



— 2018 —

# ANNUAL REPORT

RHODE ISLAND JUDICIARY



— 2018 —  
**ANNUAL REPORT**  
RHODE ISLAND JUDICIARY

# LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

## TO THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY:

It is our distinct privilege to present to you the 2018 Annual Report of the Rhode Island Judiciary, pursuant to G.L. 1956 (2012 Reenactment) § 8-15-7.

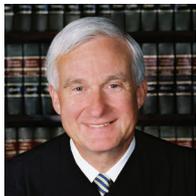
The pages that follow show caseload summaries and highlight the calendars and programs that we provide daily in the interests of access to justice for the diverse litigants who pass through our doors.

Diversity is a concentration for which the Judiciary has been recognized nationally and locally within the past year. The Judiciary has launched several initiatives designed to encourage middle school, high school and college students to pursue a career in the legal field, to attend law school and to practice in Rhode Island. The Judiciary partners with educators, school administrators, and service organizations to offer the Judiciary Shadow Program and the Judiciary Employment Education Program, which were launched to bridge the population versus workforce representation gap in the legal field. Details about recognition awards for this initiative can be found in the Court Services section of this report.

As you know, our core mission is to deliver fair and timely justice. We embrace the public demand for austerity and being effective stewards of taxpayer dollars. We believe the detailed narrative and data on the pages that follow demonstrate how we have worked diligently to achieve cost efficiencies across the Judiciary's many functions and in all six of the courts within our unified system.

Each of our courts has created specialty calendars to provide a more efficient means of dispensing justice while oftentimes dealing with social service complexities that come with certain case types. Our courts, after all, are about the public. Adequate funding makes for efficient and effective courts, saving taxpayers money. But when a shortage of sheriffs to staff our courtrooms puts people in harm's way it also often results in court operation cutbacks. In some cases, calendars are cancelled or limited, ultimately leading to continuances, delays, and a restriction to access to justice. We hope to see more bodies added to the ranks of the Sheriffs' Division to ensure a safer environment in which our state's citizens can turn to have their disputes resolved.

Respectfully submitted,



Paul A. Suttell  
*Chief Justice*



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

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **I. RETHINKING JUSTICE**

## **II. SPECIALTY CALENDARS**

- Adult Drug Calendar
- Termination of Probation
- Pretrial Services
- 'No soldier left behind'
- Supporting Families

## **III. CASELOAD TRANSFORMATION**

- Electronic Filing and Case Management
- Conversion Overview
- Looking Ahead

## **IV. COURT SERVICES**

- Language Access
- Mediation
- Community Outreach
- Diversity
- Facilities, Operations, and Security
- State Law Library
- Judicial Records Center
- Law Clerk Department
- Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit

## **V. NAVIGATING THE COURT SYSTEM**

## **VI. COURT GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION**

## **VII. RECOGNITION**

## **VIII. CASELOAD DATA CHARTS**



# I.

## RETHINKING JUSTICE

Deciding what to criminalize and what to decriminalize have become the challenges of the day as Rhode Island lawmakers, law enforcers, and the courts increasingly look for innovative responses to society's problems, many of which are tied to mental health or substance addiction. Consider the following examples:

- An auto mechanic hooked on painkillers, pulled from the depths of his drug dependence after crashing his vehicle and getting arrested for drug possession.
- An Army veteran with no prior criminal record but traumatized by the stress of combat, charged with domestic abuse, gets another chance.
- Convicted criminals, avoiding prison but on seemingly endless cycles of suspended sentences and supervision, find light at the end of the probation tunnel.
- A young couple, raised and battered in dysfunctional households, are bound to repeat learned behaviors with their own infant until intervenors step in.

These are but a mere few of the real-life scenarios that present themselves regularly in the state courts and some of the developing approaches designed to address them. Combine these with an increasing number of non-English speaking litigants in need of language assistance, a rising number of self-represented litigants, and a filing system that has largely become electronic, and the result is a Judiciary that continues to re-engineer itself since the turn of the millennium.

The changing nature of court caseloads in the past decade 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.

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.



## II.

# SPECIALTY CALENDARS

### ADULT DRUG CALENDAR

Turning from punitive approaches and focusing on treatment and prevention options are on display with the courts' specialty calendars. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Adult Drug Calendar of the Superior Court. The Adult Drug Calendar continues to be an effective diversion program for nonviolent, first-time drug offenders. Its mission is to focus on treatment while providing defendants with an opportunity to have their records cleared if they successfully complete the program.

In 2018, the program admitted 80 new defendants and graduated 66 defendants, including those admitted in prior years. The program terminated 29 defendants, leaving 148 active participants as of December 31, 2018. Since 2006, the Adult Drug Calendar has had a graduation rate of 71 percent. The recidivism rates of re-arrest of 12.3 percent after one year and 11.3 percent after three years reflect an effective diversion program for drug offenders who are eligible for the Adult Drug Calendar program.

### TERMINATION OF PROBATION

A rule change in the Superior Court allows individuals serving probation in the community to seek approval from the court to end their probation early, if certain criteria are met. As a result, a specialty calendar was introduced in late 2016 to address requests for early termination of probation.

Since November 2016, a total of 392 motions to terminate probation have been ruled upon. There were 217 rulings in 2018, a 30 percent increase over 2017. Of the 217 motions, 172 were granted, 39 were denied, 4 were passed, and 2 were withdrawn.

### PRETRIAL SERVICES

The District Court through its Pretrial Services Unit (PTSU) continues to work toward realization of the goals promoted by Justice Reinvestment, the national initiative to improve public safety, reduce corrections and related criminal justice spending, and reinvest savings in strategies that can decrease crime and reduce recidivism. Legislation was passed to refer domestic violence cases to the Pretrial Service Unit for monitoring. In addition to risk assessment tools, an evidence-based lethality screening tool will be used. Pretrial Services also continues to participate in the monthly Domestic Violence/Critical Case Review Meeting that identifies offenders with a high lethality risk.

The PTSU monitors all conditions of bail that are placed on a defendant by the District Court. In 2018, PTSU handled 3,360 cases. The majority of these defendants, following an assessment, were ordered to mental health and/or substance abuse treatment.

### FIREARMS SURRENDER

The District Court submitted 396 entries to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System placing a firearm disqualifier on mental health patients who were civilly certified by the court in 2018. This was close to a 20 percent increase over the previous year. In addition, the District Court issued 965 orders to surrender firearms in criminal cases and 398 such orders in domestic abuse cases.

The Superior Court, meanwhile, processed 10 cases in the second half of 2018 under the state's new "red flag" extreme risk protection order law, ordering at least a temporary surrender of firearms in 9 of them.



