



ANNUAL REPORT

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Annual Report | FY24

NEBRASKA ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
OF THE COURTS & PROBATION





6

NEBRASKA JUDICIARY

Supreme Court | Court of Appeals | Judicial
Leadership & Excellence | Summer Tour |
Outreach | New Judges



20

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE HIGHLIGHTS

Reports of the divisions and offices of the the
Administrative Office of the Courts & Probation



52

STATISTICS

Data reports of appellate courts, trial courts, and
probation



“

OUR COMMITMENT TO THE CORE PRINCIPLES OF
JUSTICE FOR ALL AND EQUALITY BEFORE THE
LAW HAS REMAINED STEADFAST.

”

I am incredibly proud of the many achievements of Nebraska's judges, court staff, probation officers, public guardians, and everyone who contributes to the success of the Judicial Branch. Over the past 18 years as Chief Justice, I have witnessed both change and challenge. Yet, through it all, our commitment to the core principles of Justice for All and Equality Before the Law has remained steadfast.

Thank you to all members of the Nebraska Judicial Branch for your continued dedication and service—it is on behalf of the Branch that I present to you the Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Annual Report.

**Chief Justice
Michael G. Heavican**





The Court prepares to hear oral arguments before students at Minden High School.

CHIEF JUSTICE MICHAEL G. HEAVICAN

Statewide - Chief Justice
Judicial Oath: October 2, 2006

JUSTICE STEPHANIE F. STACY

District 1 - Lincoln
Judicial Oath: September 28, 2015

JUSTICE LINDSEY MILLER-LERMAN

District 2 - Omaha
Judicial Oath: September 1, 1998

JUSTICE WILLIAM B. CASSEL

District 3 - O'Neill
Judicial Oath: May 9, 2012

JUSTICE JONATHAN J. PAPIK

District 4 - Omaha
Judicial Oath: April 11, 2018

JUSTICE JEFFREY J. FUNKE

District 5 - Nebraska City
Judicial Oath: August 2, 2016

JUSTICE JOHN R. FREUDENBERG

District 6 - Rushville
Judicial Oath: July 6, 2018

**JUSTICES OF
THE NEBRASKA
SUPREME COURT**



*Top Row: Justice Jonathan J. Papik, Justice Stephanie F. Stacy, Justice Jeffrey J. Funke, Justice John R. Freudenberg
Bottom Row: Justice Lindsey Miller-Lerman, Chief Justice Michael G. Heavican, Justice William B. Cassel*



**JUDGE
RIKO
BISHOP**

District 1
Judicial Oath:
August 20, 2013

**JUDGE
DAVID K.
ARTERBURN**

District 4
Judicial Oath:
January 17, 2017

**JUDGE
LAWRENCE E.
WELCH, JR.**

District 5
Judicial Oath:
March 28, 2018

**CHIEF JUDGE
MICHAEL W.
PIRTLE**

District 2
Judicial Oath:
July 6, 2011

**JUDGE
FRANKIE J.
MOORE**

District 6
Judicial Oath:
January 28, 2000

**JUDGE
FRANCIE C.
RIEDMANN**

District 3
Judicial Oath:
August 9, 2012



The Nebraska Constitution

provides that general administrative authority over all the courts in the state is vested in the Supreme Court and shall be exercised by the Chief Justice (Nebraska Const. art. V).

At the local level, trial court judges are responsible for the operation of the court system. They are tasked with providing leadership within their judicial district to enrich the well-being of the court system.

The Court supports a number of commissions and committees consisting of citizens, judges, and lawyers who collaborate to improve the delivery of justice throughout the state. A complete listing of committees and their members can be found on the Judicial Branch website under the Administration section.

Judicial Associations

Each level of the trial court system has an association providing leadership for its judges. Presidents of the associations for the 2024 fiscal year:

- **District Court Judges' Association:**
 - Judge Jodi L. Nelson, 3rd Judicial District, 10/2023 – 10/2024
 - Judge Leigh Ann Retelsdorf, 4th Judicial District, 10/2022 – 10/2023
- **County Court Judges' Association:**
 - Judge Jeffrey M. Wightman, 11th Judicial District, 10/2023 – 10/2024
 - Judge Randin R. Roland, 12th Judicial District, 10/2022 – 10/2023
- **Separate Juvenile Judges' Association:**
 - Judge Mary M. Z. Stevens, Douglas County, 10/2023 – 10/2024
 - Judge Elise M. W. White, Lancaster County, 10/2023 – 10/2024

Chief Justice Heavican convenes the annual Leadership Conference, comprised of those chairing Supreme Court commissions and committees. The conference enhances the leadership and administrative skills of trial court judges and promotes innovative branch-wide programming.



Developing Judicial Leadership

As an outgrowth of the Chief Justice's Annual Leadership Conference, Judicial Branch Education sponsors a judicial leadership development program bringing together trial court judges to develop their leadership skills and apply this to serving as project lead on an emerging issue facing the court. These judges meet regularly over the course of a year to develop an understanding of the issue, bringing together stakeholders familiar with the issue, and providing recommendations for ways the courts can work for the betterment of the Judicial Branch.



Judge David Prince from Colorado (center) facilitates a training exercise with Hall County Court Judge Alfred Corey and Douglas County Separate Juvenile Court Judge Amy Schuchman

Distinguished Judges

Judge Jodi Nelson, Lancaster County District Court (Improvement of the Judicial System), Judge Elise White, Separate Juvenile Court of Lancaster County (Service to the Judiciary), and Judge Frank Barron, Washington County Court (Improvement of the Judicial System), were presented with the Supreme Court's highest honor on October 1, 2023, in recognition of their meritorious projects and exemplary accomplishments beyond their day-to-day duties as a judge.

Winnebago Tribal Court hosts a drum circle as part of its programming with Nebraska Supreme Court justices. The Summer Tour included a visit to Winnebago court services and discussions on State Court and Tribal Court Relations.



Justices, court administrators, local judges, and guests gather as the Chief Justice thanks the Saunders County commissioners for their commitment to the court system and dedication to the community, highlighted by their efforts in maintaining the courthouse and courtrooms.



Judge Vernon Daniels, Douglas County Juvenile Court, listens as State Probation Administrator Deb Minardi discusses services offered by Omaha probation staff to support the metro area.



Community luncheon at Fremont art gallery with court and community leaders, highlighting the collaborative nature required to maintain safe and healthy communities.

The 2023 Summer Tour began in Wahoo and included events in Schuyler to promote language diversity in the courts. Justices then visited Columbus before ending the day with the legal community in Norfolk. On day two, Hartington showcased upgraded computer equipment, followed by stops in Dakota City and South Sioux City. Day three featured a full day of activities in Winnebago with tribal court leaders before continuing to Fremont. The Fremont visit began at the Mediation Center, with discussions about County Court and community re-entry court adaptations, followed by a community luncheon and Drug Court graduation. The tour concluded on day five at Omaha's new juvenile court facilities, highlighting local partnerships that support Nebraska's courts.

“

ACROSS THE COUNTRY, THERE HAS BEEN A CLIMATE OF DISTRUST IN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM. THAT'S TROUBLING. BUT IN NEBRASKA, WE ARE FORTUNATE TO HAVE A SUPREME COURT THAT IS HARD-WORKING, AND THEY DO NOT JUST STAY IN THE CAPITOL. THEY GO TO THE HIGH SCHOOLS AND HEAR CASES; THEY GO TO LAW SCHOOLS AND DO THE SAME. AND WE ARE VERY FORTUNATE AND VERY PROUD TO HAVE THAT.”

Dodge County District Court Judge Geoffrey Hall, remarks during Fremont community luncheon

”



Supreme Court Hears Cases at Creighton School of Law (Spring 2024)

The Court convenes at Law Schools each spring to hear arguments as part of its educational outreach efforts.



Students Engage with Supreme Court Justices

Roncalli high school students line up to ask the Nebraska Supreme Court justices questions following a live court session at their school.



Court of Appeals Sits at University of Nebraska Omaha

The morning panel answers questions from high school students. The afternoon panel of judges held a separate session.

“

IT IS CRITICAL THAT OUR STUDENTS UNDERSTAND THE WORKINGS OF OUR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND HAVE CONFIDENCE IN OUR COURT SYSTEM.

Chief Justice Michael Heavican on the purpose of high school argument sessions

”



Engaging Law Students in the Understanding of Clerkships
Judge Francie Reidmann leads a discussion with panel of current and former law clerks, offering insights into appellate work for and Creighton law students.



Judges Support All Aspects of High School Mock Trial Program
Justice Jeff Funke presides over high school mock trial in state finals.



Mock Trial Reporting Workshop
Student reporters from the high school mock trial program learn how to cover legal proceedings from Judge Laurie Yardley and experienced journalists.

NEBRASKA SUPREME COURT - Chief Justice and 6 Justices

Highest Appellate Court:

Discretionary appeals from the Court of Appeals

Mandatory appeals in

capital cases

cases concerning constitutionality of statutes

May hear cases removed from or that have bypassed the Court of Appeals by a petition of further review

Original Jurisdiction: Specified Cases

COURT OF APPEALS - 6 Judges (*Panels of 3 judges hear appeals throughout state*)

Intermediate Appellate Court:

Trial court appeals except those heard by Supreme Court pursuant to:

mandatory jurisdiction

direct appeal status

removal procedures

bypass procedure

SEPARATE JUVENILE COURTS -

12 Judges

Serving 3 counties

(Douglas, Sarpy, & Lancaster)

Jurisdiction:

County Court

Juvenile & domestic jurisdiction

DISTRICT COURTS -

58 Judges

Serving 12 districts

Trial court of general jurisdiction:

Felony cases

Domestic relations cases

Civil cases not less than \$57,000

When serving as an appellate court:

Some county court appeals

Administrative agency appeals

WORKERS' COMPENSATION COURT - 6 Judges

Hear cases throughout the state

Jurisdiction:

Injuries or diseases caused
by work



COUNTY COURTS -

59 Judges

Serving 12 districts

Jurisdiction:

Misdemeanor cases, including traffic, and municipal ordinance violations

Preliminary hearing in felony cases

Civil cases - may not exceed \$57,000

Small Claims - may not exceed \$6,000

Probate, guardianship, conservatorship, adoption, and eminent domain

Function as juvenile courts except in Douglas, Sarpy, and Lancaster Counties

Judicial Selection

Nebraska chooses judges using the merit selection system where nominating commissions screen, interview, and solicit judicial applicants. All judicial vacancies fall under the discretion of a judicial nominating commission.

Each judicial nominating commission is made up of four lawyers and four non-lawyers with a nonvoting Supreme Court Justice acting as chairperson. The judicial nominating commission holds a public hearing to interview candidates who have submitted their names for the open judgeship. The judicial nominating commission submits the names of at least two qualified attorneys to the Governor.

Qualifications

Applicants for positions on all levels of Nebraska courts must meet a number of requirements in order to be appointed to office. Each person must be a U.S. citizen, be at least 30 years of age, and have practiced law a minimum of five years in the State of Nebraska. The person must also be currently admitted to practice before the Nebraska Supreme Court.

New Judges, FY2024

County Court:

Bryan S. McQuay	Judicial District 9	9/8/23
Sara E. Bauer	Judicial District 6	10/13/23
Beau G. Finley	Judicial District 4	1/9/24

District Court:

Derek R. Vaughn	Judicial District 4	8/29/23
Mathew D. Neher	Judicial District 11	12/18/23
Zachary L. Blackman	Judicial District 6	5/24/24

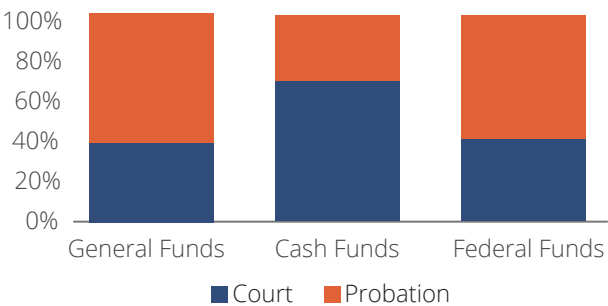
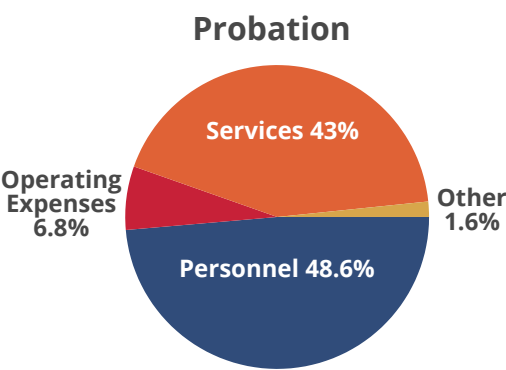
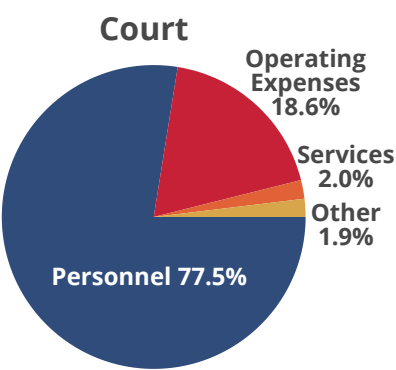


I am pleased to submit this year's Nebraska Judicial Branch Annual Report, which highlights the successful work accomplished over the past year. I am incredibly proud of all the achievements showcased in this report, a testament to the dedication and resilience of our Judges and Judicial Branch staff. As court cases continue to rebound, we are prepared to meet the demand, supported by the continued growth of the Judicial Branch. This growth enables us to face the challenges of an ever-evolving court system and respond to new legislative directives. We remain steadfast in our goal of providing equal and fair access to all, ensuring justice is served with integrity and transparency.

