

2008 Annual Report

Clark County Clerk

Vancouver, Washington



Mission Statement:

Clark County Clerk's Office employees will efficiently maintain and protect the integrity and accuracy of the judicial records of the Clark County Superior Court while serving the public in a courteous, professional and timely manner.

Message from the County Clerk



People care very deeply about justice. Regardless of economic status, there must be equal access for everyone who comes to and before the court. All citizens must be treated respectfully, fairly and equally. Case processing and the application of the law to the facts in individual cases must be consistent and predictable.

The County Clerk's Office serves and supports the Superior Court and the citizens of Clark County by receiving and processing court documents, attending and assisting in all court proceedings, maintaining the court's files, and recording its orders, judgments and decrees. The Clerk maintains the record for all Felony Criminal, Civil, Family Law, Probate, Mental, Adoption, Guardianship and Juvenile court proceedings. It is mandatory that the Clerk preserve and journalize all orders for historical and security purposes. The Clerk also receipts and disburses the court's money and the money of litigants, at the court's direction.

Our office is composed of five units staffed by 46 employees working in four separate locations. The criminal, courtroom support, office support and civil units are located in the Main Office on the first floor of the Courthouse. The Facilitator's Office is also located on the first floor of the Courthouse, near the Jury Assembly room. The Juvenile Clerk's Office is located on the second floor of the Juvenile Court Building and the Collections Unit is located in the Dolle Building, at 500 W. 8th Street, Suite 50.

We, as employees and as citizens of the county, are proud to present to you the Clark County Clerk's Office 2008 Annual Report.

Sherry W. Parker
Clark County Clerk

Presented to
The Clark County Board of Commissioners

Marc Boldt, Chair
Steve Stuart, Commissioner
Tom Mielke, Commissioner

Presented by

The Clark County Clerk
Sherry W. Parker

Teri Nielsen, Chief Deputy

and
the Staff of the Clark County Clerk's Office

Criminal Unit



Staff

The Clerk's Office Criminal Unit is staffed by five employees. Nancy Campbell is the lead worker who also serves as the Information Systems Coordinator for the entire department. The Court Assistant III position is held by Edward Conrad and front counter and office services are provided by Marlene Dodge, Laurie Freese and Kaitlynn Knable in the Court Assistant II positions.

Statistics

Case filings in the criminal unit have been dropping since 2005. This may be due to more cases being exonerated and filed in District Court and there may be some positive consequences from the success of the specialty courts. New criminal case filings totaled 2,204 in 2008. There were 187,451 pleadings filed and 59,962 hearings held.

Accomplishments

During 2008, with the assistance of other Clerk's Office staff, 2,059 Notices of Clerk's Dismissal were processed and mailed to the parties or attorneys of record in civil, domestic and paternity cases. Statute allows the Clerk to request dismissal of a case that has had no activity for 12 months. As of year end, 1,880 Orders of Clerk's Dismissal were granted and filed. This process provides the court with a more accurate picture of their active caseload.

In February, the Clerk's Office began a joint project with the County Records Center. An employee of the Records Center began quality checking images in our Liberty imaging system rather than microfilming documents that had previously been imaged. Quality assurance was completed for 4,925 Probate, Juvenile Offender, Dependency and some older Criminal files. Unfortunately, due to Records Center budgetary lay offs, output for this important project has been reduced by approximately 50 percent.

Staff developed a process to transfer documents to the sentencing guidelines commission electronically rather than printing and mailing the copies. The county benefits through savings on paper and staff overtime costs.

Outreach:

Members of the unit attended diversity training classes. When time permits, unit members work to complete required on-line safety training courses.

