
MINNESOTA JUDICIAL BRANCH OVERVIEW & PANDEMIC RESPONSE

House Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee

January 12, 2021

Agenda

- Overview of the Judicial Branch Structure
- Judicial Branch Pandemic Response

Judicial Branch Mission



To provide justice through a system that assures equal access for the fair and timely resolution of cases and controversies.

A Core Government Function

Minnesota Constitution

Article I, Bill of Rights

Section 8. Redress of Injuries or Wrongs

Every person is entitled to a certain remedy in the laws for all injuries or wrongs...to his person, property or character, and **to obtain justice** freely and without purchase, completely and without denial, **promptly and without delay**, conformable to the laws.



The Minnesota Judicial Branch

- 321 Judges
- 2,600 Employees
- 1.2 Million Cases a Year
- 105 Locations
- \$735 Million GF Biennial Budget*

* Does not include Civil Legal Services budget

Organizational Structure

Supreme Court

Court of Appeals

District Court



Supreme Court

- Direct Appeals:
 - Court of Appeals
 - Tax Court
 - Workers Compensation Court of Appeals
 - First Degree Murder Convictions
- Original Jurisdiction:
 - Legislative Election Contests
 - Judicial and Attorney Discipline

7 Justices

2019 Filings: 620 Petitions for Further Review; 95 Direct Appeals

Court of Appeals

- Appeals from:
 - Trial Court decisions
 - DEED Commissioner
 - Administrative agency decisions
- Original Jurisdiction:
 - Writs of mandamus or prohibition which order a judge or public figure to perform a specific act.

19 Judges

2019 Filings: 2,000



District Court

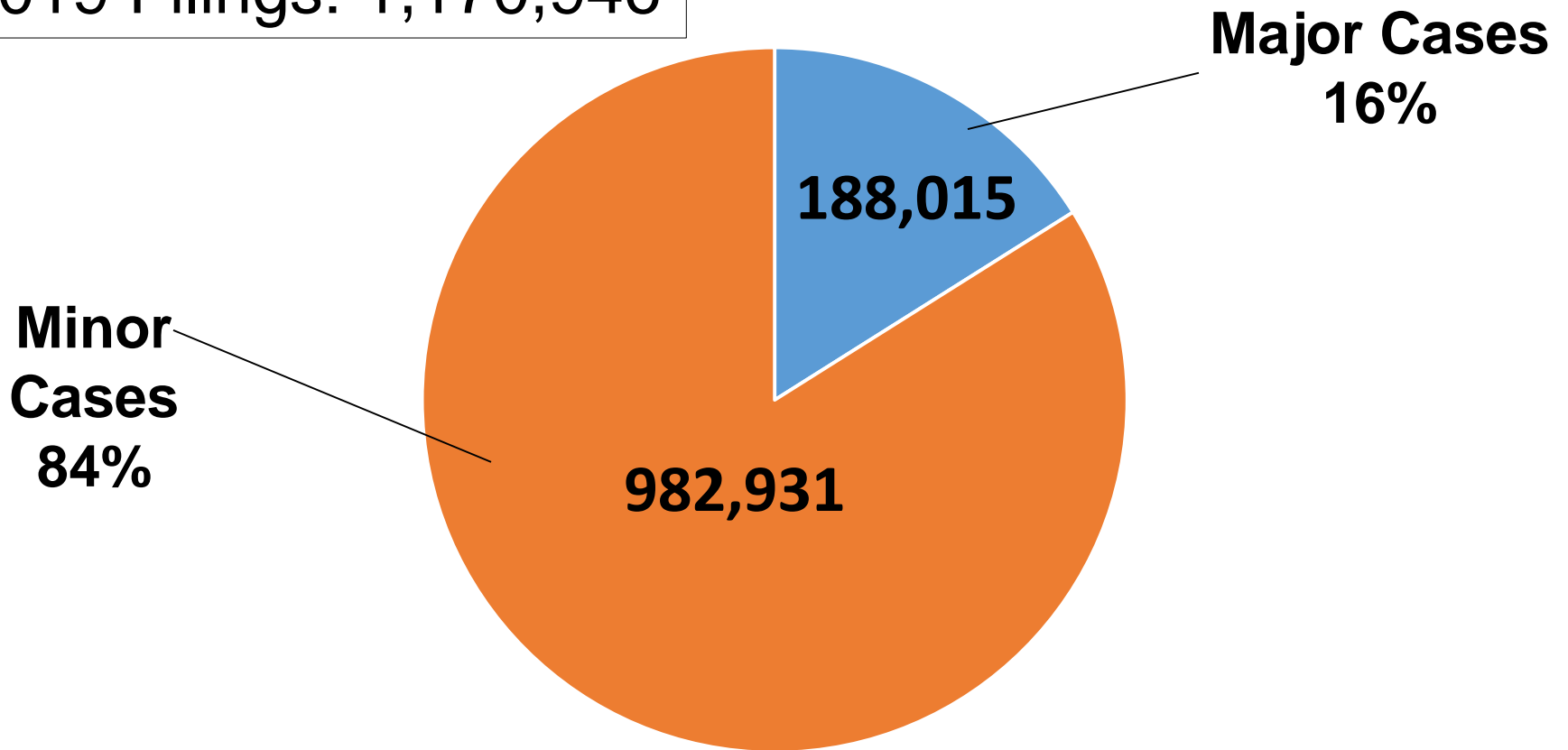
- Original Actions:
 - Civil Actions
 - Criminal Actions
 - Family
 - Juvenile
 - Probate
 - Violations of city ordinances
 - Appeals from conciliation court
- Conciliation Court Division:
 - Civil disputes up to \$15,000