Corey R. Steel
State Court Administrator

Total Expenditures by Major Account Category FY24

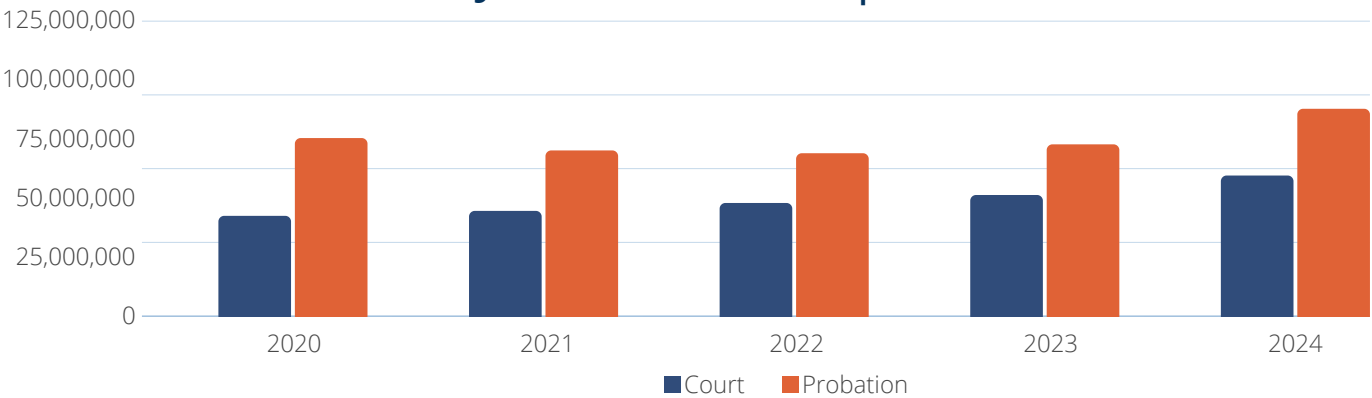
	Court	Probation	Total
Personnel	80,336,428	70,146,436	150,482,864
Operating Expenses	19,234,880	9,750,375	28,985,255
Services	2,059,288	61,983,872	64,043,160
Travel	1,006,598	1,582,899	2,589,497
Equipment/IT Projects	135,000	768,150	903,150
Grant-in-Aid	860,226	-	860,226
Total	103,632,420	144,231,732	247,864,152



Total Expenditures by Fund Source FY24

	Court	Probation	Total
General Funds	95,326,586	140,576,337	235,902,923
Cash Funds	7,304,913	3,251,416	10,556,329
Federal Funds	1,000,921	403,979	1,404,900
Total	103,632,420	144,231,732	247,864,152

General Fund Expenditures for Judicial Branch Operations



The **Information Technology Division** is responsible for technological support of the Judicial Branch. Application development of court (JUSTICE/SCCALES) and probation (NPACS) case management systems are also under the purview of the Division.

Technology teams implement improvements to online services (such as those below) to help the Judicial Branch run efficiently in delivering information and services to the public and the legal community.

- eFiling
- ePayment
- Service provider registration
- Voucher submission
- Online calendars
- Court case information searches



Nearly 8.5 million court case views online

Case information is made available through the internet for all county, district, separate juvenile, and appellate courts.



Over \$30,500,000 in online payments

Electronic payments are accepted statewide for court fines, judgments, filing costs, and probation fees.



220 Judicial Branch offices supported

Court, probation, and administrative staff across Nebraska depend on the Judicial Branch IT Division for assistance with software, hardware, or general technology questions.



24,000 programming hours

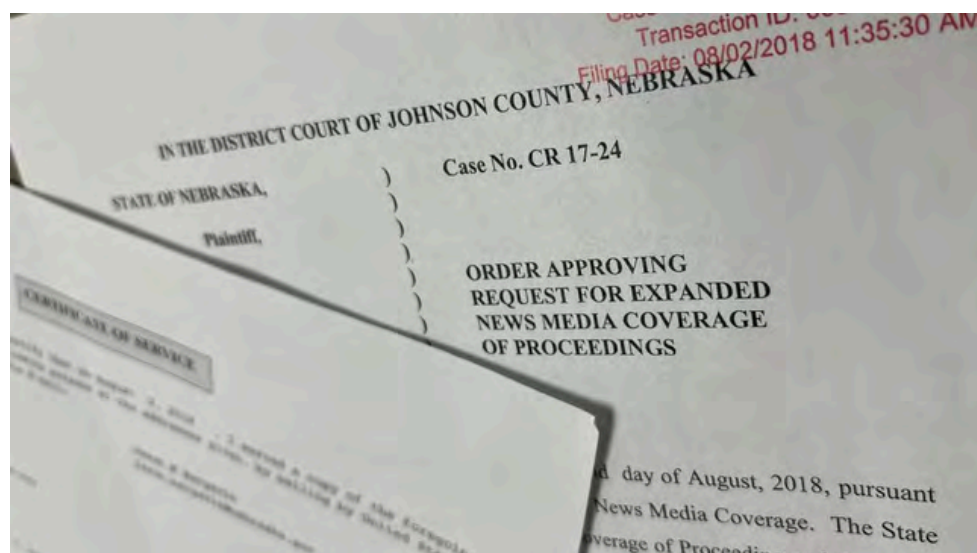
The Judicial Branch case management systems are all custom built, and continually updated to meet with new rule and statutory requirements, as well as automating new processes for courts and probation.

Nebraska Supreme Court Enhances "JUSTICE" System with Image Inclusion in One-Time Case Searches

The Nebraska court one-time search using the Nebraska Judicial Branch "JUSTICE" System has received a significant upgrade. As of January 26, 2024, users are able to access non-confidential images associated with documents filed on or after April 2008.

Previously, the application limited one-time searches to text-only information when conducting case searches. The recent upgrade addresses this limitation by including relevant images without imposing additional costs; the \$15.00 search fee now covers both text and images.

The decision to integrate images aims to enhance transparency and provide the same accessibility as those who subscribe to the full suite of services. The upgrade reflects a commitment to leveraging technology to provide a more inclusive overview of court cases for the one-time search user.



Judicial Branch Education (JBE)

provides essential continuing education to maintain and increase professional competence and knowledge to ensure the delivery of the highest quality services to the people of Nebraska. The Supreme Court Rules and the Judicial Branch Advisory Committee standards outline minimum education requirements for all judges, attorneys, and judicial branch staff. JBE also manages continuing education for attorneys in Nebraska.

JBE coordinates new and ongoing education delivered through in-person, online, and distance learning events. The division also assists outside stakeholders, such as Problem-Solving Court team members, probation providers, and attorneys, in meeting mandatory educational requirements to fulfill their roles as part of Nebraska's judicial system.

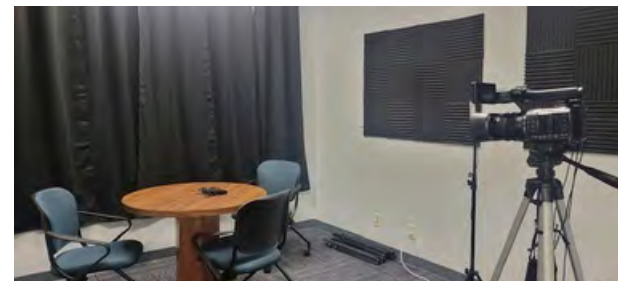
In response to increasing educational demands, JBE expanded in November 2023 by acquiring new training, meeting, and office space. This expansion doubled the number of training/meeting rooms and introduced advanced technology for in-person, Zoom, and hybrid events. The new facilities include a computer lab for JUSTICE and NPACS (case management systems) training and a sound studio for podcasts and online modules, leading to cost savings compared to hotel venues. Additionally, two new trainer positions were created, with roles filled by mid-October 2023. The new NPACS trainer is developing courses and support systems, while the JUSTICE trainer is enhancing in-person training capabilities. Both trainers work remotely and travel statewide, with a computer lab also established in Broken Bow.

7,084
Active attorneys

3,185
Inactive attorneys



44,543
Courses completed
during FY24



The **Operations Division** performs a wide variety of functions in its support of trial courts and probation operations throughout the state.

Prioritized functions include:

- All elements of human resources
- Internal and external communications, social media, and audio/video productions
- Web development, design and maintenance
- Interstate transfers of probationers
- Data collection, analysis, and reporting
- Probation performance management
- Community outreach and education



Garfield County Court Clerk Magistrate Bert Meschke, Specialized Populations Officer Kiela Richards, Probation Officer Terisa Gaffney, and Substance Use Monitor Mark Jones greet students at the Burwell Public Schools Career Fair on March 28th.



HUMAN RESOURCES

The **Office of Human Resources** provides services to Judicial Branch staff and applicants, including all trial courts and probation offices funded under the Judicial Branch budget. The office is responsible for payroll, recruitment, position classification, compensation, employee relations, benefit, and payroll records. Administrative staff is available to help employees understand the Nebraska Supreme Court Personnel Policies and Procedures, including the processes of hiring, performance management, and disciplinary actions. Administrative staff also provide guidance in an effort to resolve employee conflicts and to address allegations of misconduct.



710 Openings Posted
1,620 Staff on Payroll (avg.)

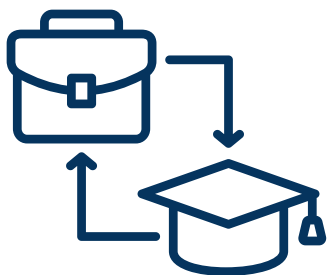
301

New
Employees Processed



270

Employee
Exits Processed



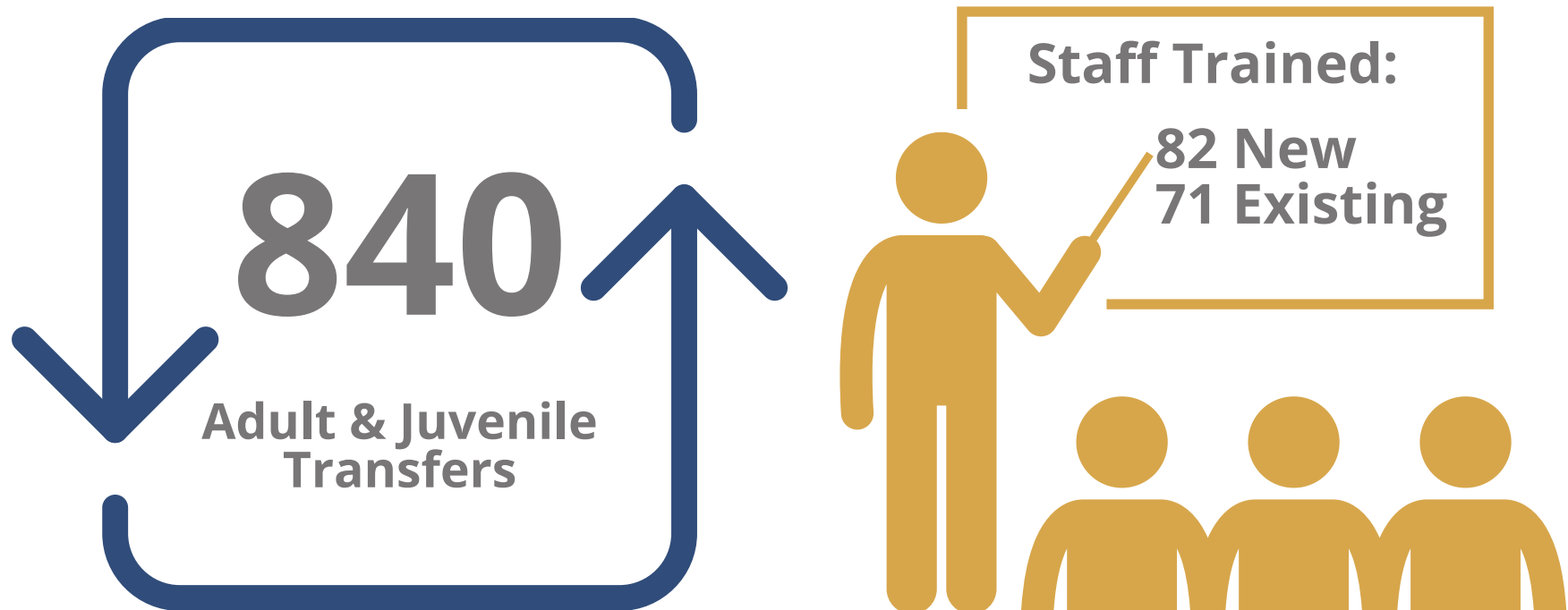
41 Completed Internships
13 Job Shadows



NEJudicial

INTERSTATE COMPACT

The **Office of Interstate Compact** is responsible for assisting with the facilitation of the transfer of supervision for both adult and juvenile probationers to the state where the client resides, as well as facilitating the safe return of any juvenile who runs (absconds) to another state. Furthermore, the compact office monitors statewide compliance with adult and juvenile compact rules and provides training and resources to field staff, district management, and other justice partners. Additionally, the compact office is charged with reviewing all inter-district transfer and shared supervision cases to ensure adherence to protocol and assist with the seamless transition of supervision within the State of Nebraska.



The Compact Office assisted in facilitating the safe return of 48 out-of-state juvenile runaways.



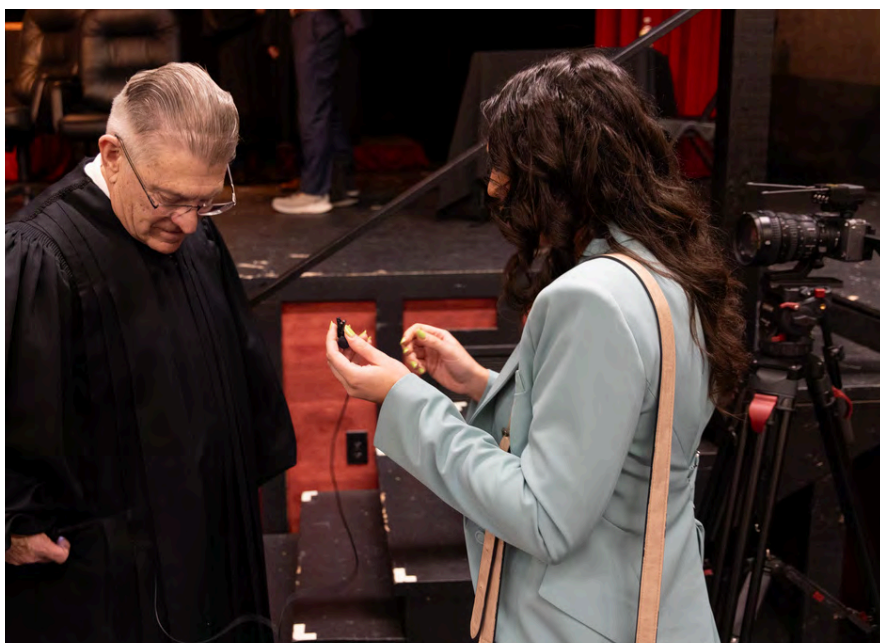
Public Information & Educational Outreach

The **Office of Public Information and Educational Outreach** manages media inquiries, public information requests, and opportunities for the Supreme Court and Court of Appeals to engage with communities, including students. The Office assists both national and in-state media to facilitate expanded media coverage. Educational materials regarding cameras in courts are produced for both media outlets and judges. Additionally, the Office directs employee communications, creates and distributes press releases, and coordinates messaging on a variety of topics.