At a 2018 graduation ceremony in District Court, Associate Judge Pamela Woodcock Pfeiffer congratulates a defendant who participated in the veterans treatment program, as veterans who serve as mentors look on.

---

## **The Rhode Island Veterans Calendar had a 94% success rate, which is a higher success rate than many other veterans courts across the nation.**

---

### **‘NO SOLDIER LEFT BEHIND’**

On June 15, 2018, U.S. Senator Jack Reed convened a roundtable meeting at the Noel Judicial Complex in Warwick to discuss the Rhode Island Veterans Treatment Calendar. Attendees included representatives from the Veterans Administration, various state agencies, department heads and veterans organizations. One significant announcement was that the Rhode Island Veterans Calendar had a 94 percent success rate (6 percent recidivism), which is a higher success rate than many other veterans courts across the nation. After the roundtable, Senator Reed and other distinguished guests attended a Veterans Treatment Calendar graduation. In 2018, 93 individuals participated in the Rhode Island Veterans Treatment Calendar, all of whom were monitored by the PTSU. Several participants were able to obtain employment through the Veterans Court collaboration with Network RI and the Veterans Assembled Electronics program. The Veterans Treatment Calendar has celebrated 364 successful

graduates since inception in April 2011. This is an especially impressive number given the intensity and length of the program.

### **SUPPORTING FAMILIES**

The Family Court’s new Safe and Secure Baby Calendar was implemented by Chief Judge Michael B. Forte in 2017. The purpose of the Safe and Secure Baby Calendar is to support maintenance or reunification of children with mother and/or father and more timely permanency for children in the care of the state Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF), making sure those children are safe and secure and that parents are able to meet the needs of their children.

This specialized calendar provides services and support in an environment that encourages participants to ask questions and be actively involved in the progress of their cases. DCYF workers, court personnel, attorneys, and service providers are encouraged to collaborate with participants to develop a case plan that will help strengthen the family. Case plan tasks are graduated based on the priorities of each individual case. Participants are eligible to receive many services that this specialty calendar was designed to provide, including referrals and support for parents and their child, additional visits, and assistance with transportation when needed. Participants also have the benefit

## HIGHLIGHTS TO DATE:

Since the inception of the Safe and Secure Baby Calendar in March 2017, there have been  
**115 REFERRALS**

**30**  
parents have successfully completed Safe and Secure Baby Calendar

Average length of time case remains open is  
**5<sup>1/2</sup> MONTHS**

**20** active open cases *and*  
**17** pending cases as 2018 ended

of sharing their experiences with parents in similar circumstances. At the court session, parents go before the Safe and Secure Baby Calendar judicial officer and talk about their progress – how services are going, visits with the child (or children), pediatrician appointments, and compliance with other court orders. Ongoing support is provided by the Women’s Services Department staff who are social workers and have the knowledge and expertise to offer these young parents.

---

**DCYF workers, court personnel, attorneys, and service providers are encouraged to collaborate with participants to develop a case plan that will help strengthen the family.**

---

This specialty calendar has made some modifications since the inaugural session a year earlier. Referrals have greatly increased. Potential cases are now screened internally in the Juvenile Clerk’s Office or referred for intake directly at arraignment, in addition to the original conduits of attorney, judicial officer and agency/provider referrals. At the program’s one-year anniversary, eligibility expanded to include minor parents (with a guardian ad litem participating), babies over 12 months old, and babies who are not their parent’s first child.

The Women’s Services Department care coordinators have developed a “unified intake” system whereby parents are referred

for a single, confidential intake appointment to determine their suitability for either of two specialty calendars: Safe and Secure Baby Calendar or Family Treatment Drug Calendar. Depending on which calendar, the parent receives a pretrial date in the respective specialty calendar, usually within two weeks of arraignment. Not only has this enabled the court to capture eligible cases much sooner, but the unified intake has aided in the identification of cases which might have a substance abuse issue. Because all three case coordinators are cross-trained on issues related to recovery, they can address such concerns with a screen, referral for evaluation, or gathering of records to confirm prior treatment. This has been enormously helpful in directing parents to the calendar that is the best fit, saving time for both the court and the families. This system has been excellent, relying heavily on the extra work required by our care coordinators.



### III.

# CASELOAD TRANSFORMATION

## ELECTRONIC FILING AND CASE MANAGEMENT

2018 essentially was the first full year in which the core components of the Judiciary's four-year conversion to a new case management system with electronic filing were in place. With each passing year, the courts have a better sense of just how many litigants, documents, and filings are recorded.

Attorneys can file documents into the electronic system 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Since 2015, the number of weekday electronic filings has consistently fluctuated between 1,500 and 2,000 per day, often depending on the day of the week, with fewer on weekends.

---

**Statewide, the courts realized a 2.4% increase in case filings from 172,600 in 2017 to 176,750 in 2018. In 2018, there were 577,919 court hearings in the judiciary, an increase of 2.2%.**

---

Registered users of the system grew from 8,891 at the end of 2017 to 11,780 at the end of 2018, a one-year increase of 32 percent and a two-year increase of 61 percent from the end of 2016. Users are largely made up of attorneys, their office professionals, and, to some extent, self-represented litigants, although the latter are not required to register.

The courts began replacing the case management system in 2014, as well as implementing eFiling, eCharging, ePayments, and eCitations. Workers' compensation, civil,

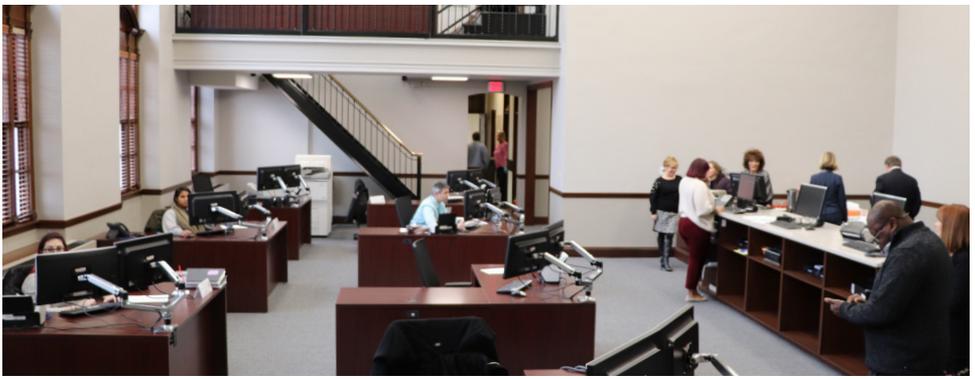
and domestic relations cases were converted in 2014, while Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal cases were converted in the third phase in 2015. Criminal cases – which include Family Court juvenile matters – and Supreme Court appeals followed in 2017.