Clerk's Judicial Proceedings Specialists



Staff:

Clerk's Judicial Proceedings Specialists are sometimes referred to as "Courtroom Clerks". These 13 employees were re-classified this year in recognition of the specialized and critical nature of their work. Sharon Ferguson serves as the Senior Court Assistant and lead worker for the unit. The other members are Kathy Boehm, Julie Brown, Whitney Freese, Heather Hunt, Joe Johnson, Rufa Kovalev, Alisa Mason, Melissa McLachlan, Elizabeth Miller, Lori Moore, Jennifer Olson, Ashley Smith and Sarah Vignali.

Statistics:

State statute mandates that "when there is a judge on the bench, there is a clerk in the courtroom." In 2008, there were 97,878 hearings held in Clark County Superior Court. Clerk's Judicial Proceedings Specialists attended and recorded minutes for each of those hearings. The members of this unit participate in the entry and filing of the documents from many of those hearings which include criminal, civil, domestic, adoptions, mental health and drug court.

Accomplishments:

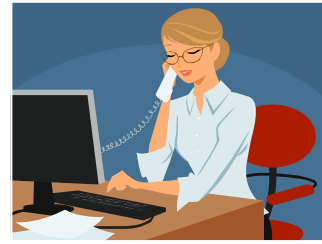
This unit welcomed four new members during the last year. More experienced members (totaling 76 years as county employees) were asked to help with the training of these new staff members.

Unit members requested a visit from a representative of the County Health Department. The optional meeting, which included information and Q&A about communicable diseases that might be encountered in the courtroom and recommended safety procedures, was well attended.

Outreach:

Unit members attended county training sessions to learn new computer skills as well as diversity awareness, emergency preparedness and Management and Supervisory Training. When time permits, unit members work to complete required on-line safety training courses. Members of this unit serve on the Substance Abuse Advisory Board and have taken CERT training.

Civil Unit - Office Services



Staff:

The Civil Unit is composed of two sections – the civil offices services section and the Court Facilitator’s section. Cynthia Taylor is the Senior Court Assistant who serves as their lead worker. The members of the office services section are Pat Cross, Michelle Diehl, Loa Ma’o, and Angela Phares. They are joined by Sue Brookins and Vicki Kesala who compose our only job share position, These employees are responsible for computer entry of civil and domestic documents, answer several hundred telephone calls each month and offer customer service at our front counter.

Appeals: Charlene Huffman serves as the Court Assistant III for the unit and handles all of the entry, preparation of documents and telephone messages for the 143 Appeals that were filed during 2008. This year, Clark County was a pilot county working to develop procedures for electronic transfer of documents to the Court of Appeals. The county benefits by increased employee productivity and reduced mailing costs.

Statistics:

In 2008, the civil unit processed the following documents and files:

Case Type	New Cases Filed	Pleadings Filed
Civil	8,979	93,657
Domestic	2,668	87,108
Paternity/Adoption	586	18,047

Accomplishments:

The civil unit and management worked with the Victim Assistance Unit of the Prosecuting Attorney’s office to develop a video depicting the process of filing for a Domestic Violence Protection Order. The video is now available for the public to view in the Law Library and has been translated to Spanish and Russian. The money for this project was made available by a STOP grant.

In June, new statutes became effective which allow for dissolution of Domestic Partnerships. Packets were made available to help the public with these filings.

Outreach:

Unit members attended county training sessions to learn new computer skills, as well as diversity awareness, first aid, CERT and Management and Supervisory Training. When time permits, unit members work to complete required on-line safety training courses. One unit member serves as assistant Safety Officer.

Civil Unit - Facilitators



Staff:

The Family Court Facilitator is available to anyone who is not represented by an attorney for domestic relations matters. There is a minimal fee charged for this service.

The Facilitator is not qualified or allowed to give legal advice. Their role is to inform the public about basic court requirements and procedures, answer questions about how to get a domestic matter filed in court and check for completeness of forms. Pam Clark-Fisher and Beth Tucker serve as the Family Court Facilitators and Judie Woodridge serves as the Protection Order Facilitator. In addition to this important work, the Facilitators help with civil unit entry, scanning and filing. They also serve as courtroom clerks for one of the Pro se dockets and the Protection Order docket each week.