The Communications Office has advanced efforts to encourage judges to engage with news reporters through the Nebraska State Bar Foundation's Bench Media Committee. In a unique two-day training, Nebraska judges and attorneys met to discuss effective interview techniques for legal professionals. A video presentation by a Nebraska news reporter emphasized the value of on-camera interviews, noting their impact on public understanding. Justice Jeff Funke, who chaired the program, urged participants to help the public better understand the legal system.


The ON-AIR Resource Committee initiative aims to foster transparency, collaboration with traditional media, and a clearer public understanding of Nebraska's judicial processes.





Digital Communications

The **Office of Digital Communications** manages the primary digital communications channels for the Judicial Branch, including the website and social media accounts. In addition, the office implements the creation of audio and visual productions, as well as graphic design and branding practices. In coordination with the Office of Public Information & Educational Outreach, the Office is responsible for the strategic public relations activities of the Branch.



>6.1
million

In FY23, the Nebraska Judicial Branch website served 6,193,458 page views to visitors.



302
Stories Published

Bringing the work of the Judicial Branch to the public.




22
Audio/Visual Productions

Podcasts and videos diving into the work of employees statewide.



1,400+
Photographs taken

Promoting and archiving daily life in the Judicial Branch and special events affecting Nebraskans.

 **NEJudicial**
 **NEJudicialBranch**



Research & Data

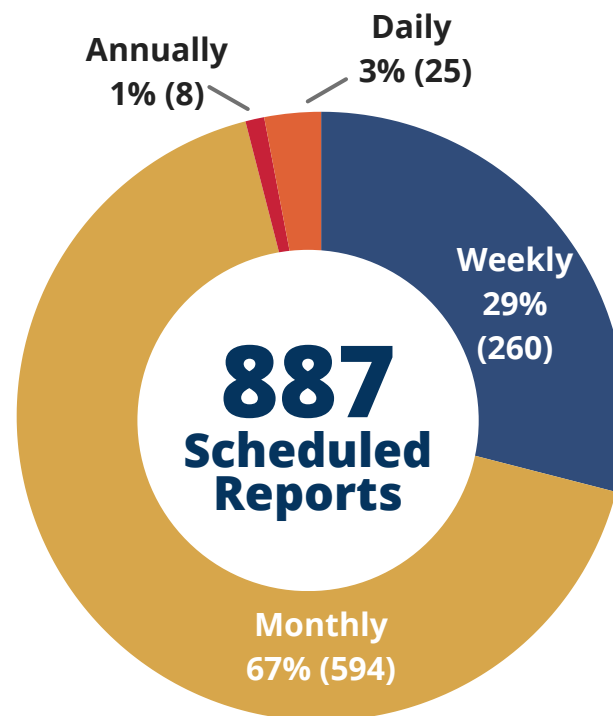
The **Research and Data team** provides data, research, and information to judicial, probation, and administrative leadership. It is responsible for completing a variety of recurring and emergent reports and analyses that are used to help drive day-to-day business decisions. It collaborates with internal divisions to provide pilot study evaluation and support internal research endeavors. Reports are available on the Judicial Branch website publications page.

For external requests, the team has taken the initiative to educate the public about accessing court records for free through their local courthouse kiosk or through our court-authorized service provider, Nebraska.gov.

For those who do not wish to compile their own data, external requestors can request the Research and Data team to compile data for a fee.

Fees start at \$2,077.00 for one year of data, with a flat fee of \$355.00 for each additional year for a maximum of 10 years of data in a single request. These fees are necessary to cover the administrative costs and mitigate potential disruption to court operations caused by fulfilling these requests.

Year(s) of Data	Cost
1	\$2,077
2	\$2,432
3	\$2,787
4	\$3,142
5	\$3,497
6	\$3,852
7	\$4,207
8	\$4,562
9	\$4,917
10	\$5,272



In line with national trends, external requests have been on the rise. The team has streamlined processes for both internal and external requests. **Reducing redundancy by 12%** for internal reporting.

The **Court Services Division** provides administrative support to the trial courts. This division is responsible for communicating Supreme Court administrative policy and providing procedural standards and publications for trial court operations. Intense focus is placed on areas related to working with and educating court staff and interpreters; developing and maintaining court forms and procedures manuals; providing support to the statewide child support referees; and providing support for special interest issues like access to justice, self-represented litigants, and mediation.

The Court Services Division also serves as a liaison to trial court-related associations and committees.





Trial Court Services supports the Nebraska Supreme Court in its administrative and supervisory authority as set out by the Nebraska State Constitution, art. V, sec. 1. Specifically, Trial Court Services provides support and resources to district, county, and separate juvenile courts and provides assistance and trial court services resources to the public.



Education

Trial Court Services in collaboration with Judicial Branch Education and the National Center for State Courts provided specialized staff education on Jury Management. Additionally, Trial Court Services provided education on the Judicial Code of Conduct, ethics training for court staff, and ADA education. These advanced trainings instill high levels of integrity and impartiality to help establish public trust and confidence in the Court.



Improving Processes for Courts & Self-Represented Litigants

With access to the courts in mind, Trial Court Services and Nebraska Court Clerks collaborated to create templates for basic court processes meant to be the structural framework of an improved self-represented litigant resources for the website. Involvement of court clerks created the opportunity identify and build parallel support for court staff. The overall approach is meant to encourage efficient and effective interactions between staff and self-represented litigants as cases progress through Nebraska courts.



Supporting Courts

Trial Court Services has helped set up, coordinate, and provide staffing support to all counties in the State of Nebraska due to staffing turnover. Staffing support has taken on a new look since both the pandemic and the implementation of the modernization rules with the ability to staff courts remotely and still provide excellent customer service.



ACCESS TO JUSTICE

The vision of the **Nebraska Access to Justice Commission** is to achieve 100 percent access to justice for all.

The mission of the Access to Justice Commission is to identify barriers to equal access in Nebraska and to recommend and coordinate effective solutions so that all court users have equal access to swift, fair justice.

Racial Equity in the Courts Initiative – Phase II Completed: In 2020, Chief Justice Michael Heavican asked the Access to Justice Commission to engage the public in a discussion of racial equity and to “learn, directly from court users, what we need to do better to address racial inequity in our courtrooms and our court processes.” The Commission responded by developing a three-phase initiative to engage court users, community leaders, judges, lawyers, court staff, and probation staff in a discussion of racial equity in the courts. Phase I involved a statewide Court User Survey that measured current perceptions of access and fairness among those using our state courts. The results of that statewide survey were published in a 2022 report available on the Nebraska Supreme Court website: nejudicial.com/usersurvey.

Phase II consisted of focus groups held in seven Nebraska counties with both community and justice system stakeholders. These focus groups were fact finding events, designed to learn about local concerns around gaps in service and barriers to access, identifying local reforms and strategies to address their concerns. The most common themes included language barriers, lack of access to court and court services due to transportation or employment, and a need for robust data collection and reporting.

The information gathered is being developed into a comprehensive report that will be shared with focus group participants to invite their feedback as part of virtual sessions in September 2024. Their input will help guide and inform Phase III, which will be public engagement sessions that will facilitate statewide discussion of the various issues identified during Phases I and II.



*Read the Court User Survey at:
<https://nejudicial.com/usersurvey>*



ACCESS TO JUSTICE, continued

Priority Projects of the Standing Committees: In a concerted effort to maximize the time commitment of committee members and efficiency related to their projects, the commission chairs and co-chairs met in March 2024 and agreed on one priority project at a time for each committee to focus on.

Committee on Equity and Fairness

In collaboration with system project partners, the Committee will complete recommendations for a comprehensive modernization of the In Forma Pauperis procedure through proposed statutory amendments, plain language changes to court rules and court forms, and education of the bench and bar.

Consortium of Tribal, State, and Federal Courts

The Consortium will focus on expanding local community engagement among tribal and judicial leaders to continue strengthening relationships and building collaboration.

Self-Represented Litigation Committee

The Committee will develop and propose a court navigator program for evaluation and implementation to address gaps in the legal services and resources available to court users who are navigating the judicial system without an attorney.

Access to Justice Specialist Hired: In January 2024 the Court added a new Access to Justice Specialist to serve as fulltime dedicated staff to the Access to Justice Commission and its Standing Committees and working groups.

This dedicated staff role in the Court Services Division demonstrates the Commission's ongoing commitment to the initiatives outlined in the [Access to Justice Commission Strategic Plan FY2023-2028](#), and our shared interest in and commitment to improving access and equity for all court users in Nebraska



Assistive Listening Technology Systems: Several years ago, the Access to Justice Commission established a temporary working group to consider pilot projects focused on improving communications access for court users who are deaf or hard of hearing. One of the goals was to pilot the use of assistive listening technology in at least one trial and one appellate courtroom. In 2022, this pilot project got an unexpected boost when it was included in the AOCP's courtroom technology upgrades being completed in more than 100 Nebraska courtrooms statewide. In 2024 those upgrades will be completed allowing those with and without compatible hearing aids and cochlear implants to hear and more effectively participate in court proceedings by wearing a device that uses infrared light to transmit sound.



ACCESS TO JUSTICE, continued

Self-Help Center Pilot Project in Douglas County: In June, the AOCP was awarded a grant from the State Justice Institute to launch a court-based Self-Help Center in Douglas County, with the goal to expand virtual resources and support for self-represented litigants statewide. The increasing number of self-represented litigants remains a focus area for the Nebraska court system.

Though this project is in its very early stages, it has received strong support from judges, court staff, attorneys, legal aid services, and community members. The data gathered from the Self-Help Center Pilot will be used to review and develop more user-friendly court forms and resources in virtual and in-person settings, benefiting self-represented court users statewide. This initiative is particularly crucial in rural areas of the state where access to legal assistance is limited.



“The law promises ‘equal justice’ in the courts. However, many self-represented litigants feel frustrated with the legal process because they are unaware of all the legal practices and procedures required. The self-help center is designed to provide guidance and education to those who represent themselves as they navigate legal filings, court appearances, and presenting evidence. Both litigants and the courts benefit when the process is understood, and expectations are met.”

Judge Stephanie Hansen, County Court, Douglas County



LANGUAGE ACCESS

The **Language Access Program** recruits, trains, and certifies spoken language court interpreters and coordinates the appointment of qualified professional interpreters across the state to serve as communication conduits for limited English proficient (LEP) court and probation users at no cost to LEP individual, regardless of case type. It is comprised of individuals with a resolute commitment for providing high-quality language services in multiple forms, including Communication Access Real Time Translation, document translation, in-person, phone, and video interpretation.

Interpreter Certification Pathway

This new initiative has been developed to empower and assist bilingual individuals in pursuing a career as a Nebraska Judicial Branch interpreter. The comprehensive pathway seeks to address the process of certification in its entirety to increase the number and language diversity of certified and provisionally certified interpreters. The multi-faceted pathway includes not only orientation, written and oral exams, but skill building, lending libraries, provisional certification, and continuing education units. A key component of the pathway is offering a large portion of it online which allows the Nebraska Judicial Branch to meet aspiring interpreter partners where they are.

In its first six months, orientation attendance has increased significantly with attendees representing a microcosm of the communities the Nebraska Judicial Branch serves on a daily basis:

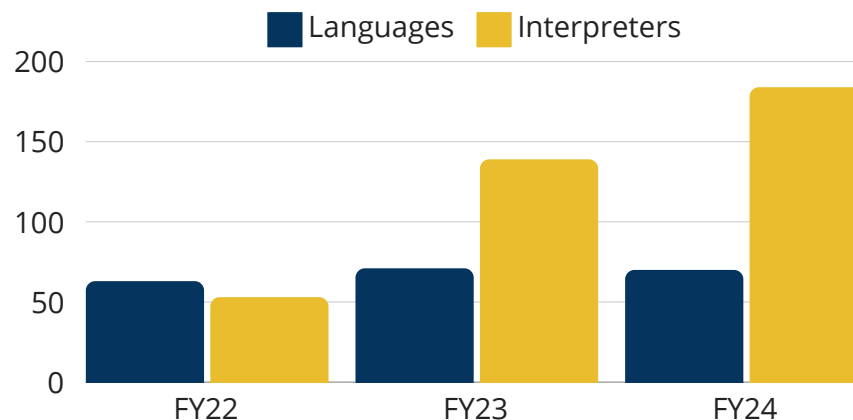
58 ATTENDEES

15 LANGUAGES
ARABIC, BURMESE, EWE,
FRENCH, KAREN, KOREAN,
KURDISH, MAM, NEPALI, NUER,
RUSSIAN, SOMALI, SPANISH,
THAI, AND VIETNAMESE

13 COUNTIES
COLFAX, DAWSON, DOUGLAS,
HALL, HAMILTON, HOLT,
KIMBALL, LANCASTER, LINCOLN,
MADISON, PLATTE, SARPY, AND
STANTON

Language Service Increase

Over a three-year period, the demand for language services has surged, as evidenced by an 11% increase in the number of languages requiring interpretation. This growth highlights the expanding diversity and linguistic needs within Nebraska's population. In response to this demand, the number of interpreters has seen a remarkable 247% increase, reflecting significant efforts to recruit and train professionals to meet these evolving requirements. This substantial rise in interpreter numbers not only supports the growing linguistic diversity but also ensures that language barriers are effectively bridged, enabling better communication and access to services for all.





Commemmorating the 50th anniversary of Language Access in the Courts across the state, August 14, 2023.

“

THESE INDIVIDUALS, COURT INTERPRETERS, PLAY AN INDISPENSABLE
ROLE IN OUR COURTS, BREAKING DOWN COMMUNICATION BARRIERS
THAT MIGHT OTHERWISE IMPEDE THE PURSUIT OF JUSTICE.

State Court Administrator Corey Steel

”



OFFICE OF DISPUTE RESOLUTION

The **Office of Dispute Resolution** (ODR) oversees the development of dispute resolution with a focus on the six ODR-approved non-profit mediation centers and court-connected programs across the state. The six mediation centers approved by ODR provide Nebraskans access to court alternatives through dispute resolution.

Services include: Basic Mediation, Parenting Act Mediation, Child Welfare Mediation/Facilitation, and Restorative Justice Facilitation.

