



A Need for Capacity: District and County Courts at Law Request for Additional Courts


JANUARY 26, 2021

Top Line Conclusions

- ▶ Tx. Office of Court Administration DATA supports the need for additional court capacity in Williamson County.
- ▶ Williamson County's growth and an increased utilization (overall) of the Justice System DRIVES the need.
- ▶ While data supports the need for more, the Judges respectfully ask the Commissioners to support a request for one (1) District Court and one (1) County Court at Law to address the current workload.
- ▶ The Judges have carefully developed this request in a way that will minimize the impact on other departments and avoid the need to add prosecutorial resources.


OCA Data: District Courts

DC Case Type	Change in Filings Between 2015-2019
Civil	50%
Family	8%
Criminal	18%
Juvenile*	-39%

State Fiscal Year	Filings
15	7,446
16	8,555
17	8,914
18	9,014
19	8,909
Trend	
Average 18-19	8,962
Average 15-19	8,568
Change 18-19	-1%
Change 15-19	20%

OCA Data: County Courts at Law

CCL Case Type	Change in Filings Between 2015-2019
Civil	33%
Family	0%
Criminal	-15%
Probate	32%
Guardianship	5%
Mental Health	318%

State Fiscal Year	Total Filings Including Probate, Guardianship and Mental Health
15	14,488
16	13,835
17	13,737
18	13,620
19	14,518
Trend	
Average 18-19	14,069
Average 15-19	14,040
Change 18-19	7%
Change 15-19	0%

How many judges are needed to manage the current case filings?

District Courts = 6.8 Judges

County Courts at Law = 5.65 Judges

OCA Numbers

- ▶ Source: Tx Office of Court Administration.
- ▶ OCA has a formula to identify judicial resources needed.
- ▶ How do they get there?
 - ▶ Felony Group A
- ▶ Caveats:
 - ▶ Data age
 - ▶ Child Protection Cases
 - ▶ Misdemeanors
 - ▶ County Courts at Law

Measuring Current Judicial Workload in Texas, 2007

Case Weights (minutes)

Case Types	Case Weights (minutes)
Felony Group A	186
Felony Group B	39
Misdemeanors	12
Injury or Damage - MV	126
Injury or Damage - Non MV	122
Contract	53
Other Civil	27
Divorce	47
Modifications / Enforcements	33
Other Family Law	48
Delinquent Conduct	54
CINS	14

June 2008
Research Division
Center for State Courts



Judicial Work Pattern & Implied Judicial Officer Need

- ▶ Judicial Work-pattern
 - ▶ Case-related activities
 - ▶ Non-case related time
- ▶ Judicial Year Value: 70,950 min./year
- ▶ Judicial Workload

$$\frac{\begin{array}{l} \text{\# of Filings by case type} \\ \times \text{ Case Weights (minutes)} \end{array}}{\text{Judicial Workload (minutes)}}$$

- ▶ Implied Judicial Officer Need

$$\text{Judicial Workload (min.)} \div \text{Judicial Officer Year Value} = \text{Implied Judicial Officer Need}$$

Estimate of Judicial Needs

District Courts

Estimated Need							Number of District Judges	Net Need
	Criminal	Civil	Family	Juvenile	CPS	Total		
Estimated Need	2.9	1.6	1.6	0.1	0.5	6.8		
Existing Associate Judge/Magistrate Resources	0.25		0.2			0.45		
Net Need	2.7	1.6	1.4	0.1	0.5	6.3077778	5	1.3

County Courts at Law

Estimated Need							Number of CCL Judges	Net Need
	Criminal	Civil	Family	CPS	Probate/MH	Total		
OCA Estimated Need		1.6	1.6	0.2		3.4		
Wilco Estimate	1.5				0.75	2.25		
Existing Associate Judge/Magistrate Resources			0.2		0.15	0.35		
Net Need	1.5	1.6	1.4	0.2	0.6	5.3	4	1.3

Court Cost

District Court

Year 1 Cost Range (Start-up)		Year 2 Cost Range	
Low Estimate	High Estimate	Low Estimate	High Estimate
\$447,096.76	\$1,732,413.21	\$408,575.94	\$1,517,776.36
Court FTE: 3 SO FTE: 1 DC FTE: 1	Court FTE: 3 SO FTE: 3.5 DC FTE: 1 DA FTE: 7 (if Criminal)	Court FTE: 3 SO FTE: 1 DC FTE: 1	Court FTE: 3 SO FTE: 3.5 DC FTE: 1 DA FTE: 7 (if Criminal)

County Court at Law

Year 1 Cost Range (Start-up)		Year 2 Cost Range	
Low Estimate	High Estimate	Low Estimate	High Estimate
\$563,994.59	\$2,117,932.64	\$534,512.93	\$1,966,352.01
Court FTE: 4 SO FTE: 1	Court FTE: 4 SO FTE: 3.5 CA FTE: 15 (if Criminal, CPS, MH & PO)	Court FTE: 4 SO FTE: 1	Court FTE: 4 SO FTE: 3.5 CA FTE: 15 (if Criminal, CPS, MH, & PO)

The Proposal

- ▶ 1 additional District Court & 1 additional County Court at Law.
- ▶ Added in a manner that does not increase the number of courts hearing Criminal Cases, which would be a significant cost driver.

January 21, 2021

Dear Judge Gravell and County Commissioners,

The Judges of the District Courts and County Courts at Law serving Williamson County request your support in seeking legislation to add one District Court and one County Court at Law in our county. Attached is a proposed resolution for your consideration.

As you know, Williamson County has enjoyed significant population growth in the fifteen years since the last new courts were created. This will only continue in the years to come, and results in a thriving community that we are all privileged to serve. Our role in the face of such positive growth is to provide the judicial services that the public relies on.


In our report explaining this request, we provide data from the Texas Office of Court Administration that reflect a clear need for additional judicial capacity. Providing that capacity is critical to our ability to ensure efficient access to justice and effectively manage the increasing number of cases brought to Williamson County courts. After careful consideration of several options, we have identified a solution that will best allow us to balance our responsibilities to the public with our commitment to fiscal responsibility. We ask you to support our request to add a District Court and a County Court at Law, with dockets assigned such that there will be no more than the current number of three (3) District Courts and three (3) County Courts at Law hearing criminal cases. It will allow the public timely access to the courts while allowing judges to continue thoughtfully considering the cases brought before them. Importantly, we will be able to do both in a way that is conscientious of the County's fiscal responsibilities.

This request is presented to you jointly by the undersigned Judges of the District Courts and County Courts at Law and we agree to enact any local rules or docket assignment orders which may be necessary to effect this plan and facilitate the establishment of the requested courts.

We are grateful for your consideration and all that you do to support us in our work.



Hon. Donna King
Judge, 26th District Court



Hon. Stacey Mathews
Judge, 277th District Court



Hon. Rick Kennon
Judge, 368th District Court



Hon. Ryan Larson
Judge, 395th District Court



Hon. Betsy Lambeth
Judge, 425th District Court
Local Administrative District Judge



Hon. Brandy Hallford
Judge, County Court at Law No. 1



Hon. Laura Barker
Judge, County Court at Law No. 2



Doug Arnold (Jan 21, 2021 13:27 CST)

Hon. Doug Arnold
Judge, County Court at Law No. 3



Hon. John McMaster
Judge, County Court at Law No. 4

Next Steps

- ▶ Court Support
- ▶ Legislation
- ▶ Effective Date

Questions