



North Carolina Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission

A Comparison of the NC Administrative Office of the Courts' *Trial Court Caseload Statistics* and the NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission's *Structured Sentencing Statistical Report*

The Administrative Office of the Courts' (AOC) *Trial Court Caseload Statistics* and the North Carolina Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission's *Structured Sentencing Statistical Report for Felonies and Misdemeanors* both use data from the AOC's Automated Criminal/Infractions System (ACIS) as their starting point for a given fiscal year. There are, however, notable differences in the statistics reported:

- The Trial Court Caseload is based on all cases filed and disposed during a fiscal year and cases pending on the last day of the fiscal year, while the Statistical Report is based only on convictions for Structured Sentencing offenses during a fiscal year. As a result, the statistics reported in the Statistical Report will be lower than those reported in the Trial Court Caseload.
- The method of disposition is defined differently in the two reports – the Trial Court Caseload represents the method of disposition for a case and will vary depending upon the method used to assign docket numbers for cases with multiple offenses; the Statistical Report represents the method of disposition for the most serious conviction for a sentencing episode.

The following is a more detailed description of some of the technical differences in the data used by the two agencies, which result in the lower numbers reported in the Statistical Report.

Data Source

- **Trial Court Caseload Statistics:** ACIS
- **Statistical Report:** ACIS

Unit of Analysis

- **Trial Court Caseload Statistics:** Cases filed and disposed during the fiscal year (July 1 - June 30) and cases pending on June 30
- **Statistical Report:** Convictions disposed during the fiscal year (July 1 - June 30)

Definition of Unit of Analysis

- **Trial Court Caseload Statistics: Case** – A case is defined as a docket number. Each case may have one (e.g., 2222221-51, 222222-51, 2222223-51) or many offenses (e.g., 2222221-51, 2222221-52, 2222221-53), depending on how docket numbers are assigned in a county/district.
- **Statistical Report: Sentencing Episode/Conviction** – For analysis, a sentencing episode is defined as the sentence imposed for the most serious conviction on a given day of court. The most serious conviction is determined based on offense seriousness (i.e., offense class), punishment imposed (i.e., active, intermediate, and community), and sentence length. Since ACIS does not contain unique identifiers for individuals, an identifier is created for each case that results in a conviction. The identifier consists of county number, last name, first three letters of the first name, sentence month, and sentence day. This identifier is used in an attempt to identify sentencing episodes (i.e., convictions) for individuals prior to the selection of the most serious sentencing episode (i.e., conviction).

Excluded from Analysis

- **Trial Court Caseload Statistics:** No exclusions.
- **Statistical Report:**
 - Excluded from felony convictions: violent habitual felon convictions and drug trafficking convictions.
 - Excluded from misdemeanor convictions: driving while impaired convictions, Class 2 and Class 3 criminal traffic convictions, local ordinance convictions, and convictions disposed of by a magistrate.

Determining Method of Disposition

- **Trial Court Caseload Statistics:** All of the disposed offenses in a disposed case are examined – either a single offense per docket number or multiple offenses per docket number is examined depending on how docket numbers are assigned.
 - Single Offense per Docket Number: In counties/districts that assign a single offense per docket number, the method of disposition for each docket number is recorded.
 - Multiple Offenses per Docket Number: In counties/districts that assign multiple offenses per docket number, the case with the highest method of disposition ranking is recorded (e.g., jury guilty verdict=1, jury not guilty verdict=2, guilty plea no contest to lesser=4, guilty plea no contest=5, voluntarily dismissed=7, dismissed by the court - speedy trial=9).
- **Statistical Report:** The method of disposition for the most serious conviction (*see* Definition of Unit of Analysis) is reported.