295 Judges

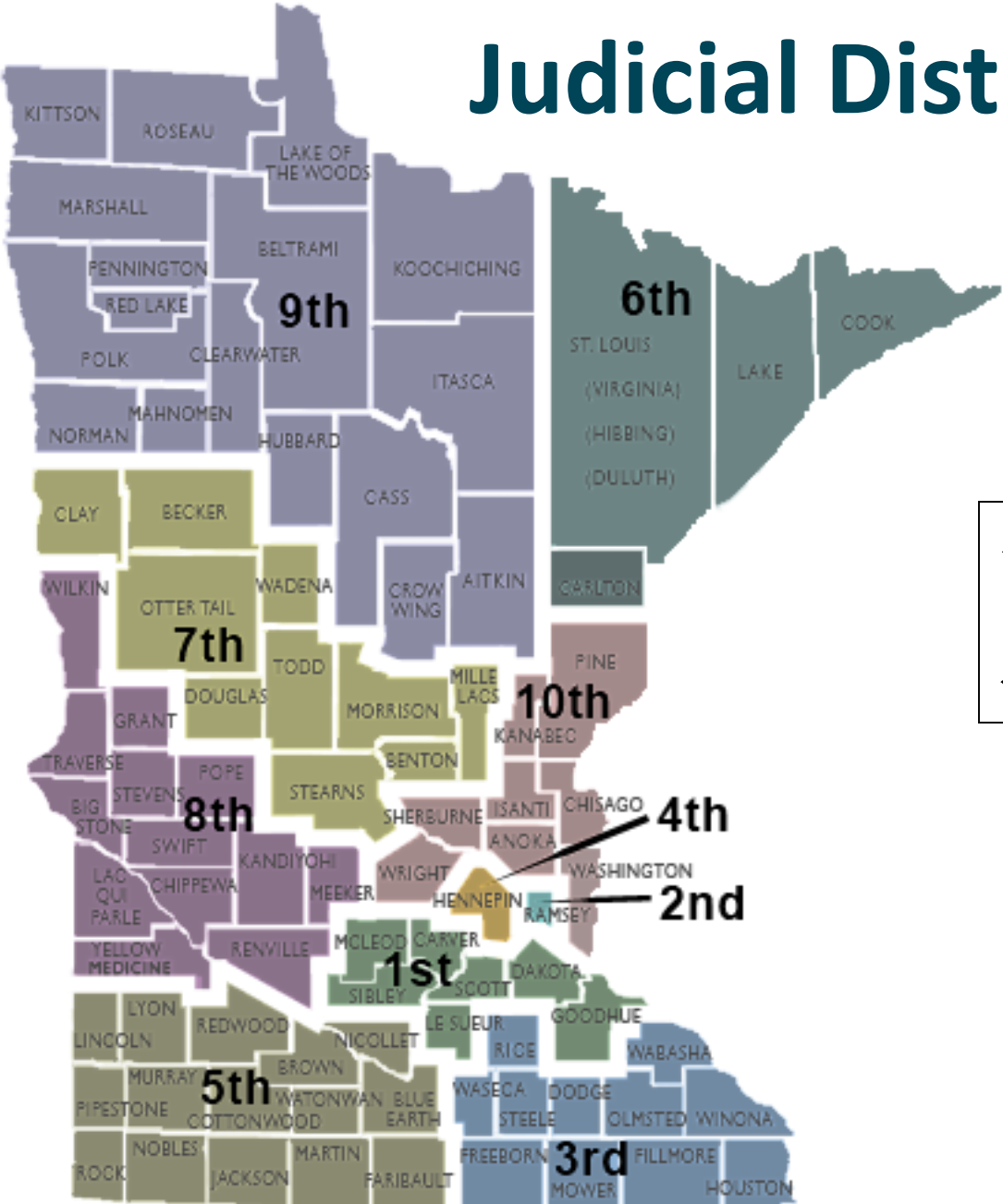


District Court Filings

2019 Filings: 1,170,946

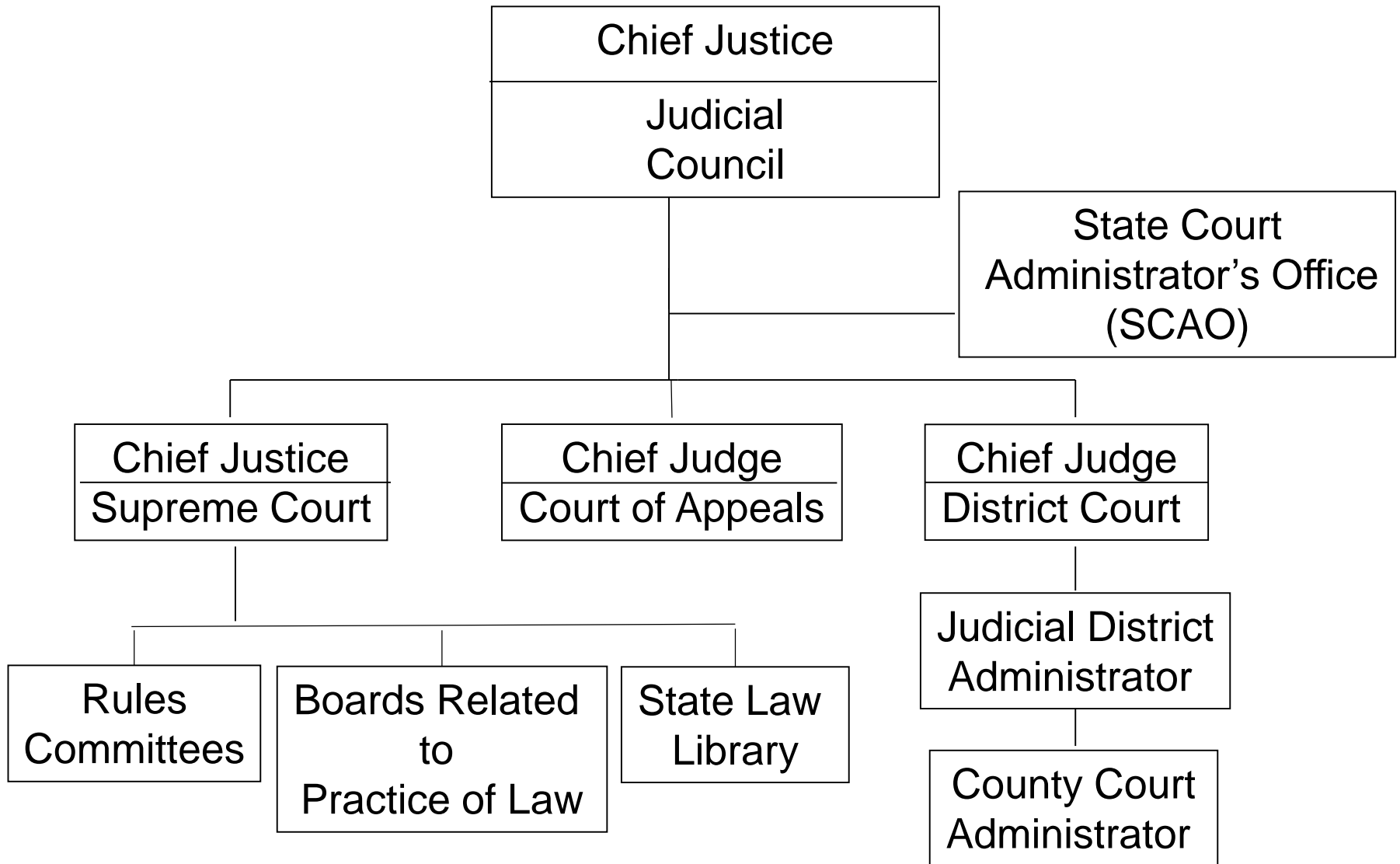


Judicial Districts



- ✓ Administration
- ✓ Election

Administrative Structure



Judicial Council

Primary Responsibilities

- Statewide administrative policy-making
- Strategic planning
- Legislative agenda
- Budget and resource allocation
- Court performance and accountability