Statistics:

The Family Court Facilitators meet with an average of 505 citizens per month; or 26.5 citizens per day, a number that has steadily grown over the last three years. The Protection Order Facilitator meets with approximately four citizens per day and helps an average of 25 people weekly who appear for the Protection Order docket.

Accomplishments:

This year brought many changes to this team. Early in the year, when a new member joined the group, they developed a new team approach to their combined work and began a cross-training schedule. After six months, just as the new approach was beginning to work fully, the new team member accepted a position in her former community. We have recently hired a new member and so the team begins again to develop a new working relationship.

In 2008, the team began keeping more detailed statistics so that we can offer the services most needed by the public at the times that are most convenient for them.

Domestic relations forms packets were updated and new packets were made available to align with new procedures and statutes.

Outreach:

Two Facilitators attended the yearly Facilitator Training/Sharing Day in Seattle. Facilitators around the state share concerns, questions and best practices by use of a list serve system. The Facilitators hosted an exchange of information program with Child Support Services employees. Team members attended a second Facilitator meeting, participated in diversity training and completed many of the on-line safety training courses.

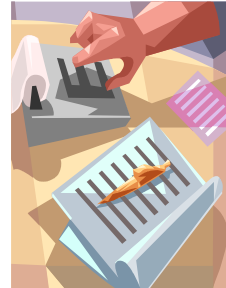
Accounting/Juvenile/Records Unit

As indicated by the unit title, the clerks in this unit provide a wide variety of services to the public and our office. Julie Swatosh-Berge is the Office Supervisor who, in addition to her other duties, serves as the lead worker for this unit.

Accounting

All monies received by the Clerk's Office are deposited in the Clerk's Trust Fund. Any interest is collected by the county. Funds managed by the Clerk's Office include:

- Payments on legal financial obligations made by adults and juveniles
- Bail for adults and juveniles
- Various filing fees and fees for services
- Deposits made for civil cases, including interpleaders and surplus funds
- Minor settlements
- Monies in amounts over \$2,000 invested by order of the court



Restitution checks and other court ordered distributions are issued twice a week from the Court Registry.

Staff:

Sandi Hill serves as the Accounting Assistant III. In September, Kalen Steinwand, a Court Assistant II, became the primary cashier in the Main Office.

Statistics:

Average monthly bank deposits for 2008 were \$981,759.45. Each of these payments is receipted and entered in the daily accounting. The Clerk's Office now accepts credit card payments for all services except case filing fees. Those payments are reflected below:

Point and Pay Summary 2008		
	Location Total	Monthly Average
Main Office	\$100,847.94	\$8,404.00
Collections Unit	\$123,710.87	\$10,309.24
Juvenile Office	\$19,356.49	\$1,613.04
Website	\$156,186.51	\$13,015.54
Department Total	\$400,101.81	\$33,341.82

Accomplishments:

In conjunction with the Collections Unit, the Accounting unit began a process to remove from our accounting system any accounts that are deemed to be no longer collectable. Removal of accounts that are 20 years old with no activity in the last five years and accounts where jurisdiction was not extended after the ten year time limit resulted in write-offs totaling \$3,172,129.37. This process provides a more realistic view of the amount of money available to collect. If a defendant wants to pay on one of these accounts, it is still available and payment would be accepted.

Accounting/Juvenile/ Records Unit



Juvenile Clerk's Office

Staff:

The Juvenile Clerk's Office is located on the second floor of the Juvenile Services Building. All juvenile offender, dependency and truancy files are housed there. MaryEllen Silk serves as the Court Assistant III for this team. Her duties include entry and telephone inquiries for juvenile offender cases. Entry and inquiries for dependency and truancy cases and cashiering duties are handled by Shannon Erb, a Court Assistant II. Beth Conners, a Court Assistant II, serves as backup for both of these positions in addition to assisting with courtroom duties. She also scans and files documents. Lynette Combs, a Clerk's Judicial Proceedings Specialist, is permanently assigned to the juvenile department courtrooms. All of these team members assist with counter service and cashiering as needed.