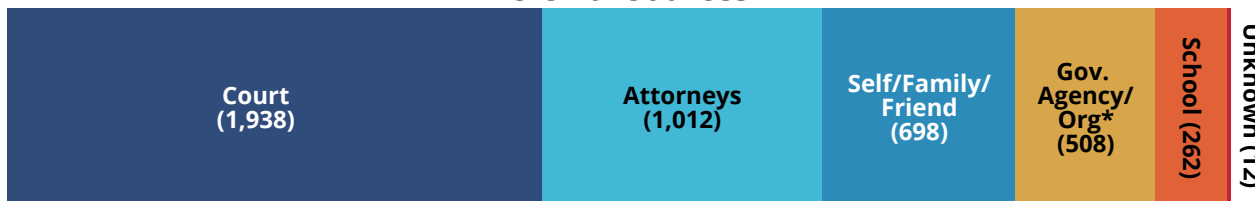
Mediation and restorative justice are alternative dispute resolution (ADR) methods involving participant input on outcomes. ADR can be utilized at the onset of disputes (in schools, families, communities), during court cases, or after court (e.g., modifying parenting plans, probation).

The Dispute Resolution Act established a partnership between the State and non-profit mediation centers to deliver these services effectively and affordably to all Nebraskans. These centers offer a sliding fee scale and cannot refuse service based on inability to pay, ensuring accessibility.

The State, Courts, and court users save money through this partnership with approved mediation centers. Savings are realized regardless of when ADR is used, such as:

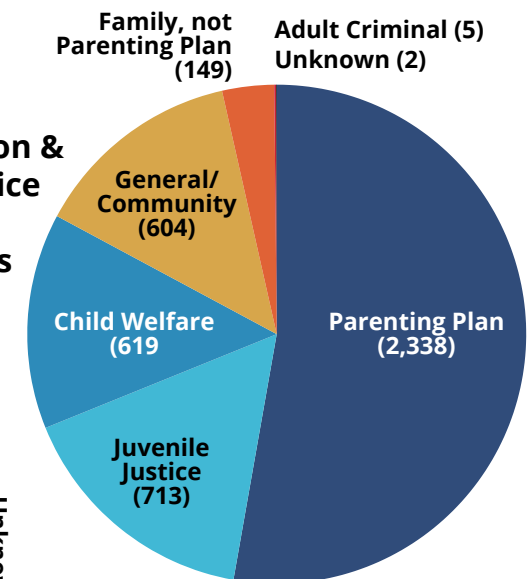
- Parents creating their own parenting plans for court (conserves court resources).
- Litigants resolving Small Claims cases with mutually agreed payment plans (conserves court resources).
- Addressing student truancy with plans for success (conserves county and court resources and facilitates positive outcomes in the community).
- Youth developing accountability plans to prevent reoffending (conserves county and court resources, and facilitates positive outcomes in the community, including community safety).

Referral Sources



**Includes: Counselor/Therapist, Diversion, Human Service, Law Enforcement, Other Mediation Center/Office of Dispute Resolution, Probation*

FY 2024 Mediation & Restorative Justice Case Volume: 4,430 Total Cases



The **Office of Public Guardian** (OPG) is designed to serve as the guardian or conservator for an individual when no other alternatives are available.

In addition to serving as guardian and/or conservator of last resort when no family or suitable individual is available, the OPG provides training, education, and support to guardians and conservators across the state, and recruits individuals to serve as guardians and/or conservators for Nebraska's vulnerable individuals.

The Advisory Council on Public Guardianship guides the work of the OPG. Work began on January 1, 2015, to develop the processes, guidelines, plans, and personnel policies to implement the Public Guardianship Act.



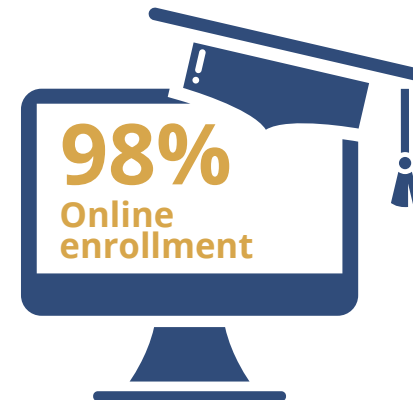
Since its inception, OPG has been nominated to serve as a guardian and/or conservator ***1,109*** times as of 6.30.24, serving as guardian and/or conservator in ***608*** of those cases.



Nominations in FY24

1,600

Private guardians and/or conservators trained



Under authority of the Nebraska Supreme Court, the **Attorney Services Division** oversees attorney admissions in the State of Nebraska.

The Division also oversees the attorney license renewal process, providing information to the public regarding attorney license status and malpractice insurance information.

The Attorney Services Division monitors attorney compliance with mandatory annual continuing legal education requirements, as well as assisting attorneys in fulfilling education requirements



New attorneys await the beginning of the swearing-in ceremony, September 21, 2023.

The Attorney Services Division oversees attorney admissions by administering the bar exam and working with the State Bar Commission to approve potential bar members for character and fitness to practice law. Attorneys may be admitted to the bar by motion after obtaining a license to practice in another state or through the bar exam process.



**204 examinees
sat for the July
2023 exam**

The goal of the attorney disciplinary process, through the **Office of the Counsel for Discipline**, is to protect the public, the profession and our system of justice from the unethical conduct of attorneys.

The conduct of Nebraska lawyers must comport to the standards set forth in the Rules of Professional Conduct as adopted by the Nebraska Supreme Court. The Nebraska Supreme Court has assigned the office of Counsel for Discipline to investigate and prosecute violations of the Rules of Professional Conduct.



400 Complaints Received

- 209 Rejected Upon Review
 - 11 Formal Grievances
 - 4 Formal Charges
 - 2 Diversion
- 12 Unauthorized Practice of Law
- 153 Dismissed after investigation
 - 9 Open and pending



3 Supreme Court Ethics Disciplinary Opinions

One resulting in 90-day suspension, one public reprimand, and one disbarment.



4 Lawyer's Advisory Committee Ethics Opinions

Nebraska attorneys can request advisory opinions from the Advisory Committee on the Rules of Professional Conduct related to their anticipated conduct.

The Nebraska **Court Improvement Project** (CIP) works to positively impact and improve outcomes for children, youth, and families involved with juvenile court through multi-disciplinary, judge-led "Through the Eyes of a Child" teams in every Nebraska county. CIP provides or facilitates education for child welfare and youth justice professionals, distributes data on court-involved youth and families, and collaborates with partner agencies, court professionals, and other stakeholders to improve court processes.

Upstream Initiative

Nebraska was selected as a pilot site for the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) Upstream initiative. Upstream builds on judicial leadership to convene community members to identify issues families face that, if left unaddressed, may result in formal court involvement. CIP partnered with NCSC to coordinate the first Upstream community mapping workshop in Red Willow County. County Court Judge Anne Paine and the local Through the Eyes of the Child team invited over 50 community members to attend a 2-day workshop which highlighted current community supports and provided an overview of the child welfare and youth justice system. With this foundational information, participants developed an action plan to address the identified issues, with a focus on supporting families prior to system involvement. The local Through the Eyes of the Child team will continue to evaluate action plan progress and reconvene in early 2025 to report on progress. CIP has plans to conduct additional Upstream mapping workshops across the state.

CIP, in partnership with the Nebraska Indian Child Welfare Coalition is proud to highlight the recently released Indian Child Welfare Act education series, available on the Judicial Branch Education learning platform and on the Nebraska CIP website. The series is viewable at: <https://nejudicial.com/cip24>

The **Nebraska Indian Child Welfare Act Education for Juvenile Court Stakeholders** includes content from a national and state perspective, as well as interviews from tribal members, families with lived experience, judicial and legal professionals, and the Department of Health and Human Services. Attorneys can receive continuing legal education for completing the modules.

The series includes the following:

- Module 1: Historical Trauma and Overview of ICWA
- Module 2: Federal Law and Regulations & Nebraska State Statute
- Module 3: Inquiry, Applicability, and Reason to Know
- Module 4: Child Custody, Emergency, and Voluntary Proceedings
- Module 5: ICWA Notices
- Module 6: Active Efforts
- Module 7: Placement Preferences and Best Interest
- Module 8: Cultural Development and Preservation Plans
- Module 9: Qualified Expert Witness
- Module 10: Working with Tribes and Tribal Courts



Participants of the Upstream Mapping workshop in Red Willow County.



NEBRASKA PROBATION Strategic Plan: 2024-2029

Nebraska Probation released a new Strategic Plan that will be effective from 2024 to 2029. This plan was created collaboratively by Probation staff over the past two years and has been approved by the Nebraska Supreme Court. It aligns with the Court's Strategic Agenda, which focuses on improving community safety. The plan outlines the following six leadership principles and includes specific goals and strategies to guide Nebraska Probation's work:

- Individuals and stakeholders are valued, heard, and supported through effective communication.
- Prioritize a culture of leadership.
- Understand and use Implementation Science principles throughout the organization.
- Evidence-based practices are foundational strategies for achieving positive outcomes.
- Nurture and develop staff.
- Embrace the individuality of justice-involved persons.

Read the plan at: nejudicial.com/probstratplan

“No matter the challenge, this foundation and plan will drive the organization on our path to excellence and in service to the courts, our clients, and safer communities.”



State Probation Administrator Deborah Minardi welcomes guests to the swearing-in ceremony of new Nebraska Probation Officers, October 2023.



OCT. 5, 2023

79

**PROBATION OFFICERS
SWORN-IN**

*The largest group of new
probation officers to take
their oath together.*



Expansion

On November 11, 2023, the Nebraska Supreme Court approved the request of 5th Judicial District Court Judge Jason M. Bergevin to establish a new Adult Drug Court in Platte County.

According to the Adult Treatment Court Best Practice Standards, 2nd edition, before implementing the program, the team learns from expert faculty about the key components and best practices in treatment courts, creates a guiding mission statement and objectives for the program, and develops evidence-based and culturally equitable policies and procedures to govern the treatment court's operations. Prior to program implementation, the newly formed drug court team participated in a 3-day Foundational Workshop conducted by All Rise. The 5th Judicial District Adult Drug Court in Platte County held their first drug court hearing on July 19, 2024.

Problem-Solving Court Summit

The 2020-2025 Strategic Plan for Nebraska Problem-Solving Courts identified problem-solving court growth, expansion, and the relationships of interested parties as focus areas that are critical for the continued success of Nebraska Problem-Solving Courts. To examine these issues, a workgroup comprised of representatives from the core disciplines of a problem-solving court team was established.

Prior to the initial meeting, a discipline-specific survey was created and disseminated to Nebraska stakeholders. Data from the survey was collected and organized to be used to facilitate the initial meeting.

The workgroup convened on May 30, 2024, in Lincoln for a Problem-Solving Court Summit hosted by the Nebraska Supreme Court and facilitated by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC). Following the May 30 meeting, the workgroup held virtual meetings in preparation for the final in-person meeting in La Vista on September 18, 2024. It is anticipated that the workgroup will submit its final report to the Nebraska Supreme Court following the final in-person meeting in La Vista.



Clockwise from top left: Lancaster County Adult Drug Court, Douglas County Young Adult Court, Douglas County Veterans Treatment Court, Hall County Reentry Court.

The **Juvenile Probation Services Division** is responsible for the statewide administration of juvenile detention intake, investigations, supervision, rehabilitative/behavioral health/supportive services, and re-entry. During all stages of the court process, youth and their families are encouraged to be active participants. Supported by research and shown to have a positive impact on recidivism, as well as behavior change, juvenile probation applies a balanced approach tailored to reflect the distinct developmental needs of adolescents.

Juvenile probation's goal is to prevent juveniles from returning to the juvenile justice system or entering the criminal justice system.



Service Expansions in Rural Nebraska:

The Juvenile Services Division remains focused on expanding service access in rural areas. In September 2023, the University of Kearney was contracted to conduct an environmental scan of probation Districts 11 and 12, leading to a detailed report on service needs. Service expansion continues to be a priority moving forward and the results of the research driven environmental scan will be utilized to continue to make progress in the future.

Highlights of recent service expansions impacting these rural areas:

Thrive:

This service was developed under the leadership of Judge Anne Paine and is a mentoring service specific to youth on probation in McCook. Youth who receive the Thrive service work with a professional Thrive Worker who helps them select a mentor, usually know to their family to support them through activities which build new skills for the youth and provide a long-term supportive relationship even after the service ends.





Mindfulness:

This service was developed in Hastings and provides both Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and yoga/mindfulness classes for probation youth. This is a trauma informed service with the goal of increasing a youth's ability to self-regulate and improve overall mood. The service also expanded to Holdrege, in June of 2024.



Transportation:

The service of transportation for youth has presented a barrier for many years and with service access difficulties in rural areas this difficulty is heightened. Due to this a special focus was placed on transportation over the past year resulting in added drivers to current providers, as well as a brand-new transportation service provider launching in June of 2024.



Professional Foster Care:

This is an intensive level of foster care available for youth with complex needs. After a successful pilot this service is now available for all foster care agencies to become a registered service provider. Currently, there are Professional Foster Homes in Scottsbluff and other areas of the state.



Each year, youth have the opportunity to document their journey in Probation through the annual Artwork Contest, last year Jarvis won first place with this entry. See this year's entrants: <https://nejudicial.com/artwork24>.

The **Adult Probation Services Division** oversees the development, training, and implementation of:

- All statutory requirements for adult investigations and supervision;
- Evidence-based programming for adults;
 - Including individuals being released from incarceration for Class III, IIIA, and IV felony offenses, also referred to as post-release supervision;
- Rehabilitative/behavioral health and supportive services for those under community supervision, creating opportunities for constructive change and enhancing community safety.

Probation strives to provide equitable access to services by reducing financial barriers for individuals and families.

Nebraska Probation: Accountability, Behavior Change, Community Safety

- Observed a reduction in the overall risk-level of high-risk to recidivate individuals on probation, post-release supervision, and problem-solving courts upon successful completion of supervision.
- Reduced number of individuals on felony probation revoked to a state correctional facilities. The number of individuals revoked off probation to a state prison for a new law violation decreased from 325 in FY22-23 to 268 in FY23-24, or a 17.5% reduction.

Adult Probation Recidivism Rate:

19% 

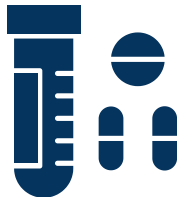
In spite of a **50% increase in the high to very high risk to reoffend felony probation population** (63% of population) resulting from LB605 passed in 2015, Nebraska Probation's community-based supervision continues to effectively reduce adult recidivism.

Cost-effective community-based supervision
\$2,000 VS. \$41,000

Incarceration costs **\$41,000** per person per year.

Probation supervision costs nearly **\$2,000** per person per year.

Intensive supervision costs approximately **\$3,500** per person per year.



