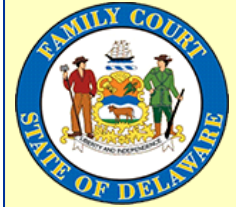


FAMILY COURT



CHIEF JUDGE MICHAEL K. NEWELL



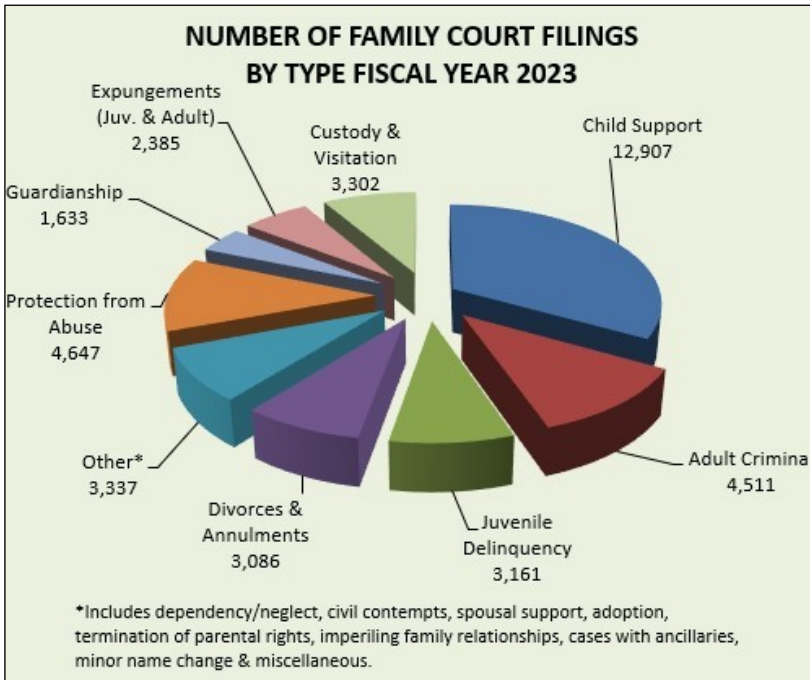
FAMILY COURT

Family Court continues to be guided by its mission: to provide equal access to justice for the families and children under its jurisdiction in a manner that is fair and efficient and that maintains the public's trust and confidence in an independent and accountable judiciary. We strive each day to build an atmosphere that ensures all members of the public are treated with courtesy, dignity, and respect.

In Fiscal Year 2023, the court processed 38,969 filings, an increase of 4.6% from last year. While adult criminal filings declined by 4.7%, juvenile delinquent filings climbed by 18.6%, and the total number of civil filings with the court increased by 4.8%. Child support filings, which have historically represented the largest volume of civil cases for Family Court, decreased by 6.2%, continuing a

substantial trend that saw decreases of 12.6% in FY 22, 9.6% in FY 21, and 20.4% in FY 20.

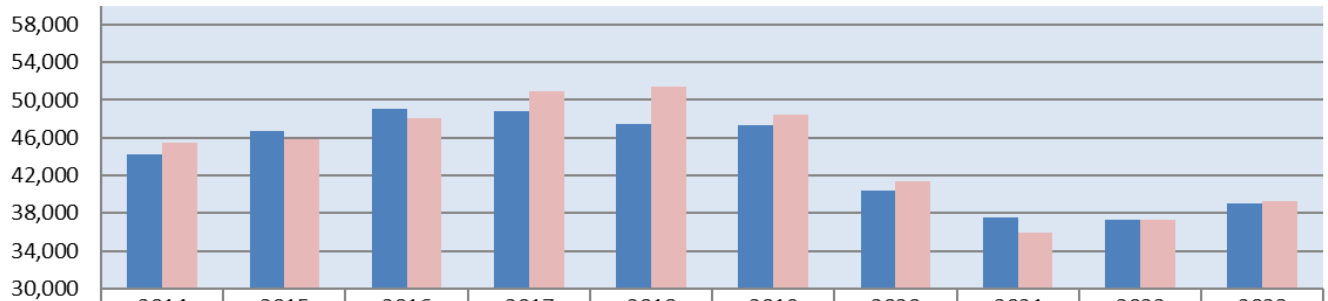
Although child support filings significantly decreased, all other civil filings, which are grouped together as non-support civil filings, increased by 14.2% to 18,390 petitions filed in FY 23. While visitation, rule to show cause, and spousal support filings



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FAMILY COURT

FAMILY COURT CIVIL & CRIMINAL FILINGS & DISPOSITIONS BY FISCAL YEAR



saw a statewide decrease from the previous year, termination of parental rights filings increased by 21.1% statewide, dependency/neglect filings increased by 3.6%, and minor name change filings increased by 18.6% statewide. Additionally, Protection from Abuse petitions increased 5.6%, and expungement filings increased by 43%.

