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Modest Increase in Backlogged Court Cases Reflects Difficult Economy

[The Judiciary's year-end case management report](#) shows that the majority of court caseloads remain current, with a modest increase in backlog that reflects a loss of staff members and difficult economic times. Today's announcement by Judge Glenn A. Grant, acting administrative director of the courts, accompanied the release of the Judiciary's year-end statistical report, which shows how each of the vicinages in the state court system is faring in terms of resolving cases timely. The report is available online at njcourts.com.

"The increase in backlog is attributable to a number of factors, including the loss of 300 staff positions through attrition and early retirements, and high number of judicial vacancies for part of the year," said Judge Grant. "We are optimistic, however, that with the recent influx of new judicial appointments we will be able to make some headway against the backlog in the coming months."

The report shows that 1,134,943 Superior Court cases were filed between July 1, 2008 and June 30, 2009, a 1 percent decline from last year's adjusted figure of 1,144,468 cases. During the same period, 1,132,760 cases were resolved, a 2 percent decline from last year. On June 30, the courts had 229,622 cases pending, including 202,121 in inventory and 27,501 in "backlog." The backlog figure represents 12 percent of the pending caseload, up 1 percent from last year's 11 percent backlog figure.

"Backlog" is the term used for cases that are not resolved within the time goals that the courts have set for themselves. Measuring backlog has become an important assessment tool as the Judiciary seeks to continuously improve its operations.

Family Division caseloads remain largely current, with 94 percent of all pending family cases within time goals for resolution. On June 30, 99 percent of child placement review caseloads were current, with 84 cases in backlog statewide; 98 percent of all child abuse and neglect cases were current, with 79 cases in backlog around the state; 94 percent of domestic violence cases were current, with 100 in backlog; 87 percent of kinship cases were current, with 16 in backlog; and 78 percent of juvenile/family crisis cases were current, with 5 in backlog. The juvenile delinquency caseload also is largely current, with 94 percent of the pending cases within time goals for resolution.

Non-dissolution cases, which involve custody or child support disputes between unmarried couples, are by far the largest portion of the family division caseload. During the court year, the backlog grew from 452 to 1,093 cases, and the percentage of cases in backlog increased from 4 percent to 9 percent of the active pending caseload. Dissolution, or divorce, cases also comprise a major portion of the family division caseload. During the court year the backlog of dissolution cases grew from 949 cases in backlog to 1,195 cases in backlog, and the percentage of cases in backlog increased from 5 percent to 6 percent of the active pending caseload.

The civil division reported a 3 percent decline in backlogged cases. The majority of cases filed in Superior Court are special civil cases, which are cases with damages less than \$15,000. Those include landlord/tenant matters, small

claims, auto and contract cases. In court year 2009, the courts received 605,315 special civil cases, slightly lower than the 607,880 special civil cases that were filed during the previous court year. On June 30, the civil division showed a 24 percent reduction in backlogged special civil cases, with 99 percent of the pending special civil caseload within time goals for resolution. Civil caseloads remain largely current, with 84 percent of civil cases within time goals for resolution on June 30. Eighty-four percent of general equity cases also were current on June 30.

The number of criminal cases filed grew by 1 percent during court year 2009, and the backlog of criminal cases grew by 16 percent. Overall the backlog in the criminal division, including post-conviction relief and municipal appeals, rose by 14 percent.

"The Judiciary relies upon objective data as one of our critical tools for assessing our performance. The staffing and budgetary challenges have obviously impacted our organization, but we have been able to continue to respond to the needs of the public for court services. I would like to commend the judges and staff for their hard work and accomplishments during this challenging period. Above all, we remain committed to our goal of providing high quality justice for all of our litigants," said Judge Grant.

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Note: As of July 2008, probate filings and resolutions no longer include Appointment of Special Medical Guardians or Withdrawals from Intermingled Trust Funds. Historical data has been adjusted for comparison purposes.

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