Implementation in the Supreme Court led to a 2018 Court Statistics Project Reporting Excellence Award for appellate court caseloads from the National Center for State Courts and the national Conference of State Court Administrators.

While the Judiciary has long been able to keep count of the number of cases filed and disposed across the unified six-court system, the Odyssey case management system has provided a reporting capability that has put some startling numbers on what the courts process on an annual basis in terms of filings, hearing, documents, and pages of documents.

Statewide, the courts saw a 2.4 percent increase in case filings from 172,600 in 2017 to 176,750 in 2018. Hearings are typically associated with most case filings – and often multiple hearings. In 2018, there were 577,919 court hearings in the state court system, an increase of 2.2 percent. Electronically filed court documents, all of which must be undergo a review process by court staff before being accepted into the system, numbered 539,753. The number of pages electronically filed annually approached 2.4 million, generating what the Judiciary believes is a savings in paper and printing costs. (A breakdown of cases by court and type and other statistics can be found on pages toward the back of this report.)

Remote viewing of case dockets or registers of actions has been available to the general public



Superior Court clerks at work in the newly renovated clerks' office in the Licht Judicial Complex, Providence.

for two 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.

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 Rhode Island Supreme Court Attorney Portal (RISCAP) was put into production in 2017 for registration of bar exams. In 2018, the attorney portal was updated to allow attorneys to create attorney accounts, submit annual registrations, modify contact information, request a certificate of good standing, and submit resignation requests and transfers of Multistate Bar Examination scores.

## **CONVERSION OVERVIEW**

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 have the ability to 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.

eCharging was implemented for the Superior Court in 2018. An interface with the Department of Attorney General allows prosecutors to send information that creates a case in the Judiciary's case management system. Creation of a case allows prosecutors to then file charges using eFiling. A similar project for police departments to file charges electronically is under way.

The Superior Court also enhanced its case management with available technology. The court achieved full electronic transmission of documents to the Department of Corrections and the Probation Department, resulting in greater efficiency and accountability.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The Judiciary continues to upgrade its network infrastructure to support the new case management, electronic filing systems, and portals. In 2018, the Judicial Technology Center completed its project to provide all Rhode Island attorneys with an eNotify system. The system notifies attorneys when key documents in a case have been filed by opposing counsel, orders have been signed by a judicial officer, docketable entries have been made, and hearings scheduled. Up until that development, lawyers had to check case files



A clerk assists a litigant at Providence County Superior Court.

---

## The Judiciary continues to upgrade its network infrastructure to support the new case management, electronic filing systems, and portals.

---

periodically to see whether any such actions had been entered.

As courtrooms in the 85-year-old Licht Judicial Complex in Providence have been renovated one-by-one, 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.

The courts continue to work on a pilot for a new jury management system that will allow prospective jurors to complete an online questionnaire. Once selected for jury service, jurors can receive text messages and e-mail notification for dates of service and any other type of notifications. The system will be particularly useful for cancellations of jury service necessitated by inclement weather. The jury management pilot has been targeted for mid-2019 in Kent County.

With Odyssey now well established, the Judiciary in 2019 will commission an audit to ensure that the case management system is operating as intended, to assess its availability and effectiveness for judicial operations. The audit will allow the courts to take a proactive approach to help identify any areas of concern before they become problematic and to identify strengths within the system with proper oversight and control measures in place.



## IV.

# COURT SERVICES

### LANGUAGE ACCESS

In 2018, the Supreme Court Office of Court Interpreters provided more language services through its efforts to increase and maintain a pool of qualified interpreters. The office provides services in cases in which interpreters are requested by court staff, attorneys, or parties to a case. The services were provided in all counties in criminal and civil matters, as well as juvenile services, pretrial services, mediation, court visitation, and probation. Services included interpretation, translation, sight translation, and court information provided in languages spoken by court users.

Services were provided in 40 languages in 10,375 events in 2018, in twice as many civil cases as criminal. Spanish was the requested service in 88 percent of those events, followed by Cape Verdean, Portuguese, Mandarin, and Laotian. 2018 brought the first-ever requests for assistance with Bengali, Indonesian, and Hebrew.

The Judiciary works closely with vendors within and outside Rhode Island to recruit, train, and contract interpreters in rare languages. The services were provided by 4 certified staff interpreters, 2 qualified staff interpreters, 2 part-time staff interpreters, 23 bilingual staff, 20 individual contractors, and 32 interpreters employed by five corporate contractors approved by the state.

Having identified the need to recruit more qualified interpreters and interpreters for rare languages, the office partnered with community organizations to approach communities that were identified as having the knowledge needed to provide those services. The office also continued its partnership with neighboring states for reciprocity for the use of qualified and certified interpreters.

---

**Calendar year 2018 saw 117 cases referred to the Workers' Compensation Court mediation program, a 45% increase from the year before. Of those referred, 71 cases were successfully mediated.**

---

### MEDIATION

Alternative dispute resolution – or mediation – 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. Mediation has expanded in the Judiciary to the point where it is now prevalent in four of the six courts in the unified system.

In the Supreme Court, 58 cases were deemed eligible in 2018 for appellate mediation, an increase of 14 percent from the prior year. The top four case types eligible for mediation were personal injury, civil appeals, trespass and ejection, and contract disputes. Of those cases that were mediated, the percentage that settled increased from 40 percent in 2017 to 46 percent in 2018.

Approximately one-third of mediation participants agree to take a survey about the program. Participants continued to rate the mediators highly. Of the surveys received, 91 percent of respondents indicated they would use the same mediator again, compared to 100 percent in 2017 and 97 percent in 2016. Satisfaction with the program decreased with 85 percent, down from 97 percent, indicating

they would recommend the program to others. The average score for a participant's overall experience increased slightly to 8.7, up from 8.5 a year earlier, on a scale of 10. Consistent with past years, when asked why the case did not settle, the top reasons given were "problems too severe" (29 percent) to "not everyone willing to try" (25 percent).

The Superior Court's Annexed Arbitration program for civil disputes has experienced steady growth over the past five years, with 901 cases certified for arbitration in 2018. The program continues to succeed with 43 percent of arbitrated cases resolved.

The Family Court's Mediation Unit conducted its third "Settlement Week" program in November. The unit handled 16 cases from all three domestic calendar judges. Of the 16 cases, 10 were fully resolved, 1 partially resolved, 3 were unresolved, and 2 remain pending.