Statistics:

In 2008, the Juvenile Clerk's Office processed the following documents and files:

Case Type	New Cases Filed	Pleadings Filed
Juvenile Offender	1,446	43,623
Juvenile Dependency	1,192	27,751

Accomplishments:

Members of this unit work closely with many outside agencies such as the Juvenile Department, the Attorney General's Office, the YWCA CASA Program, the Department of Social and Health Services, the Prosecuting Attorney's Office and the military.

There were many changes this year in procedures and court schedules as well as training a new employee. The unit has been involved in a cross-training program which will increase the efficiency of the unit when a team member is ill or on vacation.

Outreach:

The newest member of the Juvenile Court Clerk's Office team attended a week-long New Court Employee training in Wenatchee. Members of the unit attended diversity training classes, completed CERT training and, when time permits, unit members work to complete required on-line safety training courses.

Accounting/Juvenile/ Records Unit

Records



Staff:

The Records Unit has many responsibilities. In addition to entry of documents, sorting and answering mail requests and answering telephone questions from the public, each of the Court Assistant II positions has individual duties. Donna O'Connor serves as the exhibit and document retention clerk. She tracks exhibits from the time they return from a trial until the case is completed and they are returned to the attorneys or destroyed. She also oversees the quality assurance and transfer of files to our off-site storage area. Terri Archer serves as the docket clerk. It is her responsibility to print all of the dockets and prepare all the case files that are needed for the 16 civil dockets each week. Erica Rader serves as the guardianship clerk. She enters documents, is the liaison with the judges and attorneys, answers citizen questions and works with the volunteer in the Guardianship Monitoring Program. Kathy Croft is the filing clerk. She oversees the filing of documents and case files for the civil and domestic cases. She also helps supervise the temporary file clerks who sort and file documents and make daily runs to our off-site file storage areas. Our temporary workers scan all documents and help with filing.

Statistics:

The Records Unit scanned and filed the 11,647 new civil and domestic cases in 2008. They similarly processed the 180,765 pleadings that were filed during that period. New Probate/Guardianship cases filed and entered in 2008 totaled 1,027. There were 19,550 pleadings filed. At the end of 2008, 13,219 files had been transferred to off-site storage. There are 3,503 additional files that will be transferred early in 2009. This is necessary to make room on our shelves for new cases being filed.

Accomplishments:

A new procedure was developed in conjunction with the Prosecuting Attorney's Office for better tracking of criminal exhibits. This procedure was documented in Local Court Rules and approved by the Superior Court judges.

Two students in the Project SEARCH High School Transition Program interned with this unit as part time employees. These students, who have various developmental disabilities, are in their last year of high school. Experience in a workplace setting helps them develop skills that will aid in their ability to obtain full time employment upon graduation.

Outreach:

Team members attended diversity training class and completed many of the on-line safety training courses.

Guardianship Monitoring Program



The Clark County Guardianship Monitoring program started in 2002 and was originally funded by a grant. A part-time attorney worked with several RSVP volunteers to research the guardianship files, making sure that the Court appointed guardian was filing the proper reports with the court. When the grant ended, an individual stepped forward and personally funded the program for a few years. Starting in January of 2007, the program was funded by the county.

Staff

Two Clerk's Office employees currently share the duties of coordinating the program, entering the pleadings and working with a volunteer to track these cases. Until this program was started, no one was tracking these important cases and some vulnerable adults and children were being taken advantage of.

Program volunteers must pass a background check and sign a confidentiality agreement. They are trained by Clerk's Office employees and work under supervision until they understand the program fully. If they find discrepancies in the filings, they make a report to the court. In more serious cases, the matter may be brought to the attention of the Prosecuting Attorney's office, which can result in criminal charges being filed.

