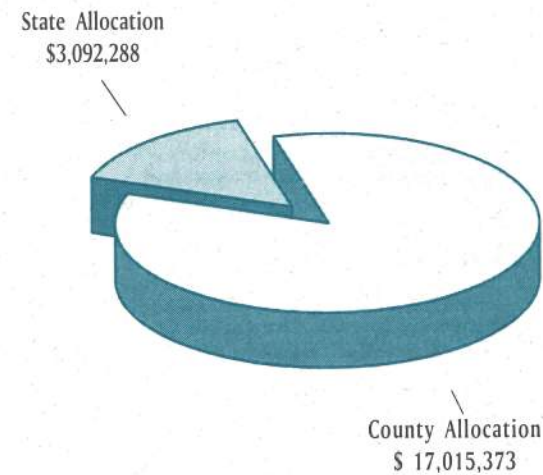


Chart 1. 1995 Superior Court Funding by Sources

Chart 2 shows how the court's funds provided by King County are used. Over half, 57%, is for judicial services. This includes salaries for judges, commissioners, bailiffs, court reporters and staff that provide direct support to courtroom operations.

The second largest category is for the four social service programs provided by the court. The court's social services include the Conference Committee Diversion Program, Guardian Ad Litem in juvenile dependency matters, Family Court Services and CASA. Combined, these four programs represent about 15% of the court's budget.

Mandatory Services represents another 15% of the court's budget. This category includes payments to interpreters, GAL experts in incompetency cases, expert witnesses, jury fees, payments to pro tem judges and commissioners and payments to arbitrators.

Finally, about 13% of the budget is to provide Support Services. This includes court administration, budget, payroll, security, and facility services.

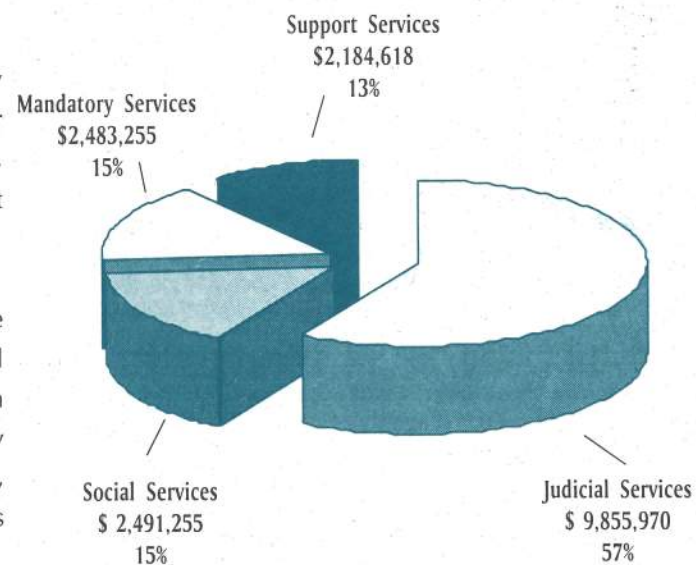


Chart 2. 1995 Superior Court Allocations

Chart 1 shows the funding sources for Superior Court's 1995 budget of approximately \$20,107,000. The majority of the funds (over 80%) came from King County. The State of Washington contributed a total of over \$3,000,000. This included funds for half of the 49 superior court judges' salaries and benefits, as well as the state's share of arbitrator and pro tem judge payments.

## Judicial Caseload

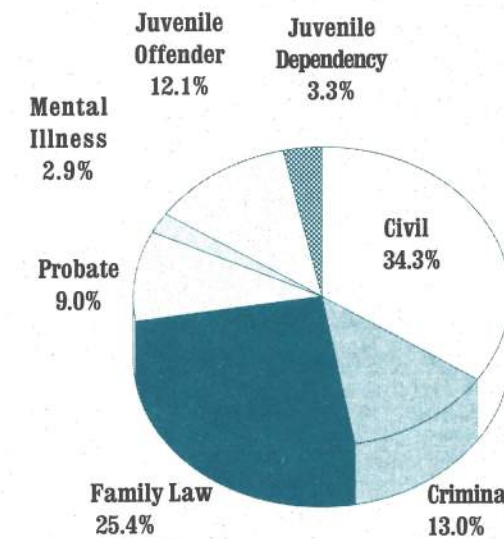


FIGURE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF 1995 FILINGS

TABLE 1. TOTAL JUDICIAL FILINGS BY CASE TYPE, 1994-1995

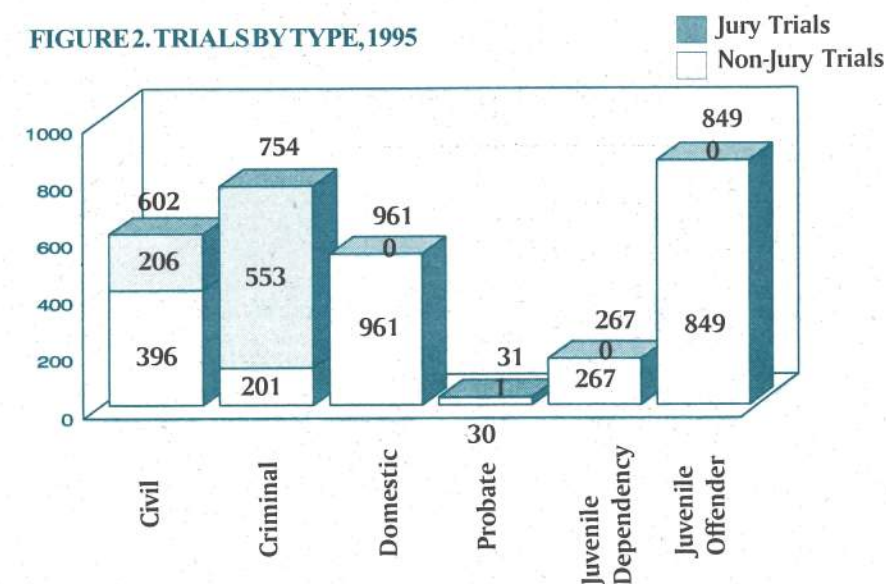
Case Type	1994	1995	% Change 1994 to 1995
Civil	22,234	22,667	+1.9%
Criminal	8,442	8,614	+2.0%
Family Law	16,814	16,789	-0.2%
Probate/Adop./Guardianship	6,051	5,938	-1.9%
Juvenile Dependency*	1,427	2,182	+52.9%
Juvenile Offender	8,307	7,990	-3.8%
Mental Illness	1,916	1,903	-0.7%
<b>Total Cases Filed</b>	<b>65,191</b>	<b>66,083</b>	<b>+1.2%</b>

\*Significant change resulting from addition of truancy cases in 1995.

TABLE 2. TOTAL RESOLUTIONS BY CASE TYPE, 1994 -1995

Case Type	1994	1995	% Change
Civil	21,990	22,455	+2.1%
Criminal	8,144	8,745	+7.4%
Family Law	16,023	16,107	+0.5%
Probate/Adop./Guardianship	6,994	5,883	-1.6%
Juvenile Dependency	1,582	1,419	-10.3%
Juvenile Offender	8,742	8,584	-1.8%
Mental Illness	1,831	1,870	+2.1%
<b>Total Cases Resolved</b>	<b>65,143</b>	<b>65,099</b>	<b>-0.1%</b>

FIGURE 2. TRIALS BY TYPE, 1995



## Trial Activity