Reviewing the results from the three settlement weeks offered in fall 2017, spring 2018 and fall 2018, the average rate of success/partial success hovers around 70 percent. Even if cases do not resolve in mediation, there is value in just getting the parties to the table to talk. Often the options discussed in mediation lead to agreements later on. It is difficult to identify the number of those cases because there is no contact once mediation has concluded. The plan is to continue to tackle divorce cases which have been pending more than nine months by using the same tools employed for the settlement weeks, but on an ongoing basis rather than two sessions per year.

Chief Judge Forte has started a pilot program to identify new divorce cases in which both parties are self-represented to have a mediator meet with them on their initial hearing date. The thought is that when both parties are self-represented, there are usually minimal assets and generally fewer issues for the parties to resolve to reach a nominal divorce. Starting in early 2019, every Monday through Thursday

one mediator will be available to the domestic calendar judges to mediate such cases.

The new Workers' Compensation Court's Mediation Program continued to flourish in 2018, its second year of operation. After a case reaches trial level, it may be referred for mediation by the trial judge with agreement of the parties. The mediation sessions occur at the Workers' Compensation Court and are conducted by retired or active Workers' Compensation Court judges. Calendar year 2018 saw 117 cases referred to the mediation program, a 45 percent increase from the year before. Of those referred, 71 cases were successfully mediated, 7 cases saw no resolution and returned to trial, and 39 were still pending an outcome to the mediation. Cases which saw a conclusion to the mediation process (settlement or return to trial) in 2018 attained a 91 percent success rate of settlement. This remarkable success rate is a 21 percent increase from last year. This alternative dispute resolution program gives parties a tool that facilitates communication and assists them in reaching a mutually acceptable resolution. It has been praised by practitioners in the court for its successes.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Courthouse tours for school groups were suspended for a third straight year in 2018 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 Supreme Court hears oral arguments on the road at Lincoln High School.

The five Supreme Court justices and court staff took the appellate process on the road for its annual “Riding the Circuit” program when it heard oral arguments at Lincoln High School in April 2018.

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 million students nationwide, and it heads a coalition of 67 education and policy organizations focused on expanding and improving civics education in the United States.

At the end of the 2017-2018 school year, Rhode Island ranked number one in the nation for iCivics website visits relative to the state’s total K-12 student body. Rhode Island teachers were using iCivics resources to reach nearly 53,000 students across the state (about 27 percent of the K-12 student population). Midway through the 2018-2019 school year, the program was reaching 63,250 students,

an increase of 19 percent. More new teachers have registered to use the program in Rhode Island in the 2018-2019 school than all of the previous school year (165 vs. 160).

The Family Court finalized 23 adoptions with 19 families at its 15th Annual National Adoption Day in November 2018, a public event that drew more than 250 people to the Noel Judicial Complex in Warwick for the first time. Families, friends, court staff, and supporters joined that day to celebrate with adoptive families, coinciding with events

---

## **At the end of 2017-2018 school year, Rhode Island ranked first in the nation for iCivics website visits relative to the state’s total K-12 student body.**

---

held across the United States to draw attention to the adoption process and the number of children available for adoption. These festivities were also supported by many community sponsors and agencies, and the Family Court was grateful for their participation.

2018 saw the revitalization of the Workers' Compensation Court's community outreach program YES-RI (Young Employee Safety-Rhode Island). On average over the last decade, between 700 and 800 Rhode Island youths have been injured each year, seriously enough to file a workers' compensation claim. Countless others do not know they have workers' compensation rights and do not file claims. Through outreach and education, YES-RI aims to inform adolescents about young workers' rights and injury prevention. Workers' Compensation Court judges and employees, along with lawyers and safety engineers, travel to schools throughout the state to engage high school students through this educational initiative. An effort to recruit volunteers at the court's annual educational conference resulted in over 40 new commitments. This influx of new volunteers helps to ensure the program's viability over the coming years and bring this valuable message to young workers.

## DIVERSITY

Since 2017, the Judiciary has had a diversity coordinator to educate minority communities and populations about career opportunities. New hires have averaged 20 percent from minority groups. The coordinator has focused not only on jobs within the court system, but also has actively encouraged careers in the law to help increase the number of eligible



Diversity coordinator Dorca Paulino with the Judiciary's award from Providence Business News.

minorities for judicial nominations. The courts historically have faced criticism for its small number of minority judges, despite having no role in their selection. Still, with only 2 percent of attorneys identifying as minorities, it is

worthwhile for the Judiciary to encourage law school applications and legal careers.

The Judiciary also works with Young Voices, a Rhode Island nonprofit dedicated to encouraging civic engagement among youths and their development as leaders in their communities.

The effort has received recognition at local and national levels. At year end, the Judiciary received the Providence Business News' Diversity and Inclusion Award for 2018 in the government category. For the same period, the courts received the American Society for Public Administration's Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Exemplary Practice Award. The award is presented to individuals and organizations that have made contributions to a more equal society in the areas of government, education, nonprofit institutions, and private sector organizations.

## FACILITIES, OPERATIONS, AND SECURITY

The Judiciary recognizes that its court facilities are significant capital assets of the State of Rhode Island and that as such it must be diligent in the care and preservation of those assets. The Department of Facilities, Operations, and Security's mission is to provide economical, efficient, and well-organized maintenance services to all of the Judiciary with professionalism, courtesy, and proficiency. It strives to provide the highest level of security and safety for all court employees and the various state agencies located in courthouses, as well as the public.

The department's Construction Division continued with restoration projects, completely restoring Courtrooms 1 and 7 at the Licht Judicial Complex, including furniture refinishing. The jury lounge was painted and refurbished along with other offices and public spaces. At the Fogarty Judicial Annex, which was built in 1857, the main stair tower and other public spaces were refurbished and repainted. At the Garrahy Judicial Complex, restoration of courtrooms



Brick work, masonry, and windows were restored and repaired at the Licht Judicial Complex, Providence.

upgraded with new computers and monitors, enabling deputies to monitor any camera and create unique camera views on all monitors in the block.

Shooter detection sensors have been installed in all buildings, putting Rhode Island in the forefront of this new technology installed in courthouses. The sensors have been integrated with the security camera system, automatically activating and displaying cameras in the immediate vicinity of detected shots fired, enabling quick response by sheriffs and Capitol Police.

At the McGrath Judicial Complex in South Kingstown, radar tracking sensors have been added to the security camera system, which will direct cameras to follow detected motion.

LED recessed canned lighting replacement and courtroom LED retrofitting is ongoing into 2019. The can lights are much brighter, cleaner, and also are air-tight, preventing conditioned air from leaking into unconditioned space. This was also the first major LED retrofit project with dimming controls that were already in place. These updates create electrical savings for lighting efficiency.