Statistics

There were 1,007 Probate cases filed in 2008 containing 25,700 pleadings.

In early 2008, Clerk's staff reviewed all Guardianship cases to determine which cases were still active. This review identified approximately 850 open cases. By the end of the year, approximately 680 (80%) of those cases had been re-evaluated. These cases are now part of our monitoring program which uses a "tickle date" system to alert staff that a report is due. If the report is not filed as scheduled, the Clerk's Office sends a reminder letter. If there is no response, the court is notified of the non-compliance and a court hearing is scheduled. When reports are filed, they are checked by the volunteer for compliance. The Clerk's Office reports to the court if concerns are noted and the court decides whether more information is required or a court hearing needs to be held.

Goals

The Guardianship Monitoring Program will continue re-evaluating the open cases until all are part of the monitoring program. Clerk's Office staff and the volunteer will continue to work closely with the judges to develop the most efficient monitoring system possible to ensure protection of vulnerable adults and children.

Collections Unit

Staff

Baine Wilson is the Program Coordinator II for the Clerk's Office Collections Unit. The Court Assistant II positions are held by Tina Asbury, Patricia Swatosh and Jenna Tuttle. Temporary employees help with data entry and processing mail.



The Collection Unit meets with adult offenders and juvenile offenders who are now adults to set monthly payments for restitution, fines and fees imposed by the Court at sentencing. Offenders are sent monthly statements by the Administrator for the Office of the Courts indicating their required payment amount. If the offender does not make agreed upon monthly payments, they must return to court and face possible sanctions, such as jail time. If they skip the court appearance, warrants can be issued for their arrest.

Statistics

Our Collections Unit is consistently one of the most efficient in the state. In 2008, the Collection Unit collected a total of \$3,503,037. Of that amount, \$900,008 was restitution which was sent directly to crime victims; the county's portion of the monies collected was \$2,154,144 and the state received \$448,885. The average amount collected from the 24,519 adult offenders contacted last year was \$133.39.

Accomplishments

The weekly Payment Review docket routinely contains over 600 cases. Each week, over a thousand documents must be printed, entered, scanned, linked and filed. Since many of these documents need to be placed in older files which are located in the records storage area (the Pepsi building), our temporary staff must take them to the facility, locate them in boxes and file them. This is a very costly process in terms of both time and staffing costs. In November, we began a new process which creates a paperless image of Clerk's Minutes for the Payment Review docket. These documents are quality checked as they are scanned to assure accuracy and readability. Originals are not filed, but are indexed, boxed and kept in the Collection Unit for a period of three months before the originals are destroyed. The county benefits through savings on paper and the need for temporary employees.

Collections Unit staff telephone offenders who have not made scheduled payments and have not appeared as for court. This strategy can sometimes elicit the required payment and avoid the issuance of a warrant for their arrest.

Staff is collaborating with the Prosecuting Attorney's office to streamline the workload and volunteers have been recruited to help with data entry and mail.

Outreach:

The Program Coordinator attended a Collections Conference and has hosted Clerk's Office Collectors from other Washington counties to demonstrate our successful process. Team members attended diversity training class and completed many of the on-line safety training courses.

Lead Workers and Management



The Clerk, the Chief Deputy Clerk, one Program Coordinator and four lead workers comprise the management team for the 46 employees in the Clerk's Office. The team meets monthly to share information, coordinate schedules and plan programs. The lead worker of each unit then holds a unit meeting to pass along this information and address issues pertinent to their work area.

Each year the Chief Deputy meets with all of the employees except the four Collections Unit members to conduct an employee evaluation with input from the lead workers. The Program Coordinator conducts evaluations for the Collections Unit. In addition, new employees are evaluated monthly during their probationary period.