Collected **474,645 drug tests on 19,288 unique individuals** or an average of 24 chemical tests per adult individual under supervision, helping to enforce court-ordered abstinence and improve community safety.



During Fiscal Year 2023-2024, **Nebraska Probation Reporting Centers had over 64,545 visits** by probation, post-release supervision, and problem-solving court individuals who accessed services and programming.



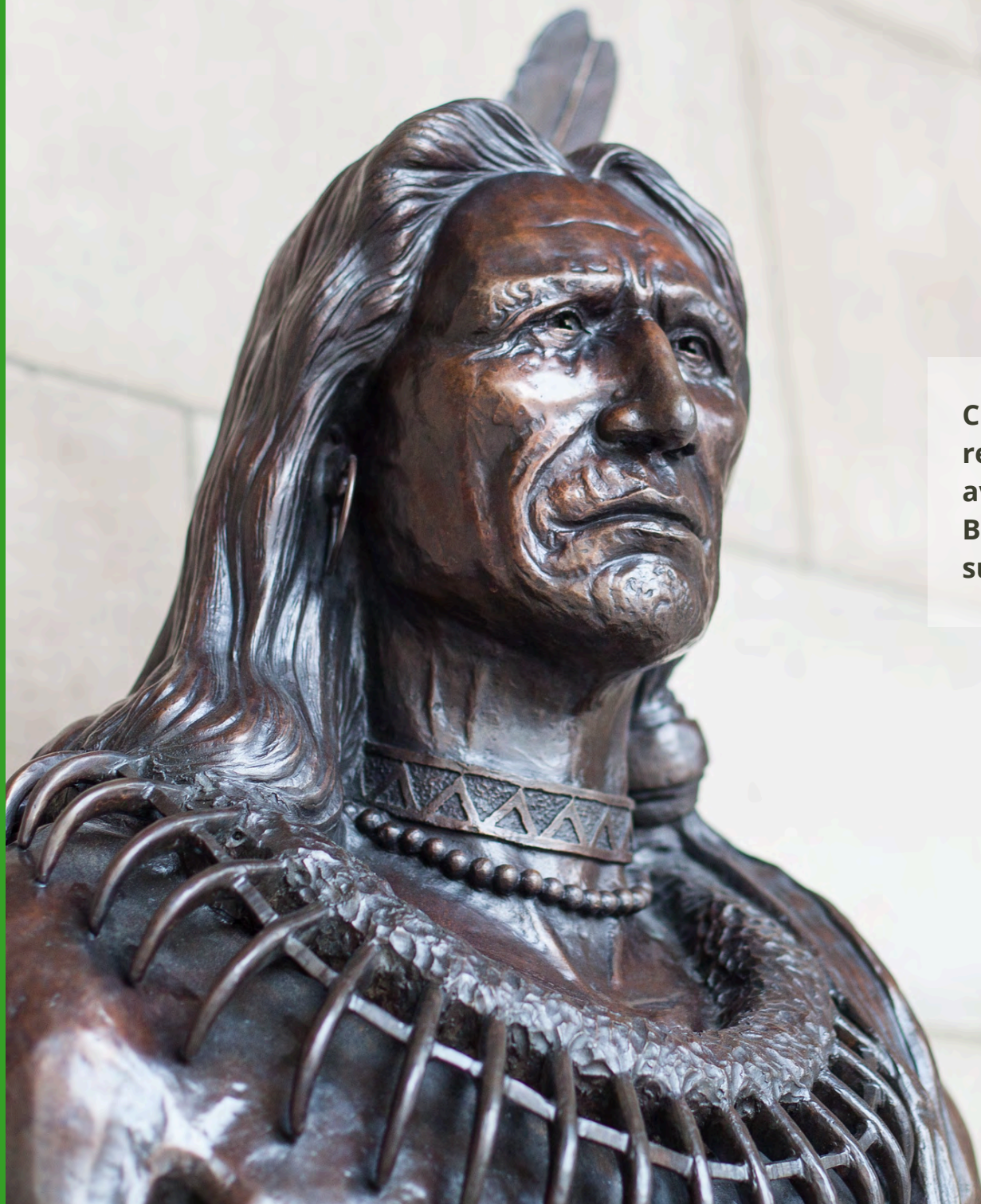
Completed **10,285 presentence investigations** to assist Nebraska courts with sentencing decisions for adult justice-involved individuals.

Completed **550 post-release supervision reentry plans**, providing critical support for individuals reentering their community following a period of incarceration.



Supervised **9,163 high-risk to recidivate individuals** on probation within their communities, critical for their successful rehabilitation and improved community safety.

Supervised **1,299 individuals on post-release supervision**, addressing their critical needs such as housing, employment, and treatment for substance use and mental health.



Current and historical statistical reports, and other publications, are available on the Nebraska Judicial Branch website: supremecourt.nebraska.gov/reports

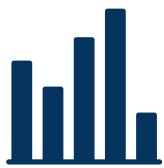


STATISTICS FY24

50 APPELLATE
COURTS

52 TRIAL
COURTS

58 PROBATION
CASES

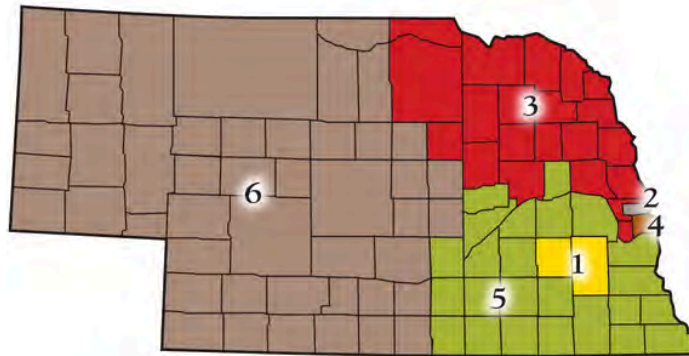


Nebraska Court Case Filings

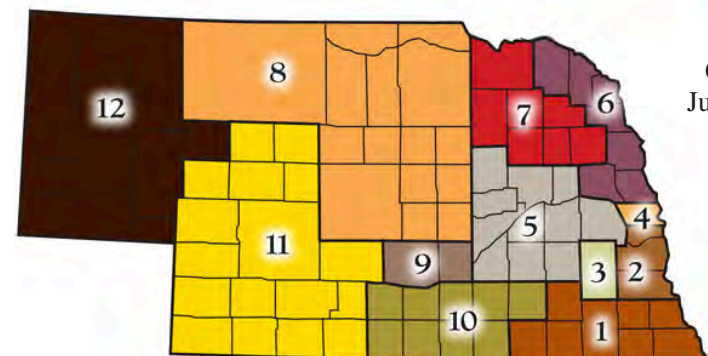
DISTRICT INFORMATION

The Constitution of the State of Nebraska distributes the judicial power of the state among the Supreme Court, Court of Appeals, district courts and county courts. All state courts operate under the administrative direction of the Supreme Court.

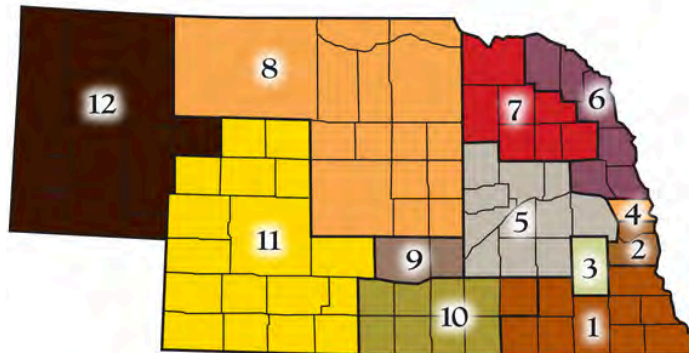
Supreme Court &
Court of Appeals
Judicial Districts



County Court
Judicial Districts



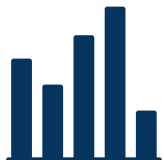
District Court &
Probation Judicial
Districts



Separate Juvenile
Courts



*Note: Sarpy,
Douglas, and
Lancaster Counties*



Nebraska Court Case Filings

APPELLATE COURT CASELOAD INFORMATION

Arguments in the Nebraska Supreme Court Courtroom are streamed live and preserved on the Oral Argument Archive of the Nebraska Judicial Branch website. Additional available arguments include the court sessions held at the University of Nebraska College of Law and Creighton University School of Law.

Court of Appeals arguments heard at the State Capitol in Lincoln are streamed live and archived.

When Appellate Courts hear arguments in communities across the state, the audio recording is archived on the website.

Caseload - Nebraska Supreme Court

New Cases Docketed

- Petitions to Bypass Filed
- Petitions to Bypass Granted
- Petitions to Bypass Denied

Cases Transferred from Court of Appeals

- Petitions for Further Review Filed
- Petitions for Further Review Granted
- Petitions for Further Review Denied

Cases Disposed by Opinion

Cases Disposed Without Opinion

Total Cases Disposed

<i>FY21</i>	<i>FY22</i>	<i>FY23</i>	<i>FY24</i>
61	61	56	61
50	42	35	35
37	24	22	23
16	18	15	9
108	127	102	105
216	145	178	178
11	6	8	15
207	147	162	168
219	140	177	130
36	49	42	39
255	189	219	169

Caseload - Nebraska Court of Appeals

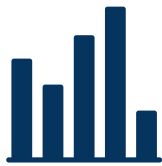
New Cases Docketed

- Transferred to the Supreme Court
- Petitions to Bypass Granted

Cases Disposed by Opinion

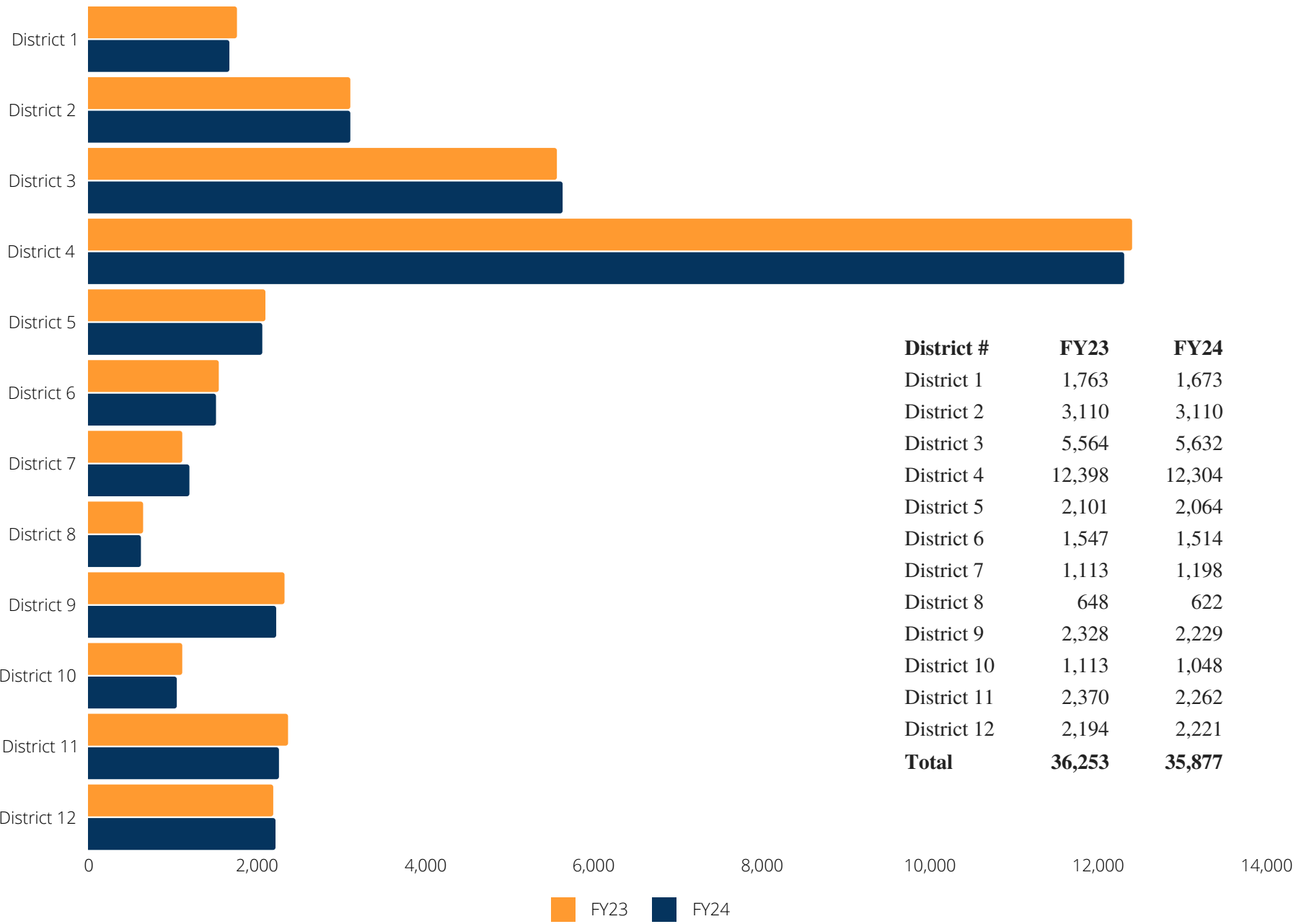
Total Cases Disposed

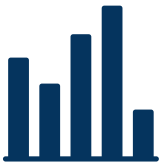
<i>FY21</i>	<i>FY22</i>	<i>FY23</i>	<i>FY24</i>
932	928	925	987
108	127	102	105
37	24	22	23
401	308	359	353
819	793	806	845