In criminal and delinquency filings, there was an increase of 3.7%, with the most noticeable change being in juvenile misdemeanor filings that saw an increase of 32.4% from the previous fiscal year. While our adult criminal jurisdiction saw an overall decrease from last fiscal year as noted above, the court saw an increase of 27% in violation of probation filings.

Family Court has continued to engage with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (“NCJFCJ”) and now serves as a Mentor Site for other jurisdictions, providing expertise to other Implementation Sites while receiving technical assistance and training to enhance our Court Improvement Project (“CIP”) work, improve outcomes for children and families, and support our ever-evolving child welfare practices. The court has engaged with the Division of Family Services in their Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR), a periodic review of the

state child welfare system to ensure conformity with the federal child welfare requirements. As mentioned in last year’s annual report, the implementation of the new data management system has successfully enabled the court to track data and collaborate with child welfare stakeholders. CIP workgroups have engaged to update the statewide Leading Practice Report and to improve visitation or family time policies and practices statewide. Quality legal representation remains a focus of CIP with continued efforts to develop a multidisciplinary approach for parent representation. The Court continues its efforts to expand the teaming of social workers with parent attorneys and adding peer parent advocates to the multidisciplinary team for improved, holistic, parent representation.

Family Court partnered with the Administrative Office of the Courts for the first Delaware multidisciplinary problem-solving court conference in May of 2023. This two-day conference brought local and national speakers to present on various topics relating to youth wellness, truancy, and substance abuse recovery and treatment. More than 500 people from Delaware’s public and private organizations attended.

Family Court continues to partner with the Department of Education, the Office of Defense Services, and the Department of Justice to ensure that our truan-

FAMILY COURT

cy program improves, and that resources are triaged and delivered in a timely manner. Family Court and the Administrative Office of the Courts continue to collaborate on trauma initiatives for staff and lead Judicial Trauma and Wellness Committee workgroup activities, including distribution of journals and self-care resources. In 2023, Family Court launched a trauma survey to determine future initiatives. Family Court continues to meet as a court-specific trauma workgroup to construct trainings for staff, focusing on Human Resources in 2023 to bolster resilience and connection with staff and supervisors. Within our technology workgroup, Family Court is exploring project management software, continuing to monitor our online public satisfaction survey, and continues to manage and oversee virtual hearings and mediations.

While the Family Court Enhancement Project (FCEP) concluded several years ago, Family Court continues to make improvements provided by FCEP recommendations. This year, the Court received technical assistance from the St. Louis County Domestic Violence Court to implement a PFA Compliance calendar in each county. This specialized calendar was created to increase the engagement and completion of domestic violence intervention treatment by those PFA respondents that were ordered to have a domestic

violence evaluation. It is the court's intention to review compliance data in the coming months with the hope that our outcomes will align with national findings, affirming the value of this specialized monitoring calendar.

Family Court has also focused training efforts on improving our mediation process. Our mediation/arbitration officers have unique interactions with families who have experienced domestic violence. This year's training initiatives have focused on recognizing patterns of coercive control in all case types. Family Court has equipped mediators with essential tools to effectively navigate mediation sessions where there is an unbalanced power dynamic.

The PFA/Custody Task Force, a workgroup born out of FCEP, continues to improve our forms and Orders of Protection from Abuse to make orders easier to read and better identify the protected parties. Also, Family Court has partnered with the Department of Correction Probation and Parole, Justice of the

Peace Courts, and the Court of Common Pleas to serve respondents with emergency ex parte or default PFA orders when the respondent appears in the other courts or probation office. Family Court is grateful for the support and partnership of our domestic violence stakeholders.



Construction at the site of the new Sussex County Family Court building in Georgetown, November/December 2023.