Upgrades to the fire alarm system at the Murray Judicial Complex in Newport were

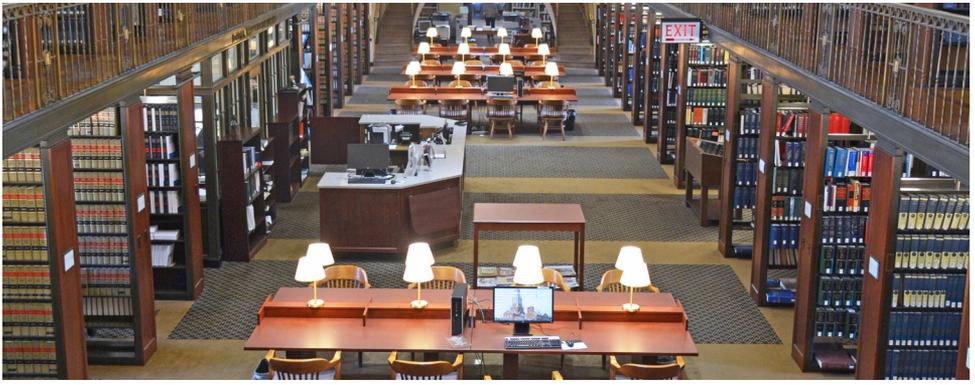
completed, and all smoke detectors and strobe devices were replaced. The former smoke detectors were more than 40 years old. The system upgrade now allows identification of the devices when in alarm or in need of service, known as an addressable system. Many strobe devices were moved from the wall and mounted on the ceiling for a clean finish.

The heating, venting, and air conditioning division continues to strive for efficiency while maintaining comfort for the Judiciary and general public. The improvements realized over the past year have been part of a multiphase project that has aided in our goal to become energy efficient while maintaining a positive impact on the operating budget for the Judiciary. Recent improvements were made to air handlers at the Garrahy Judicial Complex, boilers at the Forgarty Judicial Annex, and cooling units at the Noel Judicial Complex.

## STATE LAW LIBRARY

In 2018, the State Law Library continued to improve library services by achieving five goals: public outreach to the legal community, improvement and expansion of our library setting, participation in professional activities, formalized instruction in library resources, and purchase of additional computers to support digital access. Public outreach to the legal community was accomplished by the law librarian being part of a panel of individuals instructing Boy Scouts pursuing their Law Merit Badges. The United States Navy Legalman Paralegal Program students enrolled at Roger Williams University and preparing themselves for military Judge Advocate General units visited the library and were introduced to the vast collection. The class took special interest in the U.S. Federal Documents collection.

With the continued generosity from The Champlin Foundations, the law library continued to improve the facility's setting with the addition of a laptop commons



The Rhode Island State Law Library.

area in the foyer of the library. This area opens up the library to all users of the courthouse and provides a central place to convene, read, and utilize laptop computers in a relaxed setting. We now offer four comfortable oversized club chairs centered with a table and two reupholstered wingback chairs. In addition to the foyer, the library benefited from the Champlin grant with the replacement of 100 seat cushions done in a gold-tweed fabric, providing comfort and much needed replacement to the twenty-five year old seat cushions. These improvements complemented the aesthetic work already completed in the library to make the surroundings bright, comfortable, and accessible for 21st century learning.

Since it is always striving to improve its professional educational opportunities, the staff participated in the Annual Research Fair at Roger Williams University School of Law. In 2018, the staff hosted a table at the fair showcasing the depth and breadth of the library's treatise collection. The event was both educational and collegial, leaving attendees with fresh ideas and possibilities for improvement in their libraries.

In continuing the library's mission to provide formalized instruction in resources, the law librarian also participated in the Annual Bridge the Gap program offered in November to new members of the Rhode Island Bar. The State Law Library continues to be a proud

member of the New England Law Library Consortium. The library director attended a 2018 fall director's meeting at Harvard Law School focusing on training law students in perfecting their technological skill sets necessary for post-graduation employment.

Electronic access is a constant in today's library settings. Digital programs are a central part of the library's collection and having enough high-tech computers to handle the demand is imperative. In 2018, the library allocated part of its Champlin grant toward the purchase of three HP ProDesk 600 state-of-the-art computers featuring 23-inch displays with light-touch keyboards to the library's array.

## **JUDICIAL RECORDS CENTER**

In 2018, the Judicial Records Center in Pawtucket took custody of 275,000 older court cases from all state courthouses, and it processed more than 117,000 requests for records. The Judicial Records Center in Pawtucket now stores or controls the storage of more than 6.4 million court cases in more than 127,000 boxes.

Among the inquiries for records were 3,125 archival requests concerning naturalization, divorce, undergraduate research, post-graduate papers, and Rhode Island historical books. More than 600 Providence County coroner reports from 1900 to 1930 were flat-

filed, as were more than 700 naturalization petitions from 1894 to 1899.

## **LAW CLERK DEPARTMENT**

The Supreme Court Trial Court Law Clerk Department provides legal research and writing assistance to the trial judges and magistrates of the Rhode Island court system. These law clerks are based in the Providence/Bristol, Kent, Newport, and Washington County courthouses, and in Cranston at the Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal. They assist with the general trial and motion calendars and the special calendars: the civil motion calendar, the business, the out-county business, the asbestos, and the formal and special cause calendars. The law clerks also

---

## **The expanding case management system has enabled law clerks to obtain quick and thorough access to case pleadings and documents as well as to remain current with any incoming filings.**

---

serve the Family and District Courts and the Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal Appeals Panel. Additionally, law clerks, after training, can be appointed as guardians ad litem in the court-appointed law clerk advocate program. Law clerks also assist the Judiciary, participating in Law Day activities at local schools and with preparing materials for presentations.

In 2018, the law clerks worked on case assignments encompassing civil, criminal, and administrative law with increased efficiency by utilizing the public portal. This has enabled law clerks to obtain quick and thorough access to case pleadings and documents as well as to remain current with any incoming filings. Additionally, law clerks

in the county courthouses have been able to work remotely from one courthouse to another to assist each other with assignments as necessary. Law Clerk Department meetings have continued to provide legal updates for the law clerks and promote interaction among members of the department and familiarity with the different courthouses.

During 2018, the Law Clerks continued to expand their electronic communication with the judicial officers regarding the status of law clerk research and writing and to track the completion of assignments. Also, there has been increased coordination of assignments among law clerks at the various courthouses to accommodate varying workloads and prevent backlogs. Overall, law clerks assist the Judiciary with the diverse work of the trial courts.