Accomplishments in 2008

The Chief Deputy has worked with the Auditor's Office and served as the Project Coordinator for the transfer of microfilmed documents to digital images. The project is currently in the final phase and the images should be available in 2009. Completion of this project will make the documents easier to access for the judges, our staff and the public. With this change, staff time needed to help the public find and access these files on microfilm will decrease. Elimination of a microfilm reader, will add needed lobby space.

Our office worked with Superior Court Administration in the creation of the Family Law Annex. Although budget concerns have reduced our ability to open a full service satellite office in that facility, we have been able to store active records there and plan to expand our presence as the budget permits.

Our office worked with the Treasurer's Office to re-evaluate accountability for the banking costs of our trust fund money (approximately \$2 million dollars a month). It is our understanding that the Treasurer was able to institute new procedures that should result in additional general funds money for the county and/or reduction of banking costs.

Our office worked with the IT Department and Superior Court Administration to create a reader board in the courthouse lobby which helps direct the public to the correct courtroom. This allows the volunteers at the information desk more time to provide personal attention to courthouse visitors.

Lead Workers and Management

Accomplishments (continued)

Our office purchased a label printer for numbering court files. This will result in supply savings as we carry over file folders from year to year, rather than purchasing pre-numbered files. It will also be easier to make additional volumes as needed for large files.

Our office is currently working with the Sheriff's Office records unit to identify a workable paperless process to replace the dissemination of paper protective orders to their department.

Outside training for staff and internal cross-training has allowed more flexibility in scheduling staff time. New procedures have been instituted for work distribution and rotation of duties. This will alleviate staff burn-out and work will be accomplished more efficiently.

Outreach:

Members of the management team participated in the following county committees and programs:

Take Your Child to Work Day	Downtown Campus Plan
Law & Justice Council	Safety Committee
CERT Training Committee	Diversity Committee
Children's Sharing Project	Picnic Committee
Law & Justice Strategic Plan Committee	Our Personal Best Committee
Continuation of Operations (COOP) Task Force	
Enhanced Treatment Therapeutic Court Advisory Group	
Medical Reserve Corps (National Assn of County and City Health Officials)	

The Chief Deputy presented programs for the Young Lawyers, Family Law and Probate/Guardianship legal support groups.

The Clerk presented programs for the Clark County Bar Association, Parent Consortium and Leadership Clark County. She updated the Clark County chapter in the Washington Lawyers Practice Manual and participated in interview skills training for Clark County Skills Center students. She also attended PowerPoint classes and a Managing Technology and Resources seminar.

The Clerk served on the Public Trust and Confidence Committee sponsored by the Board for Judicial Administration and the Public Legal Education Council. She is a member of the Washington State Association of County Clerks and the board of directors for the Clark County Volunteer Lawyers Program. She also served as the Vice-Chair of the Board of Trustees for Clark College, as a member of the Salmon Creek Lions Club executive board and as a member of the YWCA Luncheon Committee.

Department Goals for 2009



Paperless Process for Tax Warrants - Starting in January 2009, we will use a paperless process for the approximately 2,500 state tax warrants filed each year. Since these filings rarely require a court date, this saves staff filing and retrieval time and there is a significant cost savings for file folders. Document images are quality checked as they are linked. This procedure also results in time savings for the County Records Department.

Liberty Web Access - Our office has been working with the IT Department to develop procedures and computer storage capabilities to allow access to scanned images of public documents by outside agencies such as title companies and attorneys' offices. We currently have pilot programs with the Attorney General's office and the CASA program at the YWCA. Subscribers pay the county a subscription fee and a yearly fee which covers program costs and staff time. This service saves the subscriber the time and cost of coming to the courthouse, parking, coming through security and either checking out the file or purchasing copies of needed documents. In addition, it saves our office staff time at the counter and on the telephone.

Electronic Certification of Documents – We are working with a company that has developed a process for electronic certification of documents. This will allow us to expand our use of credit cards and e-mail to deliver certified documents to the public quickly and efficiently. This process will save staff time and mailing costs.