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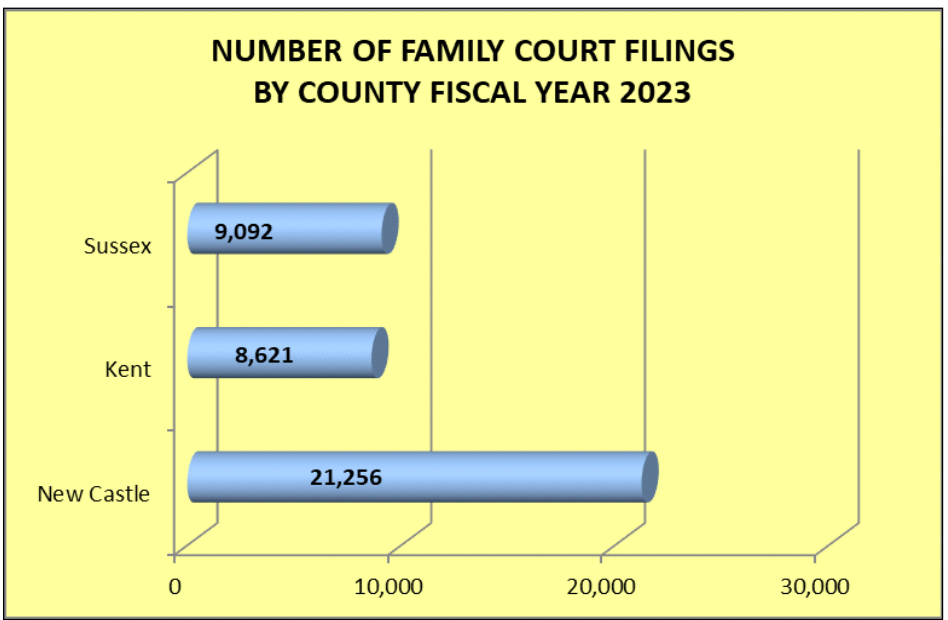
To address undersized, undignified, and unsafe court-houses in Kent and Sussex County, Family Court continues working towards building two new facilities to adequately serve the litigants, stakeholders, and staff. The Sussex County Family Courthouse is currently under construction with an estimated completion date in mid-2025. The construction and completion of the Kent County Family Court building will be approximately six months behind Sussex County Family Courthouse.

On December 7, 2022, the Honorable Andrew Southmayd received the Delaware State Bar Association’s Outstanding Service to the Courts and Bar award. This award is presented to a “Delaware lawyer or judge who, by exemplary service to the Delaware Courts and the Delaware Bar, has substantially assisted the courts and the Bar and has strengthened public trust and confidence in the courts in the state of Delaware and the administration of justice.”

On September 8, 2023, the Honorable James Maxwell was confirmed for his third term as a Commissioner in New Castle County. Commissioner Kelly H. Sheridan resigned as a Commissioner in New Castle County effective September 29, 2023.

Family Court’s Council on Racial Equity (“C.O.R.E.”) continued its work to “eliminate systemic and institutional racism that serves as a barrier to accessing and achieving justice for litigants of color, and to promote a supportive and inclusive environment for employees that is dedicated to celebrating diversity by removing any social, cultural or other inequities that stifle professional development.” CORE has moved into the implementation phase following the publication and distribution of its report with recommendations.

The Family Court is privileged to serve all citizens of Delaware, but especially its most vulnerable citizens, its children. The court has a large caseload and hears some of the most intimate and sensitive issues that affect families, parents, and children. Our Judges, Commissioners, administration, and staff strive to ensure equal access to justice for our citizens and are dedicated to the court’s mission. We are proud of what we have accomplished during the past fiscal year and look forward to doing even more in the year ahead. ♦



FAMILY COURT



FAMILY COURT JUDGES

Back Row (left to right): Judge Joelle P. Hitch, Judge Peter B. Jones, Judge Theresa M. Hayes, Chief Judge Michael K. Newell, Judge Mary S. Much, Judge Michael W. Arrington, Judge Janell S. Ostroski, Judge Mardi F. Pyott.

Front Row (left to right): Judge Felice G. Kerr, Judge Louann Vari, Judge Natalie J. Haskins, Judge James G. McGiffin, Jr., Judge Jennifer B. Ranji, Judge Mark D. Buckworth, Judge Paula T. Ryan, Judge Arlene Minus Coppadge.

Not Pictured: Judge Robert B. Coonin.

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FAMILY COURT



FAMILY COURT COMMISSIONERS

Back Row (left to right): Commissioner Gretchen C. Gilchrist, Commissioner David W. Jones, Commissioner Jennifer Mayo, Chief Judge Michael K. Newell, Commissioner Francis E. Mieczkowski, III, Commissioner M. DeSales Haley, Commissioner James J. Maxwell.

Front Row (left to right): Commissioner Danielle S. Blount, Commissioner Loretta Young, Commissioner Andrew K. Southmayd, Commissioner Kelly Hicks Sheridan (resigned in September 2023), Commissioner Craig R. Fitzgerald, Commissioner Sonja T. Wilson, Commissioner Para K. Wolcott, Commissioner Theresa A. Sedivec.

Not Pictured: Commissioner Emily A. Farley, Commissioner Kim DeBonte.