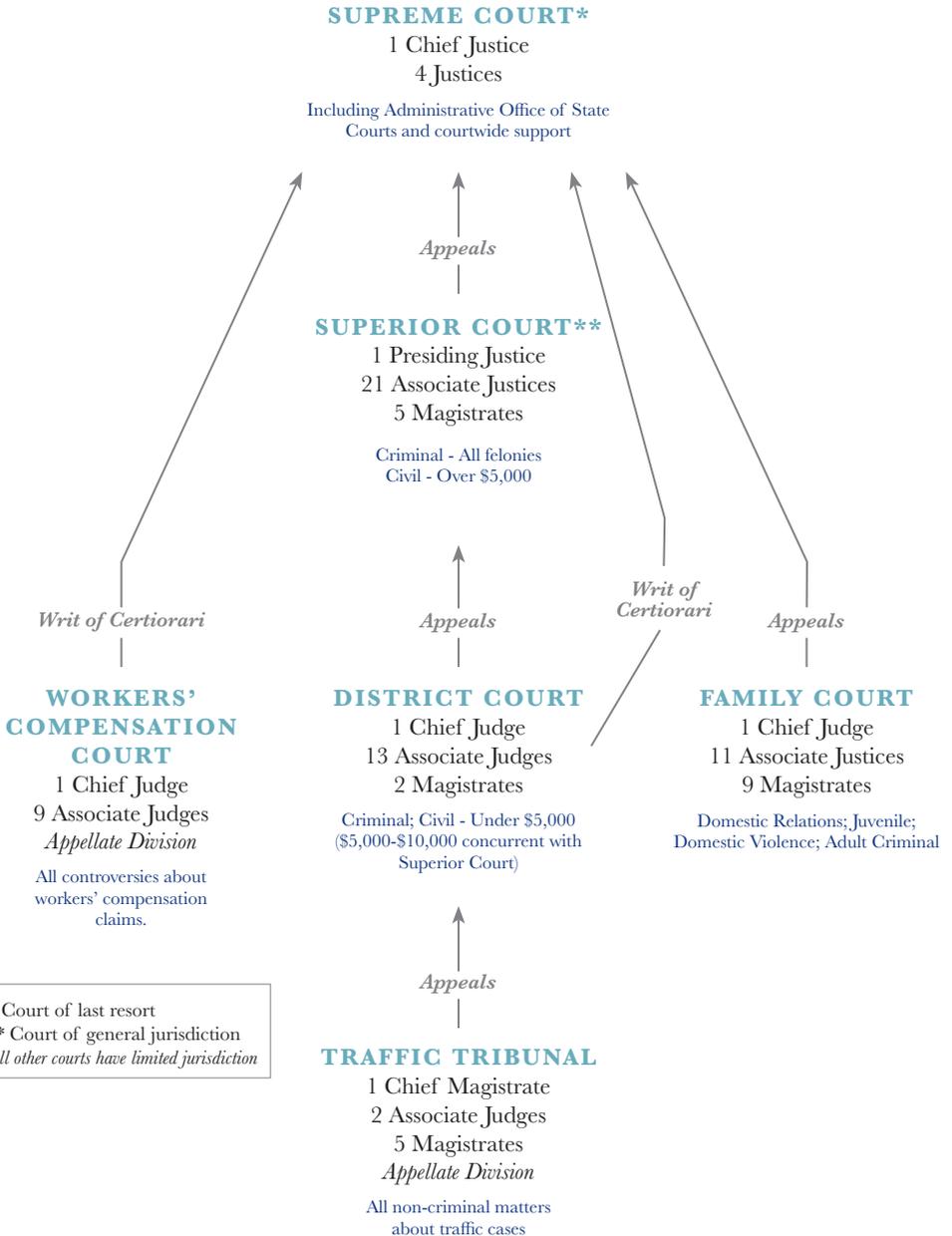
## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TRAINING AND MONITORING UNIT**

The Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit distributed approximately 23,000 new Victim Information and Safety Planning pamphlets in 2018. As an active member of the Violence Against Women Act's Law Enforcement Training Committee, the unit's 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, as well as in-service trainings for the Sheriffs' Department and the Pawtucket Police Department.

The unit processed 15,148 domestic violence survivor assessment (DVSA) forms manually prepared during 2018, comparing it against the accompanying police reports to check for thorough reporting. In addition, the unit processed 1,323 electronic forms from two law enforcement agencies that use the Judiciary's electronic data transfer interface system.

# 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, 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, Bennett R. Gallo, Brian P. Stern, Sarah Taft-Carter.

Top, left to right: Richard D. Raspallo, John F. McBurney, III, Patricia L. Harwood, Maureen B. Keough, Joseph A. Montalbano, Luis M. Matos, Richard A. Licht, Melissa A. Long, Patrick T. Burke, John J. Flynn.



## 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, and Patricia K. Asquith.  
 Top, left to right, Charles J. Levesque, Edward H. Newman, Jeanne L. Shepard, George N. DiMuro, Feidlim Gill, Sandra A. Lanni, Rossie Lee Harris, Jr., Lia N. Stuhlsatz, Angela M. Paulhus, Armando O. Monaco II, Paul T. Jones, Jr., Andrea M. Iannazzi.



## DISTRICT COURT

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



## WORKERS' COMPENSATION COURT

Bottom, left to right: Dianne M. Connor, Debra L. Olsson, Robert M. Ferrieri (Chief Judge), Janette A. Bertness, and George T. Salem, Jr..

Top, left to right: Alfredo Conte, Robert E. Hardman, Hugo L. Ricci, Jr., Michael J. Feeney, and Steven Minicucci.