Judicial Branch Pandemic Response

- March - May
 - Limited most in-person activity
 - Worked with Department of Health
 - Developed new health and safety protocols
 - Placed moratorium on most criminal and civil jury trials
 - Began transition to remote hearings
 - Transitioned judges and staff to remote work

Pandemic Response

- June
 - Six pilot counties held criminal jury trials
 - Public counter opened in each county
 - Strict safety protocols in place

Pandemic Response

- July
 - Began expansion of criminal jury trials
 - Made face coverings mandatory in all court facilities
 - Jury Plans required approval
- September
 - Criminal jury trials resumed in all 87 counties

Pandemic Response

- November
 - Suspended most in-person court proceedings and trials through January 31
 - Created exception process for in-person hearings
 - Continue to hear cases in remote fashion
 - Public service counters must remain accessible, through remote, live and/or appointment

General Jury Trial Experience

- 184 criminal jury trials and 10 civil jury trials held between June and November
- Postpone Rate did not change
 - July – December 2019: 15% requested postponement
 - July – December 2020: 16% requested postponement
- Failure to Report Rate decreased
 - 2019: 15%
 - 2020: 10%

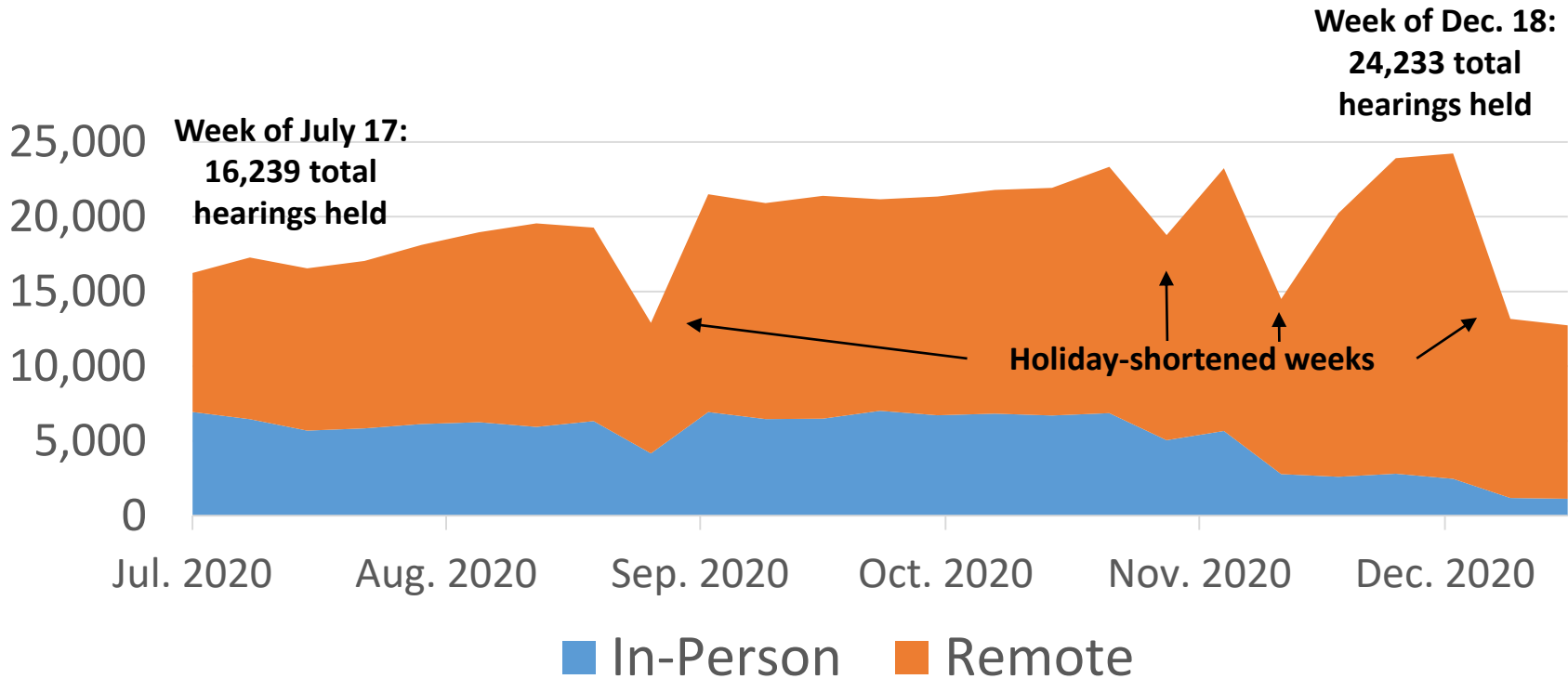
Remote Hearings

- Using Zoom as primary tool
- Established technology rooms to support remote hearings
- Pilot project to provide remote hearing technical assistance to court users

