

FROM THE CHIEF

C. Haley Bunn

Chief Justice
The West Virginia Supreme Court



FROM ANECDOTES TO ANALYTICS

Using Data to Drive Innovation in West Virginia Courts

State courts are a vital part of our nation's judicial architecture. Justice Byron White, writing for the majority in *Trainor v. Hernandez*, 431 U.S. 434 (1977), emphasized "the principle that state courts have the solemn responsibility equally with the federal courts to safeguard constitutional rights." In fact, state courts are where the vast majority of Americans have their only contact with the justice system.

The data backs up this idea. According to the National Center for State Courts, roughly 96% of all legal cases in the United States are handled by state courts.¹ Be it the thousands of criminal, civil, family and child welfare cases or one of many writs seeking extraordinary relief that cannot be found elsewhere, state courts are responsible for overseeing the overwhelming majority of the interactions our citizens have with the legal system.

But how do we know if we're accomplishing the monumental task of handling these varied and vitally

important matters in an efficient and accessible way? We need data.

The Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia is committed to upholding the Rule of Law and providing equal access to justice through transparent and effective management of the appellate, circuit, family and magistrate courts across all 55 counties of our state.

As part of the Court's 2023 Strategic Plan, we set a goal of enhancing judicial transparency through the use of technology and public availability of statistics and data trends. To achieve that goal, the Court created a Division of Statistical Information under the umbrella of our Administrative Office, responsible for marshaling the data used to track judicial activity for the circuit, family and magistrate courts throughout the state.

In the past, collecting data from across West Virginia has been a slow and arduous task because all 55 counties had separate systems in place and there was no uniform process for

tracking cases. Available case information and the data formats varied widely, even between the magistrate and circuit court levels, making it difficult to compile meaningful comparisons.

Over the past two decades, my fellow justices and I, along with many of our predecessors, have made significant investments in our technological infrastructure to improve how we manage information across all levels of our unified court system with the goal of improving transparency and accessibility.

Last fall, the Supreme Court took a significant step forward in that endeavor by announcing a partnership with i3 Verticals to create CourtOne, a unified case management system for our magistrate, family and circuit courts.²

Not only will this new system allow for more effective administration of the judicial system in our state, but it has also positioned West Virginia to become one of the first states in the

country to have a completely unified case management system for its lower courts.

This integrated system will allow us to have access to aggregate caseload data in near real time. It will, in turn, give our Administrative Office an invaluable tool to analyze data to better support our collective goal of administering a responsive, effective and efficient court system.

We also know that statistics and analytics are not the same thing. As an example from sports, a statistic shows a basketball player shoots 33% from three-point range. While that is fun for fans, the coach may know from analytics that the shooter hits 40% of threes from the right corner but only 30% from straightaway. With a game on the line, the coach will draw up a play to give the shooter the best statistical chance to hit the shot. Similarly, organizations that leverage data analytics into actionable strategies are best positioned to succeed. Moving into the future, we want our judicial branch to be one of these organizations.

However, we do not intend to use this information solely as an in-house tool. As a branch of government dedicated to serving the people of West Virginia, we are adamant that this data and analytics should be published and available to the public as well. Our Court is committed to operating the judicial branch in the most transparent and accountable way possible.

To further that goal, I am excited to announce that on July 1, we will be launching a new interactive data dashboard on the West Virginia Judiciary's website, www.courtswv.gov, that will give the public, and you as members of the legal profession, access to this data as well.

With this dashboard, users will be able to search county and circuit-level caseload information, basic criminal demographic data, criminal case statistics (including method of disposition and bail amount/type by county) and civil case data. Statistics for treatment courts by type and county will also be readily available. As we continue to upgrade our systems, we intend to make even more types of information available on the dashboard..

Why is this so important?

Because we want to highlight all the important work our courts are doing. In 2025 alone, our circuit courts saw 40,396 new cases filed, consisting of 11,022 new criminal matters, 21,071 new civil cases and 8,303 new juvenile filings. Our family courts had 19,671 new cases filed, while magistrate courts handled 116,741 new felony and misdemeanor criminal cases and an additional 48,599 civil, domestic and personal safety matters.

We often hear from individuals about their personal involvement with the court system — either from lawyers,

parties in a case, legislators or family and friends — saying what their experience was like, or how long it took for their case to progress.

This is all useful feedback, but how representative is it of the entirety of the judicial branch and these thousands of cases?

With our new unified case management system and this data dashboard, we will be able to move from anecdotes to analytics.

What is the average time for a case to progress in a certain circuit? How does that compare with others across the state? Is this individual's experience in a case an average one or an outlier? This data will help us answer that.

I believe once the public sees the data representing all the work that is getting accomplished in their local courthouses, they'll gain an appreciation for how much our frontline judicial officers and support staff do for their communities.

Everyone hears about the two or three cases in their communities that make headlines, but what you don't hear about are the dozens if not hundreds of other cases — including child abuse and neglect, juvenile justice and other types of confidential cases — that are on a court's docket in a given week.

While we will not be showing individual case information, this data dashboard will help shine some light on the significant work our judicial officers and staff are performing that might otherwise go unnoticed and unappreciated by members of the public.

This data is important, not just because it will better inform the public about state courts' work, but because it will also help the Supreme Court work with lawmakers in better budgeting and enacting legislation that could affect the operations of the judicial branch.

The Courts — like all organizations across the globe — have witnessed an exponential growth in available technologies and processing power. It is critical that our judicial branch of government remain on the cutting edge of the continuing technological revolution to ensure we're serving the people in the most effective, transparent and efficient way possible.

With this new data dashboard, West Virginia's courts will be at the forefront of using data and technology in innovative ways to best serve our citizens and administer the Rule of Law in our state. **WV**

Endnotes

1. <https://www.ncsc.org/resources-courts/who-what-when-how-state-courts>
2. Release: Supreme Court Partners with i3 Verticals to Create New Lower Court Case Management System (10/20/2025) <https://www.courtswv.gov/sites/default/pubfiles/mnt/2025-10/Supreme%20Court%20Announces%20New%20Unified%20Lower%20Court%20CMS.pdf>