## RHODE ISLAND TRAFFIC TRIBUNAL

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

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

# VII. RECOGNITION

## *Promoted in 2018*



**Honorable  
Domenic A. DiSandro III**  
Chief Magistrate  
TRAFFIC TRIBUNAL



**Honorable  
Dianne M. Connor**  
Administrative Judge  
WORKERS' COMPENSATION  
COURT



**Honorable  
Joseph A. Abbate**  
Administrative Magistrate  
TRAFFIC TRIBUNAL

## *Retirements*



**Honorable  
Michael A. Silverstein**  
Associate Justice  
SUPERIOR COURT



**Honorable  
Allen P. Rubine**  
Associate Justice  
SUPERIOR COURT



**Honorable  
Janette Bertness**  
Associate Judge  
WORKERS' COMPENSATION  
COURT



**Honorable  
Hugo L. Ricci Jr.**  
Associate Judge  
WORKERS' COMPENSATION  
COURT

## IN MEMORIAM



**Honorable  
Thomas J. Caldarone Jr.**  
Associate Justice  
SUPERIOR COURT



**Honorable  
Ronald R. Gagnon**  
Associate Justice  
SUPERIOR COURT



**Honorable  
William C. Clifton**  
Associate Judge  
DISTRICT COURT





# VIII. CASELOAD DATA CHARTS

## AT A GLANCE

### Judicial Officers

---

65 Judges  
(4 Vacancies)  
26 Female  
5 Minorities

20 Magistrates  
(2 Vacancies)  
5 Female

### Employees

---

FTE Count  
723.3 Authorized  
668.3 Average Filled

### Facilities

---

6 Courthouses  
(2 Administrative  
Buildings)

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



**176,746**

Total Filings in 2018



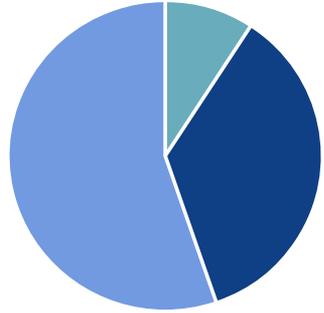
**177,708**

Total Dispositions in 2018

# SUPREME COURT

## 2018 Appellate Caseload

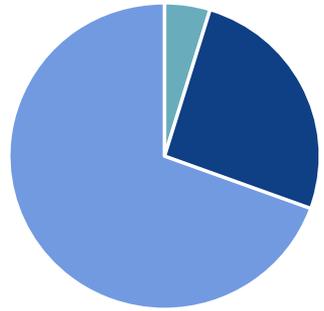
Criminal	33
Civil	128
Miscellaneous	199
<hr/>	
<b>Total Filed</b>	<b>360</b>



■ CIVIL ■ CRIMINAL ■ MISCELLANEOUS

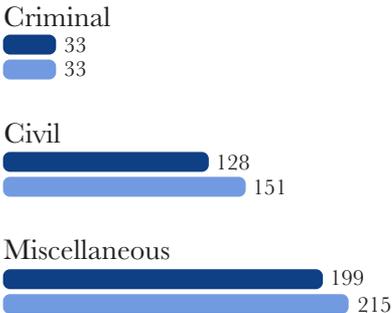
## 2018 Appellate Manner of Disposition

Permission Denied	19
Disposed Prior to Decision	103
Decided on the Merits	277
<hr/>	
<b>Total Disposed</b>	<b>399</b>