Nebraska Court Case Filings

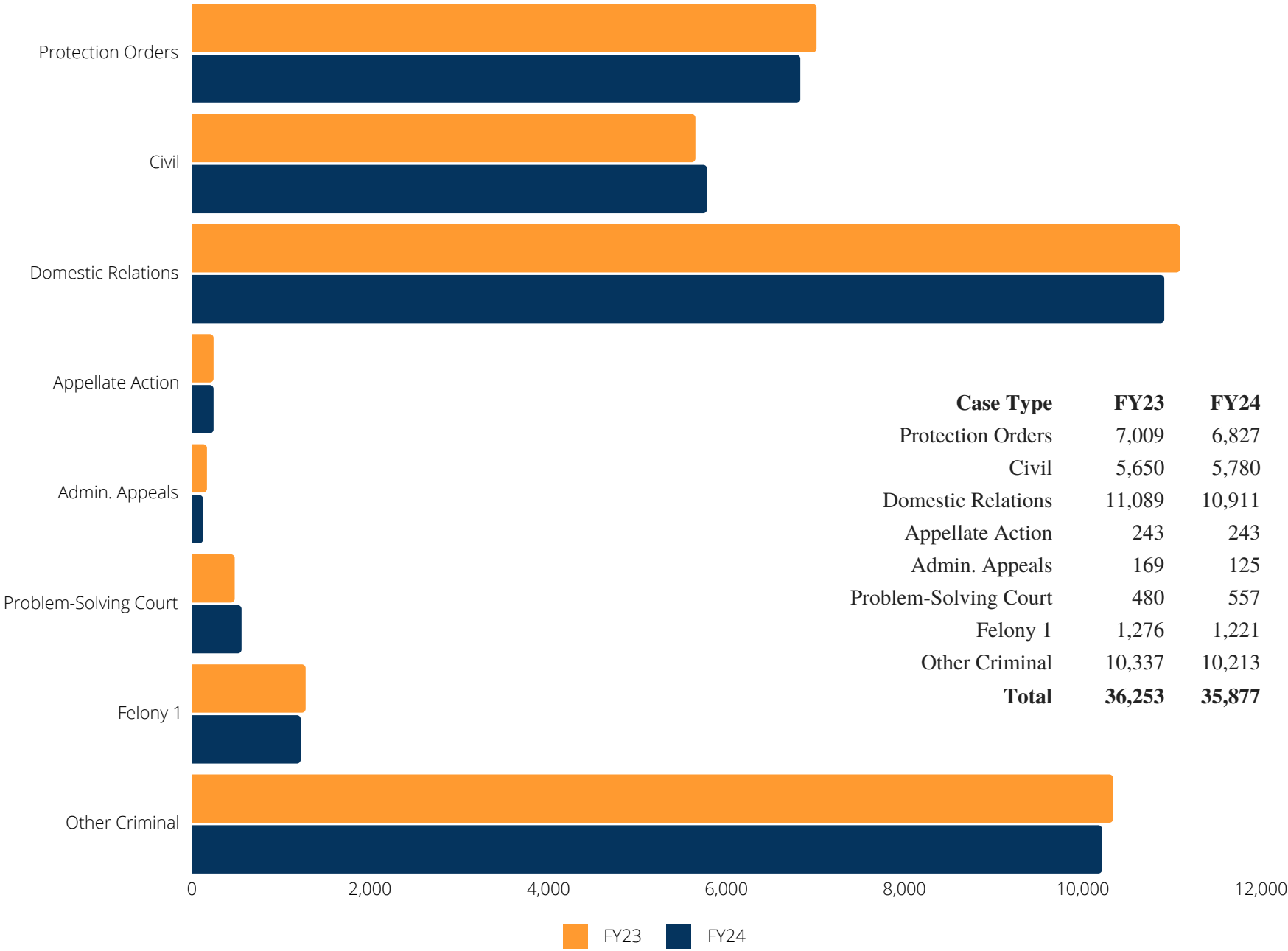
DISTRICT COURT CASE FILINGS BY DISTRICT FY24

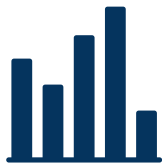




Nebraska Court Case Filings

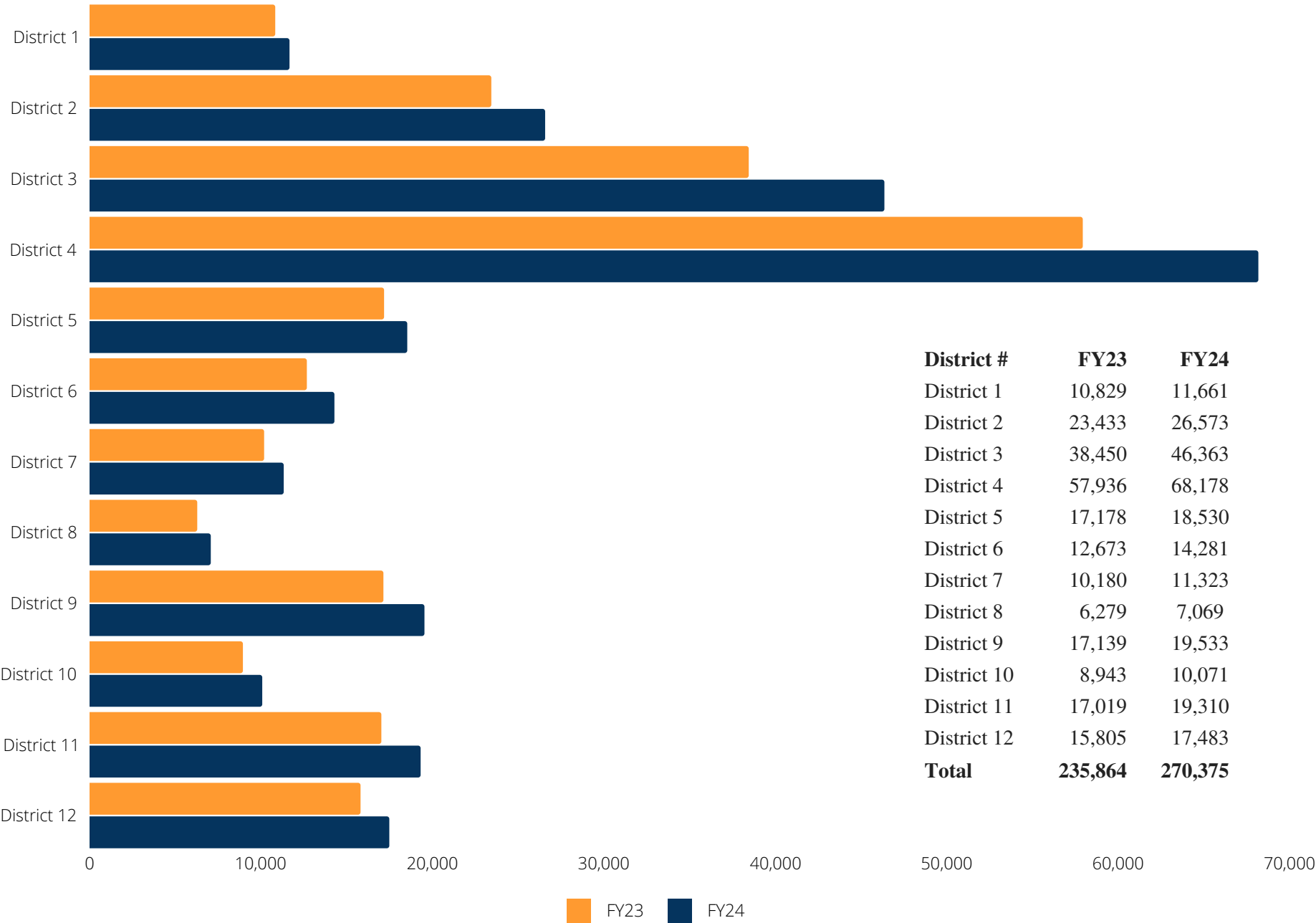
DISTRICT COURT CASE FILINGS BY CASE TYPE FY24

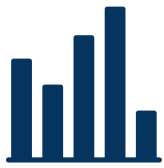




Nebraska Court Case Filings

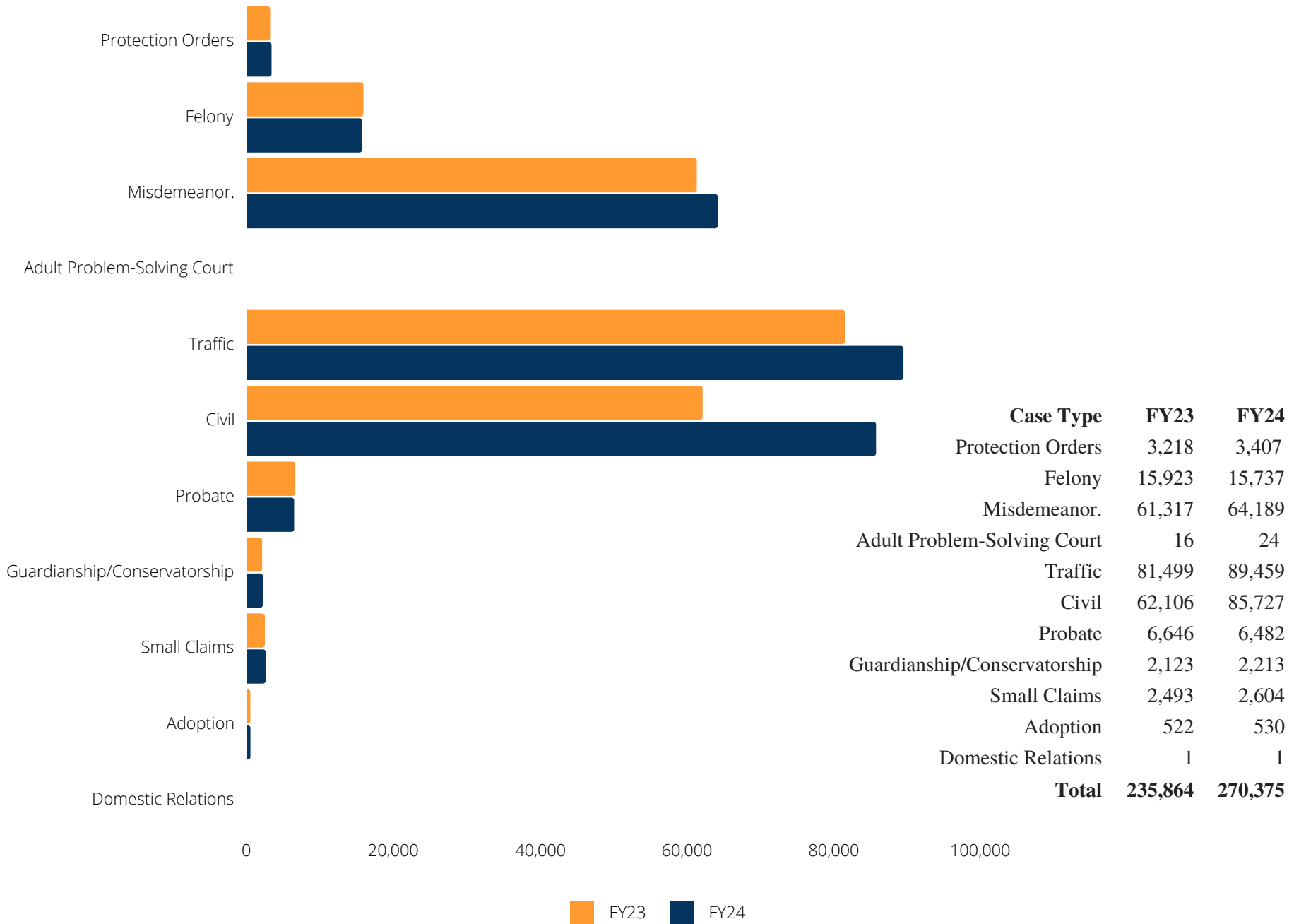
COUNTY COURT CASE FILINGS BY DISTRICT FY24

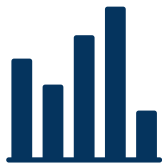




Nebraska Court Case Filings

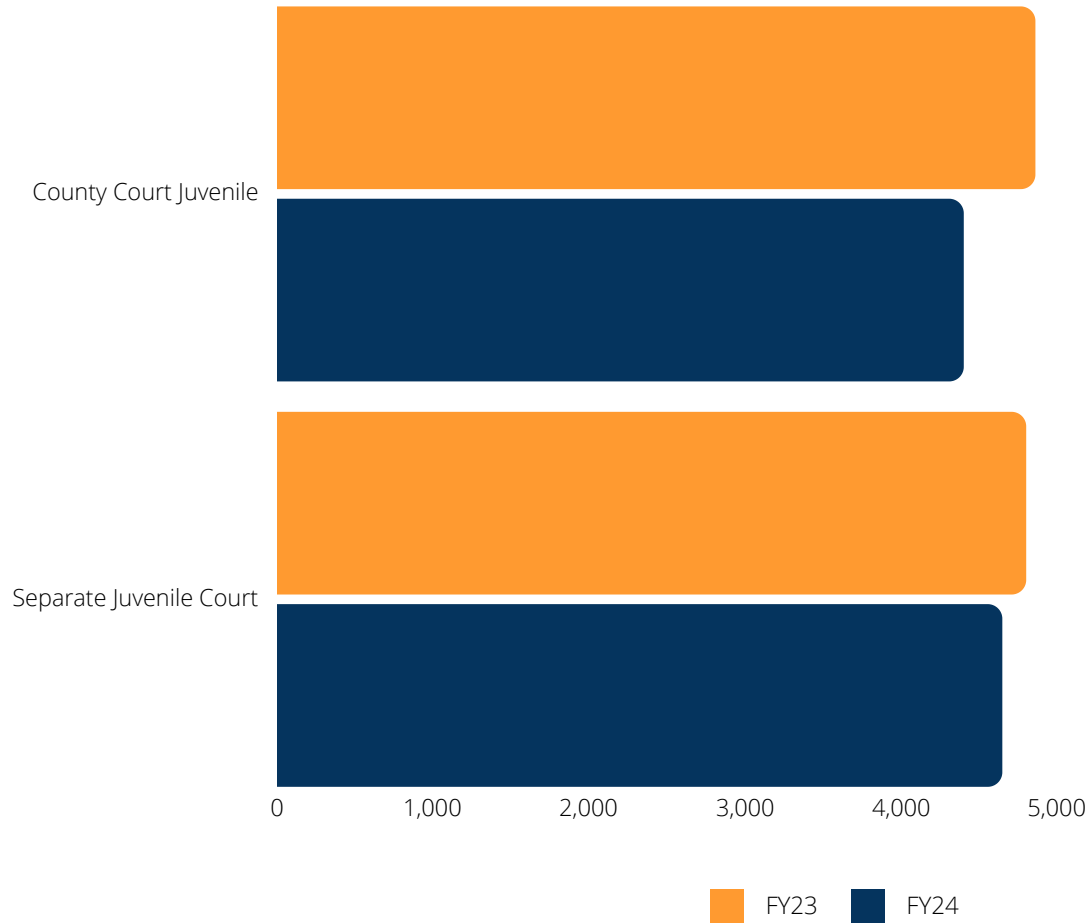
COUNTY COURT CASE FILINGS BY CASE TYPE FY24