Less Reliance on Temporary Personnel - Many of the measures mentioned above should result in less reliance on temporary personnel for filing and retrieval of files from off site storage areas.

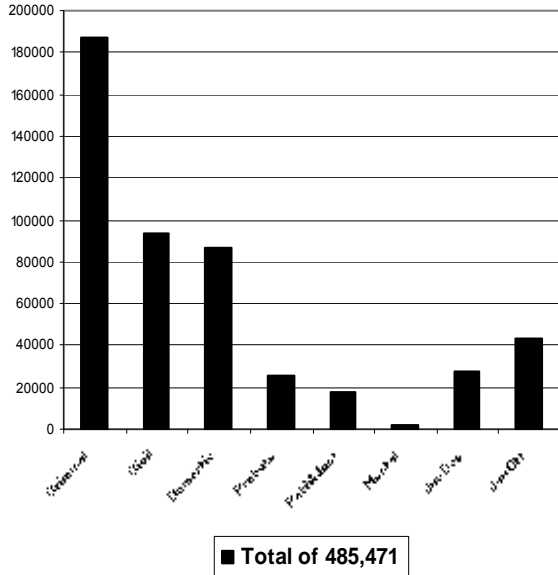
Technology and Efficiency - Our staff will continue to review our procedures to find new ways to improve the work flow. We will continue to develop new ways to use technology to make our procedures more efficient.

Community Outreach – We will continue to develop our website so that it is more user-friendly and contains more information for the public and the legal community. We will also continue to share new procedures and policies with the legal community through our *Clerk's Alert* column, published in the monthly Clark County Bar News. Our staff will continue to be involved with county and community projects that improve the quality of life in Clark County.

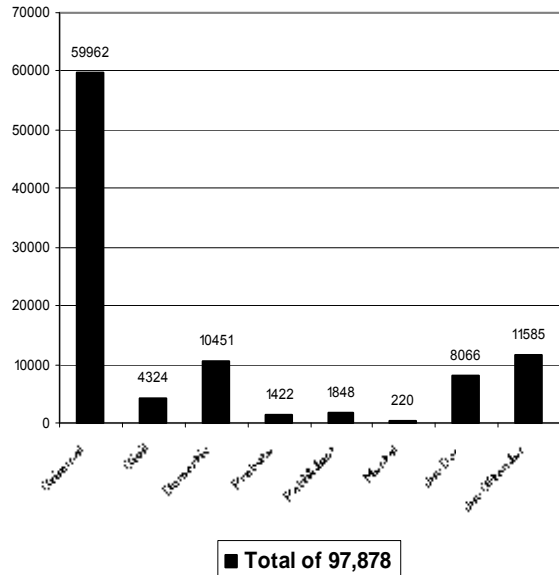
Statistics



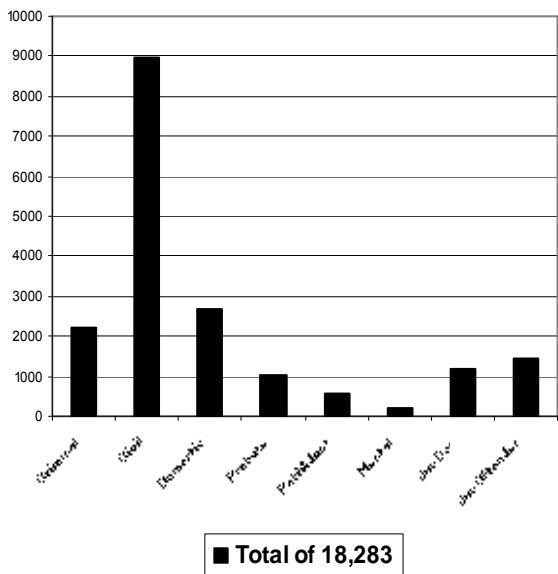
2008 Pleadings Filed by Type of Case



Number of Hearings Held in 2008



2008 Cases Filed



2008 Funds Collected From Convicted Defendants

