



Department of Justice

Office of Justice Programs



ADVANCE FOR RELEASE AT 4:00 P.M. EDT
FRIDAY, AUGUST 29, 2008
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs

BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS
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CIVIL RIGHTS CASES FILED IN U.S. DISTRICT COURTS DECLINED BY NEARLY 20 PERCENT FROM 2003 TO 2006

WASHINGTON – The number of civil rights cases filed in U.S. district courts declined from 40,516 to 32,865 (nearly 20 percent) between 2003 and 2006, the Justice Department’s Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) announced today. Civil rights claims may involve allegations of discrimination in areas such as employment, housing, welfare benefits or voting rights based on an individual’s or group’s race, sex, religion, age or physical condition.

Civil rights filings doubled in U.S. district courts from 1990 (18,922 filings) to 1997 (43,278 filings) and subsequently stabilized until 2003 when they declined. The growth, stabilization and decline in civil rights filings were largely attributable to employment discrimination cases which rose from 8,413 in 1990 to nearly 23,800 in 1997 and then declined to 14,353 in 2006.

Cases involving allegations of housing discrimination (rental, sale or financing of housing) and public accommodation discrimination in restaurants and hotels rose from 341 in 1990 to 1,315 in 2003 and declined to 643 by 2006. From 1990 to 2006, welfare discrimination cases declined from 129 to 56.

Voting rights cases peaked in 1992 and rose again in 2002. These increases were most likely the result of redistricting challenges following the 1990 and 2000 censuses.

Most civil rights complaints (about 9 out of 10) involved disputes between private parties. Federal civil rights cases accounted for about 17 percent of all civil cases filed in U.S. district courts in 1998, but by 2006 they accounted for 13 percent of all civil cases.

Civil rights cases concluded by trial dropped from 8 percent to 3 percent from 1990 through 2006, while dismissals increased from 66 percent to 72 percent. Trials decided by juries increased from 51 percent of all civil rights trials in 1990 to 87 percent in 2006.

Plaintiffs won under a third of civil rights trials on average from 1990 to 2006. The percentage awarded monetary damages declined during the period, from 83 percent to 79 percent.

(MORE)

The median damage awards (the amount at which half the awards are higher and half are lower) for plaintiffs who won in civil rights trials concluded in U.S. district courts ranged from \$114,000 in 2001 to \$154,500 in 2005. In 2006, the median damage amount awarded to plaintiffs who won in civil rights trials was \$150,000.

Civil rights cases disposed of by jury trial (\$146,125) resulted in median damage awards that were about two times higher than cases disposed of by bench trial (\$71,500). The rate in which plaintiffs won at trial did not differ appreciably between jury and bench trials.

Civil rights complaints filed by state and federal prison inmates increased from 25,992 in 1990 to 41,679 in 1995. Following the enactment of the Prison Litigation Reform Act, civil rights petitions from prisoners declined to 26,462 in 1998. On average from 1999 to 2006, the number of civil rights prison inmate petitions filed in U.S. district courts stabilized at about 24,500 cases per year.

The report, *Civil Rights Complaints in U.S. District Courts, 1990-2006* (NCJ 222989), was written by BJS statisticians Tracey Kyckelhahn and Thomas H. Cohen. Following publication, the report will be available at <<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/crcusdc06.htm>>.

For additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics' statistical reports and programs, please visit the BJS Web site at <<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs>>.

The Office of Justice Programs, headed by Acting Assistant Attorney General Jeffrey L. Sedgwick, provides federal leadership in developing the nation's capacity to prevent and control crime, administer justice, and assist victims. OJP has five component bureaus: the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the National Institute of Justice; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; and the Office for Victims of Crime. In addition, OJP has two program offices: the Community Capacity Development Office, which incorporates the Weed and Seed strategy, and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking (SMART). More information can be found at <<http://www.ojp.gov>>.

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