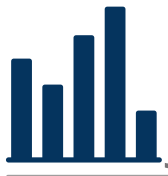


Nebraska Court Case Filings

JUVENILE CASE FILINGS BY COURT TYPE FY24

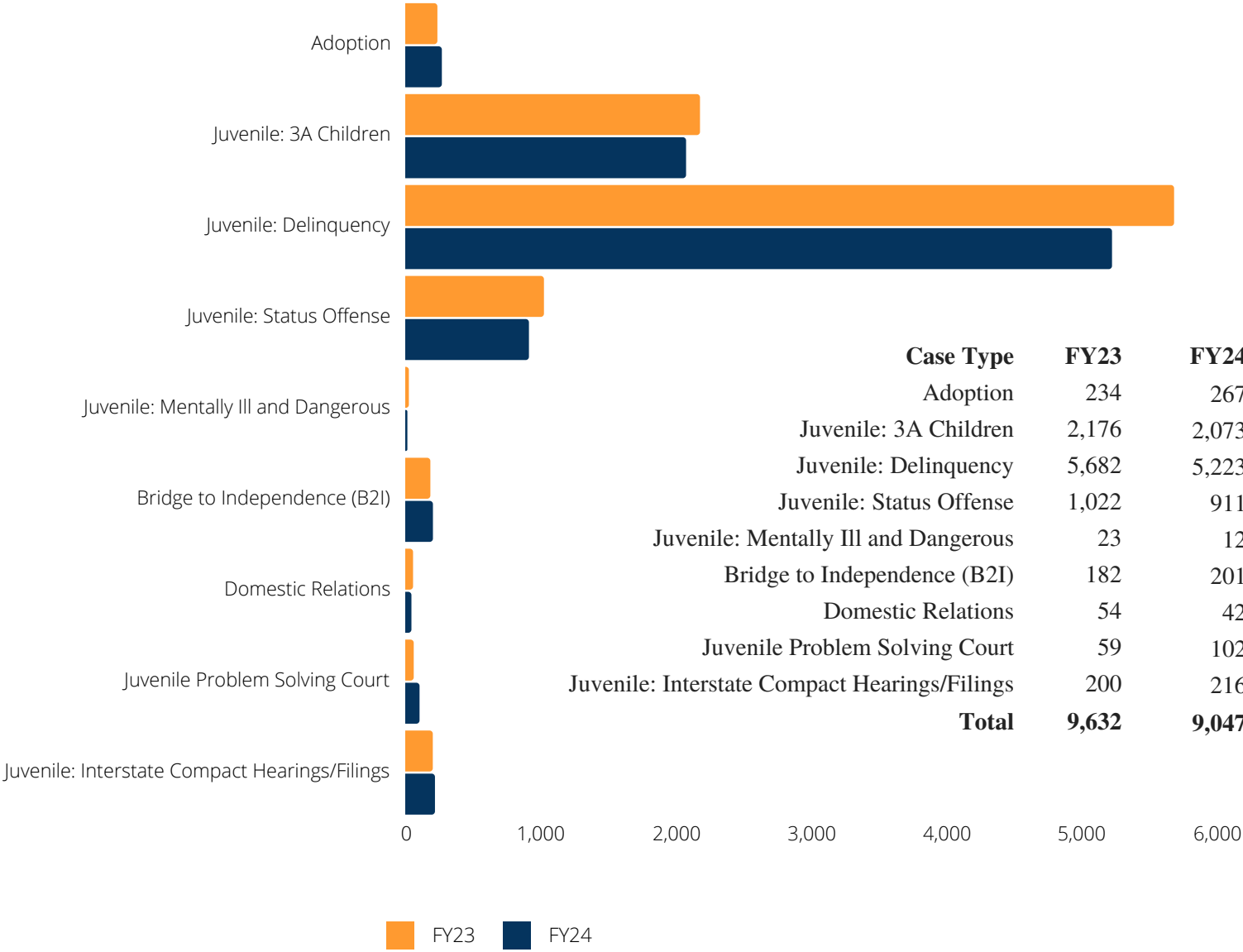


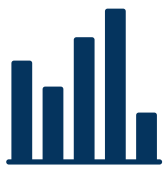
Court Type	FY23	FY24
County Court Juvenile	4,859	4,400
Separate Juvenile Courts	4,800	4,647
Total Juvenile Cases	9,659	9,047



Nebraska Court Case Filings

JUVENILE CASE FILINGS BY CASE TYPE FY24

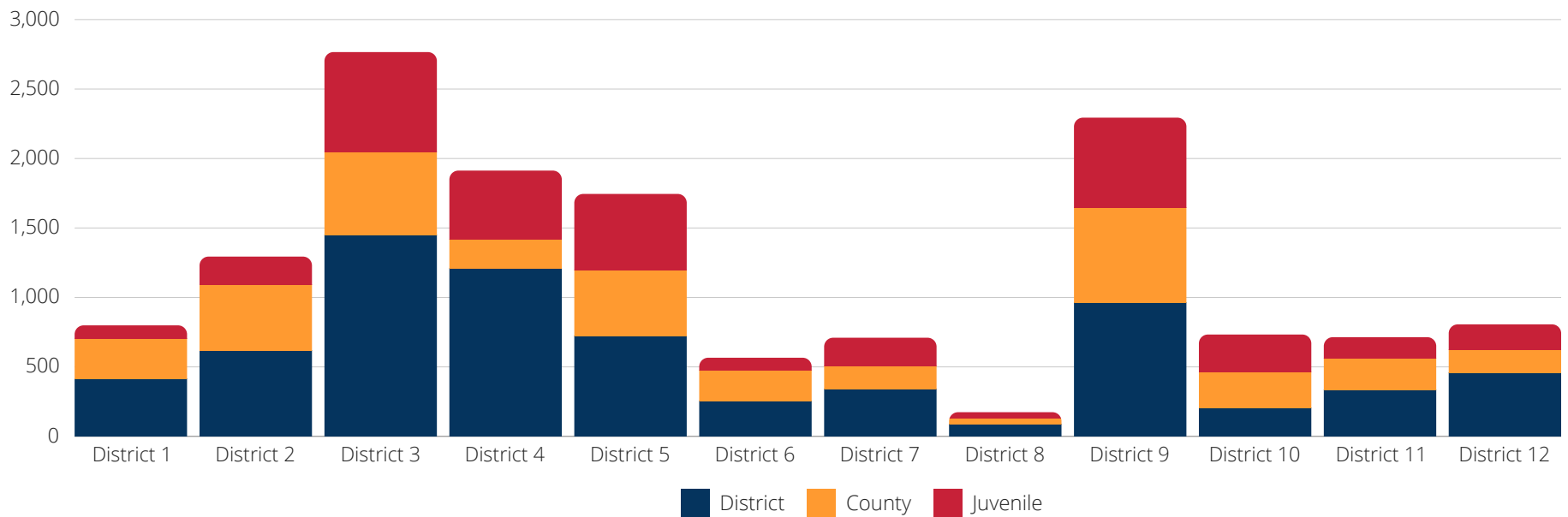




Nebraska Probation Case Statistics

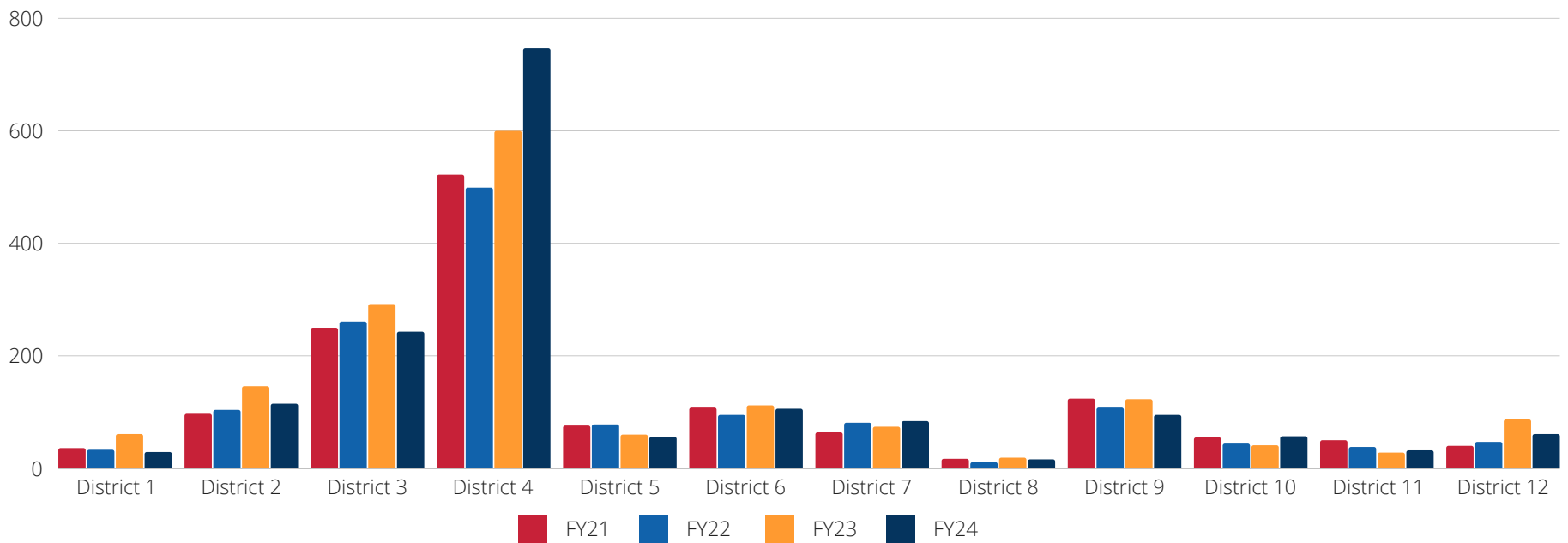
INVESTIGATIONS BY COURT TYPE FY24

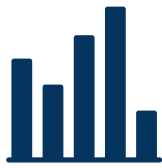
District #	District	County	Juvenile	Total
District 1	415	291	93	799
District 2	621	472	201	1,294
District 3	1,447	598	721	2,766
District 4	1,212	208	493	1,913
District 5	725	472	548	1,745
District 6	252	224	90	566
District 7	340	166	204	710
District 8	89	44	41	174
District 9	960	686	648	2,294
District 10	206	260	267	733
District 11	336	227	151	714
District 12	456	167	183	806
Total	7,059	3,815	3,640	14,514