■ CIVIL ■ CRIMINAL ■ MISCELLANEOUS

## 2018 Appellate Caseload



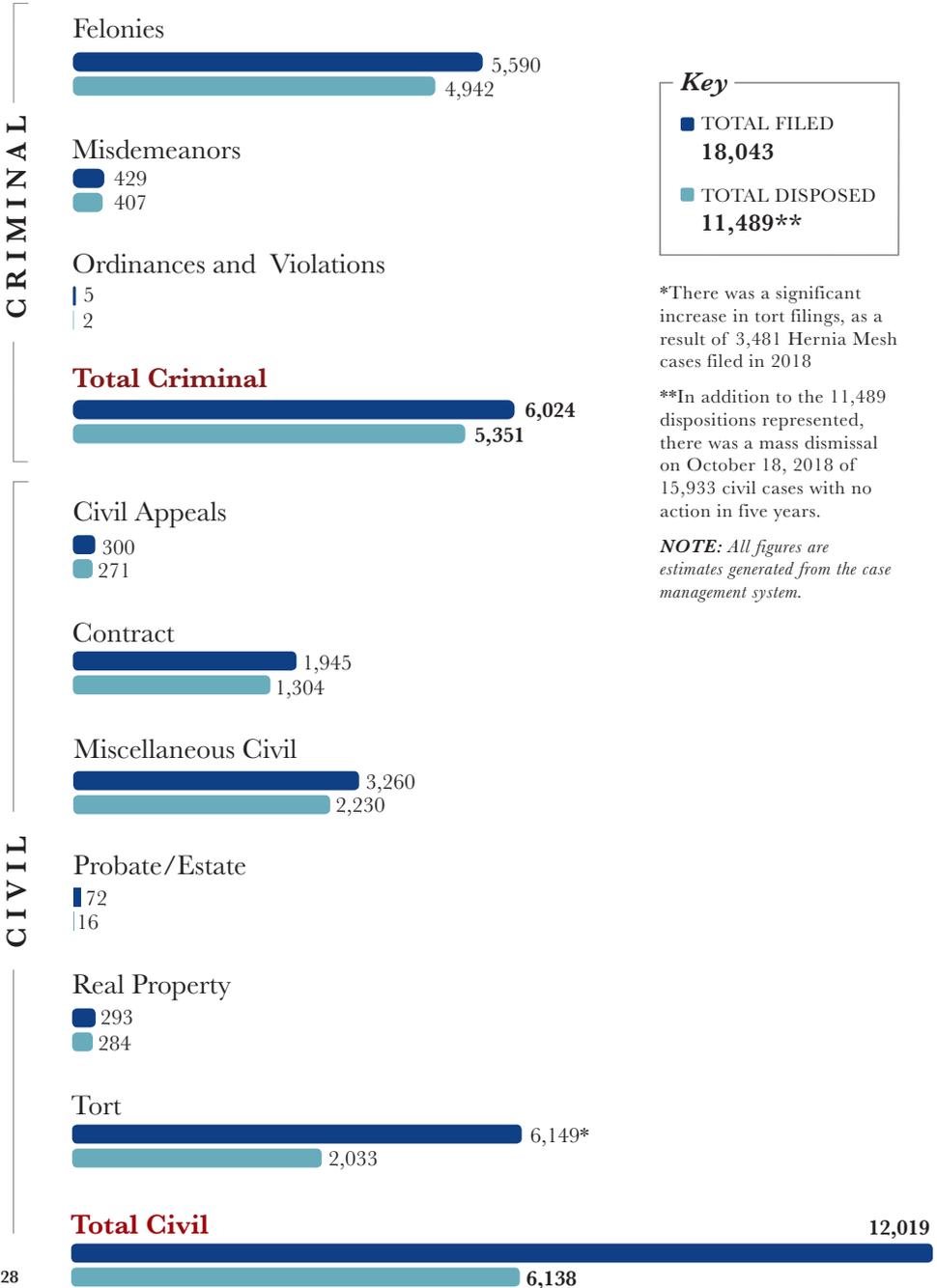
### Key

■ TOTAL FILED  
**360**

■ TOTAL DISPOSED  
**399**

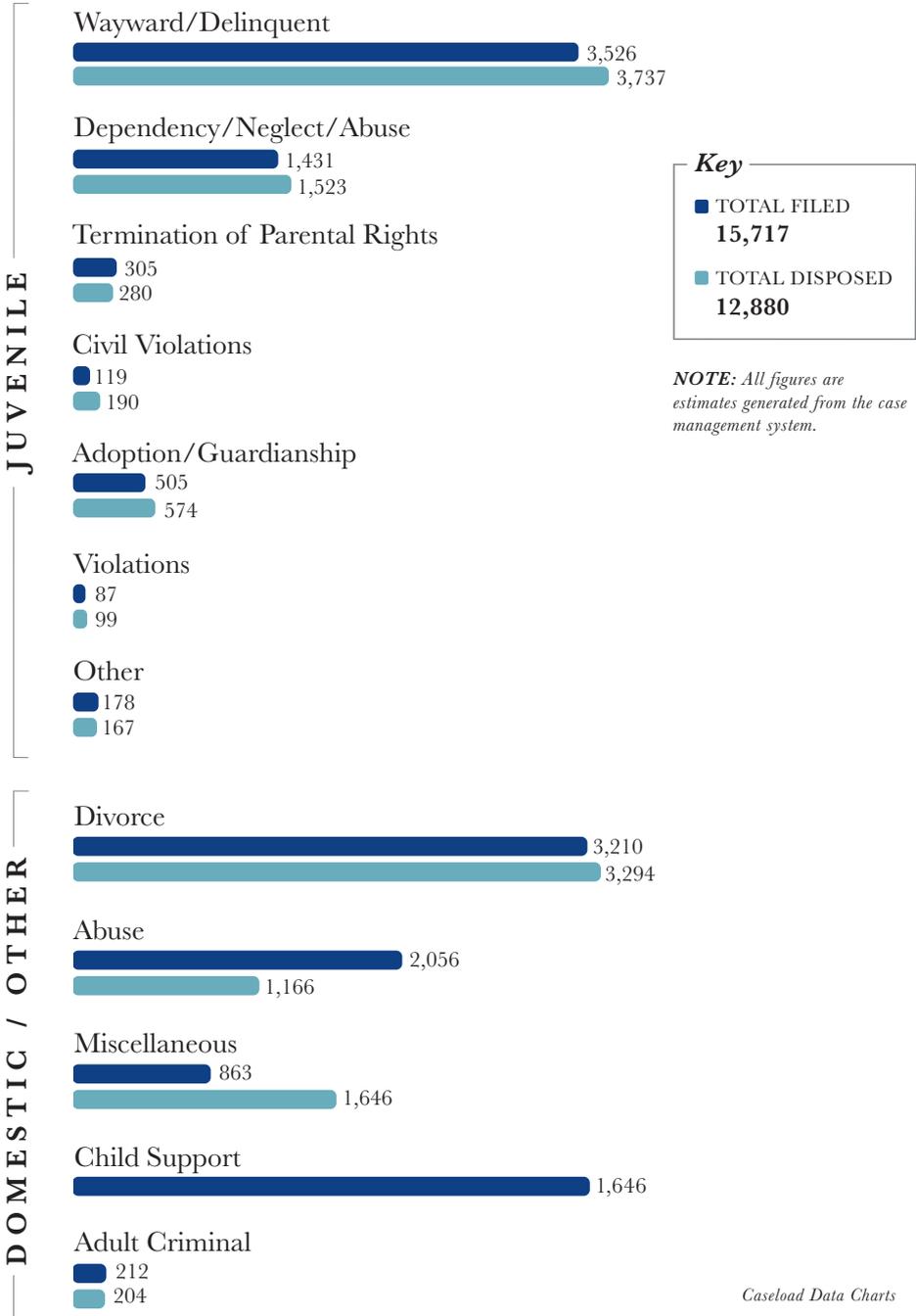
# SUPERIOR COURT

## 2018 Superior Court Caseload



# FAMILY COURT

## 2018 Family Court Caseload



# DISTRICT COURT

## 2018 District Court Caseload

### Misdemeanors



### Felonies



### Civil Violations



### Violations



### Ordinances



### Small Claims



### Civil



### Abuse



### Administrative Appeals



### Mental Health Hearings



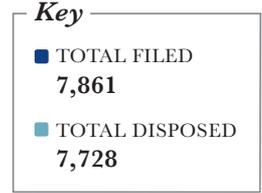
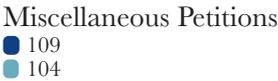
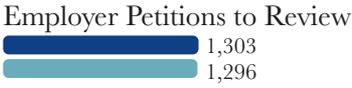
### Key



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

# WORKERS' COMPENSATION COURT

## 2018 Workers' Compensation Caseload

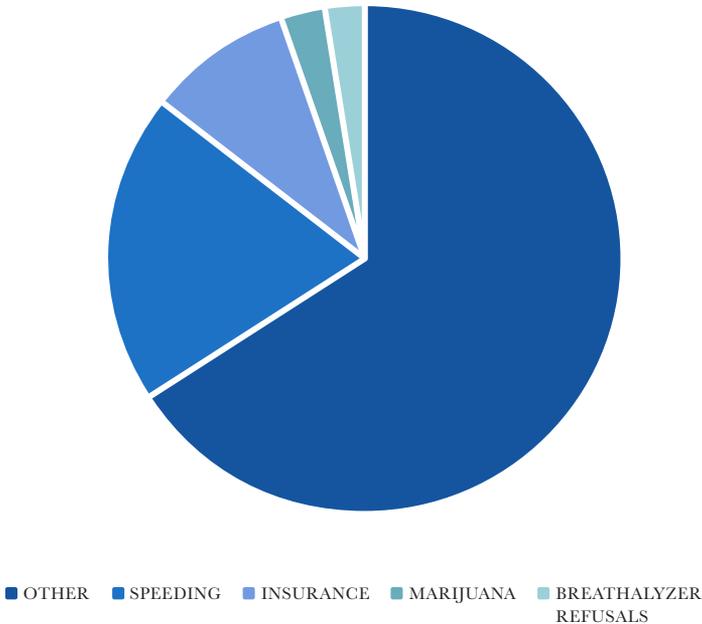


*NOTE: All figures are estimates generated from the case management system.*

# TRAFFIC TRIBUNAL

## 2018 Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal Caseload

<b>Traffic Tribunal Summonses Issued</b>	<b>70,679</b>
Insurance	9,094
Marijuana	2,316
Breathalyzer	2,658
Speeding	19,301
Other	64,325
<hr/>	
<b>Total Violations</b>	<b>97,694</b>
<b>Total Traffic Tribunal Summonses Disposed</b>	<b>69,741</b>



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

---

### **PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS**

Cover – Courtroom 7, Licht Judicial Complex, Jasmin Chery

Page 20 – Supreme Court, Holly Hitchcock

Page 21 – Family Court and District Court, Craig Berke

Page 22 – 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**

250 Benefit Street  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903  
(401) 222-3266  
[www.courts.ri.gov](http://www.courts.ri.gov)