Nebraska Probation Case Statistics

JUVENILE INTAKES FY24

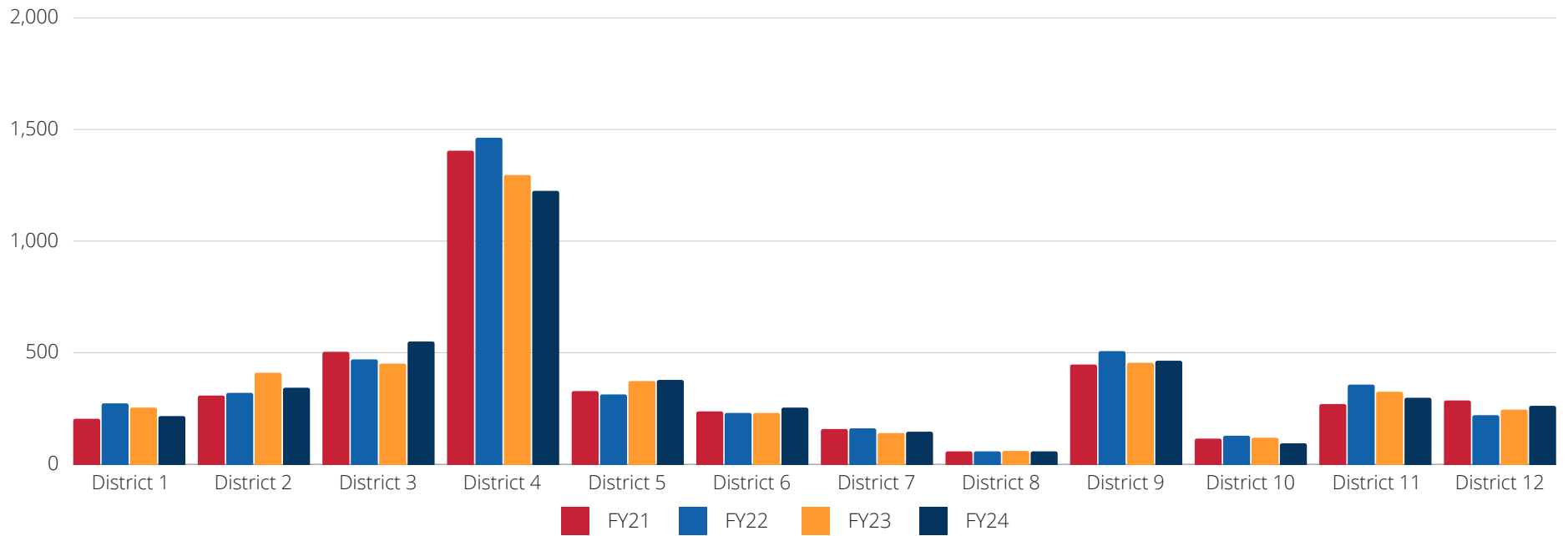


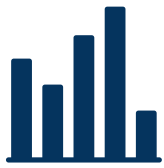


Nebraska Probation Case Statistics

DISPOSITION OF PROBATION FY24

District Court Cases with a Disposition of Probation or Post-Release Supervision

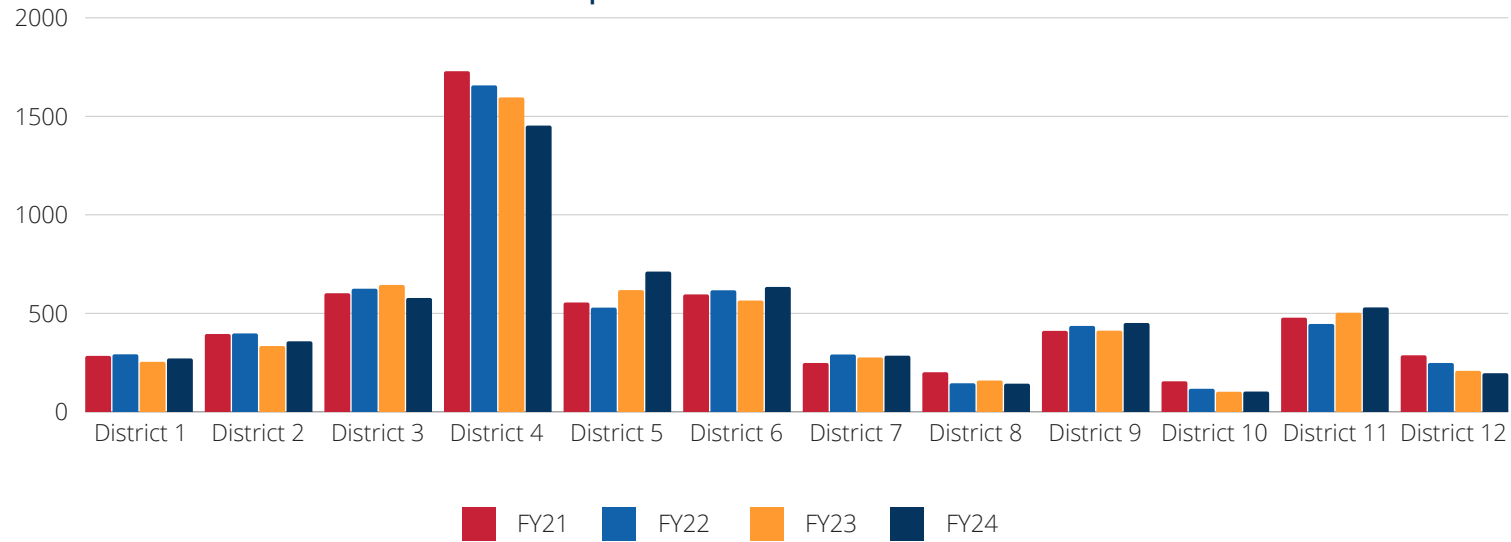




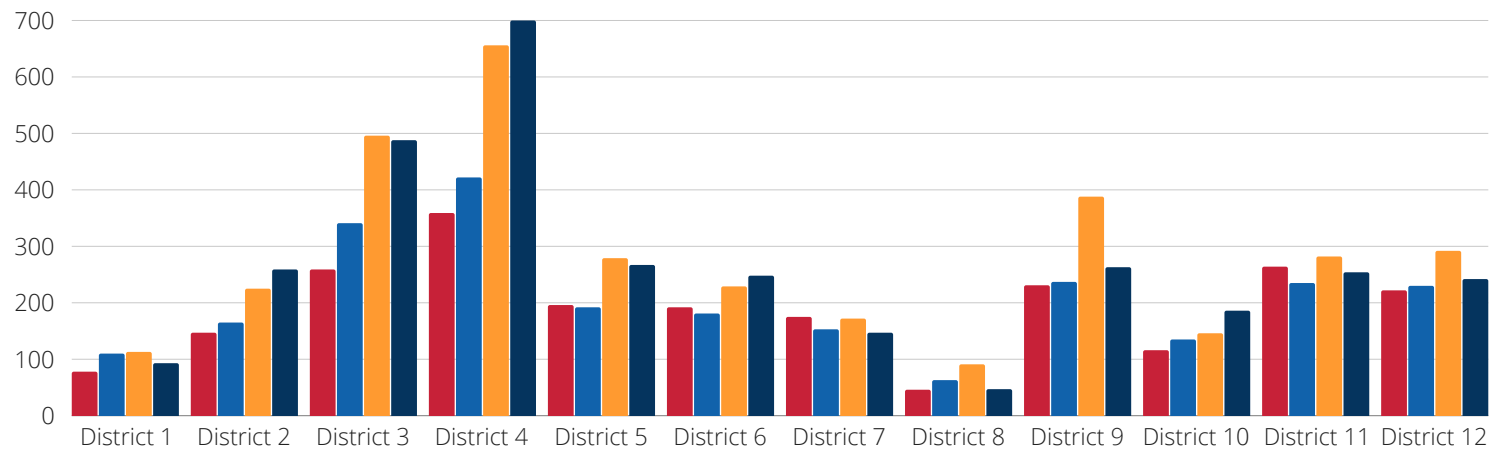
Nebraska Probation Case Statistics

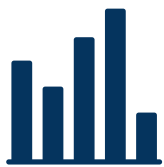
DISPOSITION OF PROBATION FY24

County Court Cases with a Disposition of Probation



Juvenile Court Cases with a Disposition of Probation

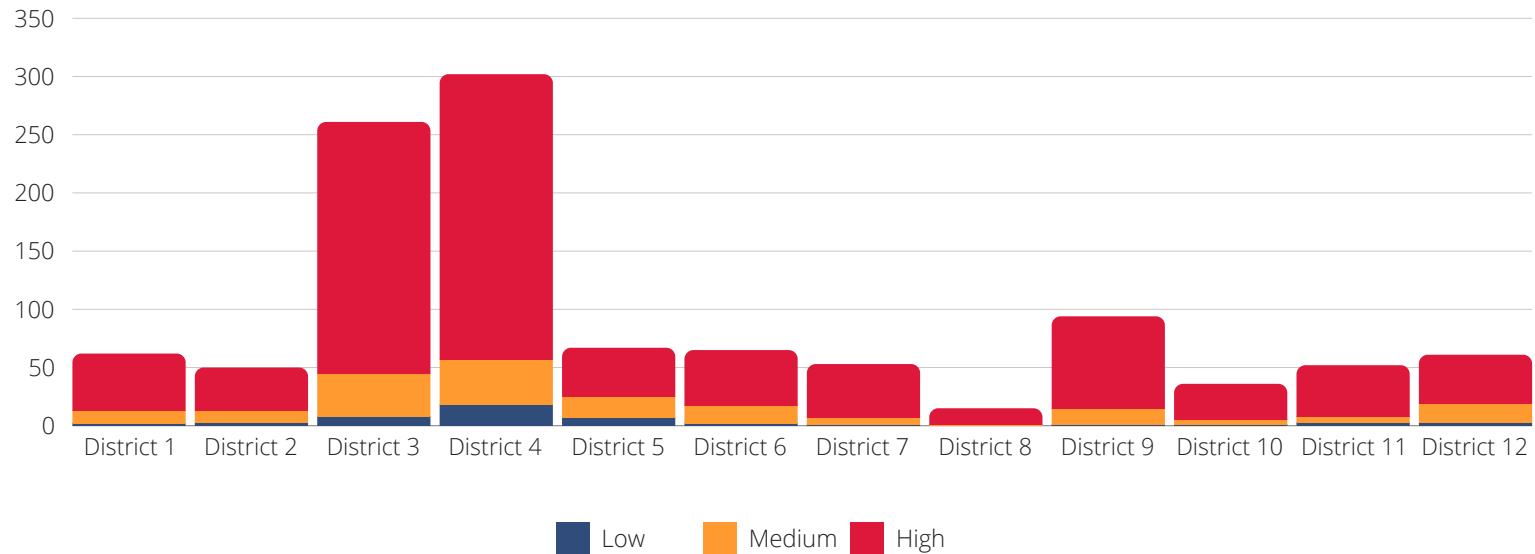




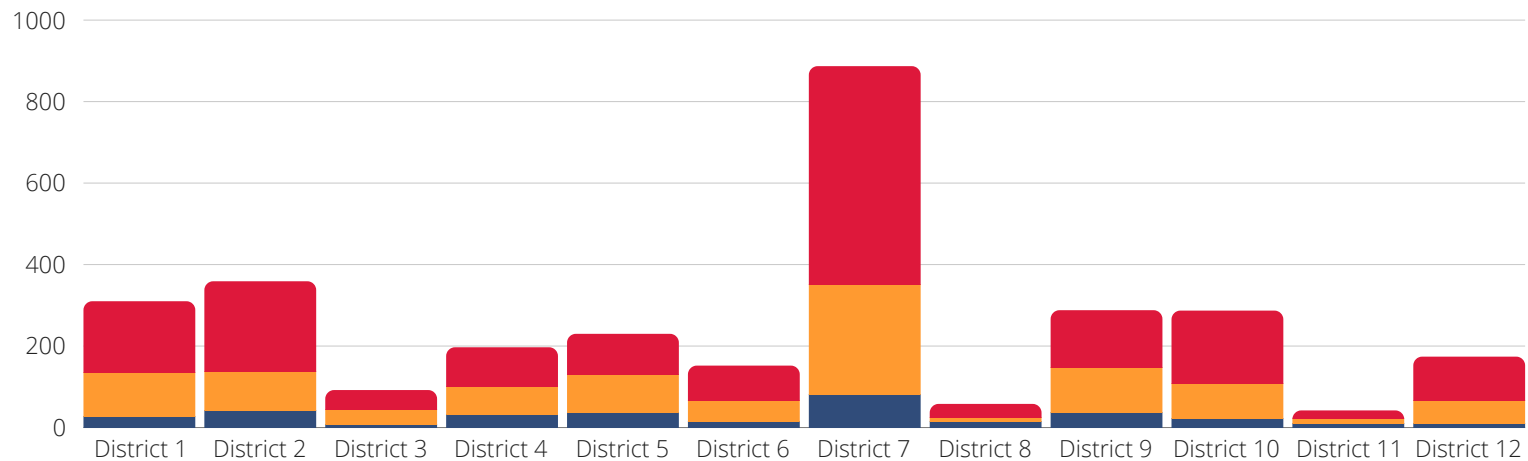
Nebraska Probation Case Statistics

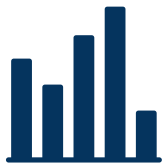
RISK TO REOFFEND FY24

Post-Release Supervision Cases and Risk to Reoffend FY24



District Court Cases and Risk to Reoffend FY24

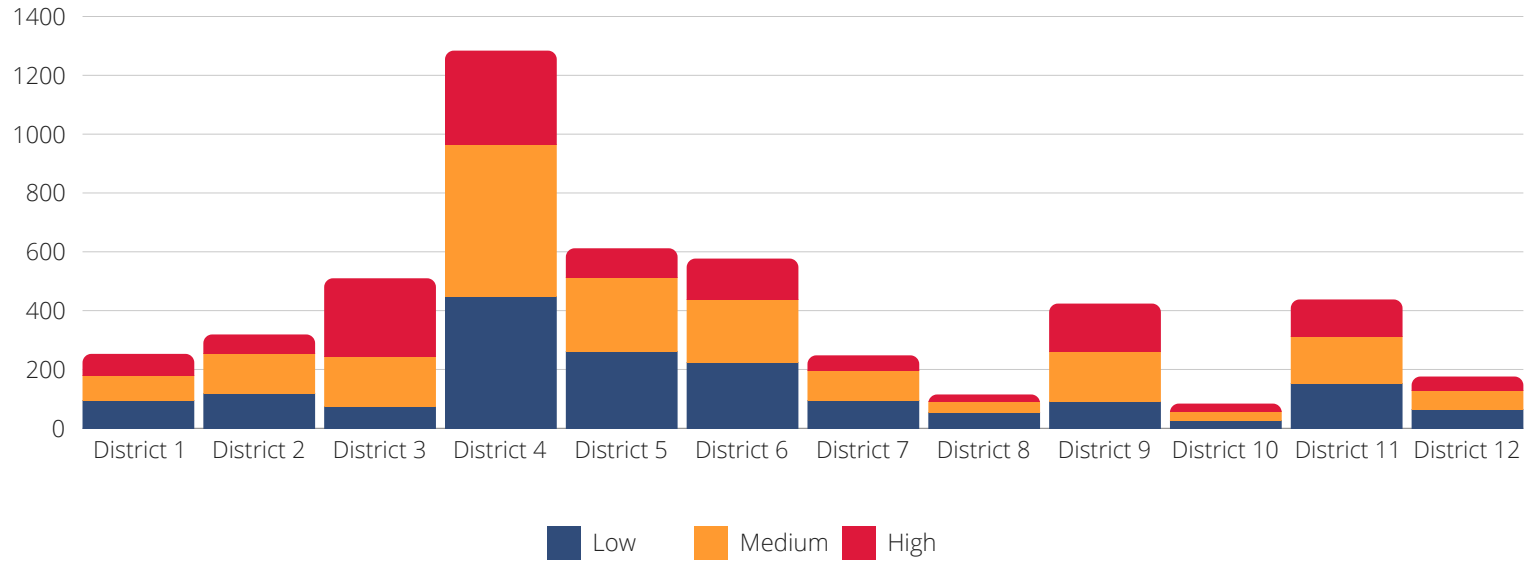




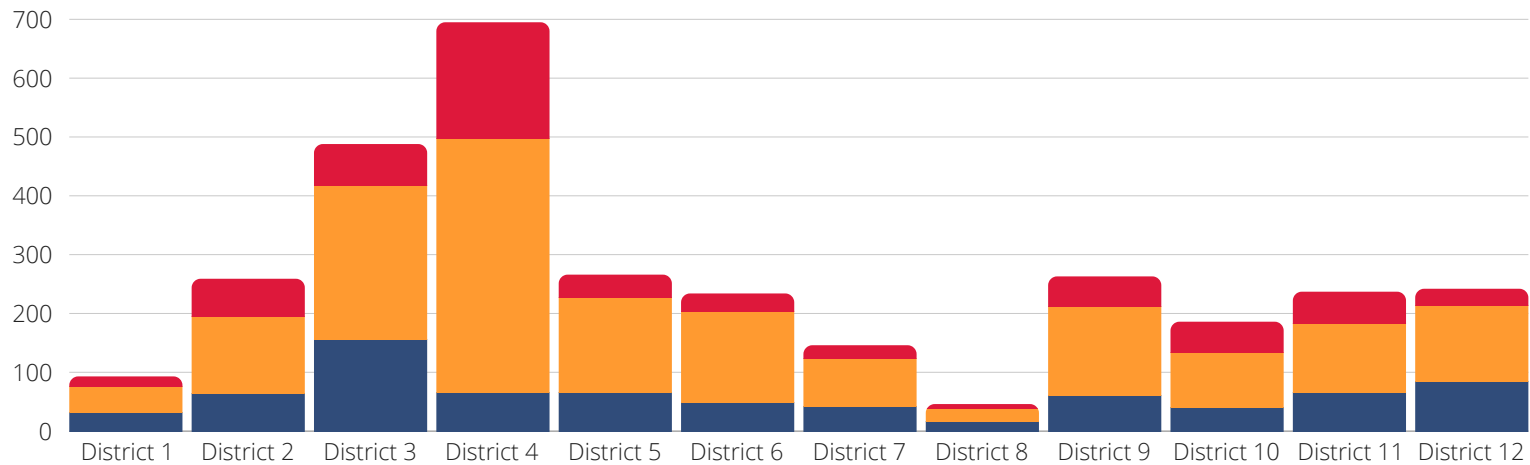
Nebraska Probation Case Statistics

RISK TO REOFFEND FY24

County Court Cases and Risk to Reoffend FY24



Juvenile Court Cases and Risk to Reoffend FY24





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