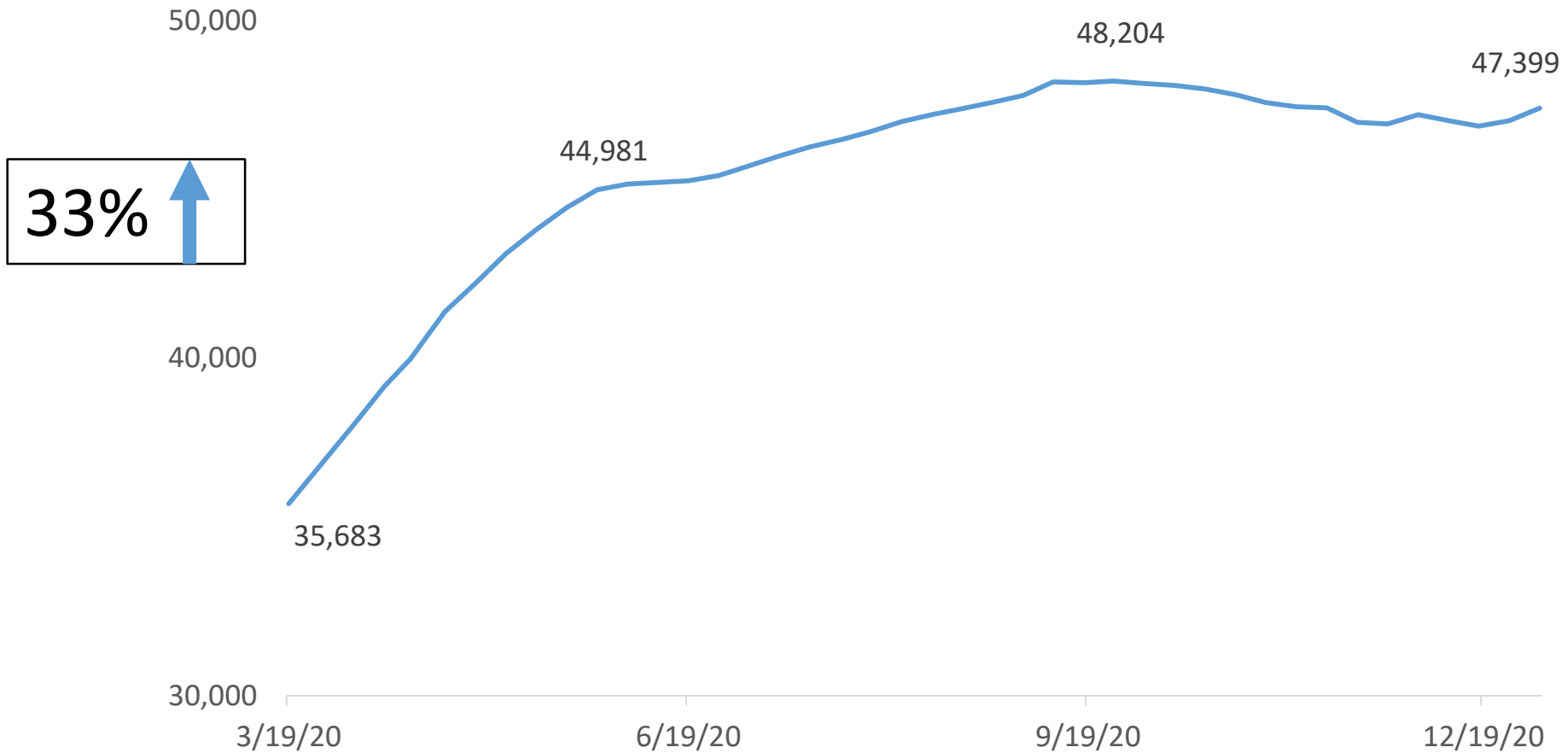
MJB Remote Hearing Trends

Weekly District Court Hearings Held

July 17, 2020 – January 1, 2021

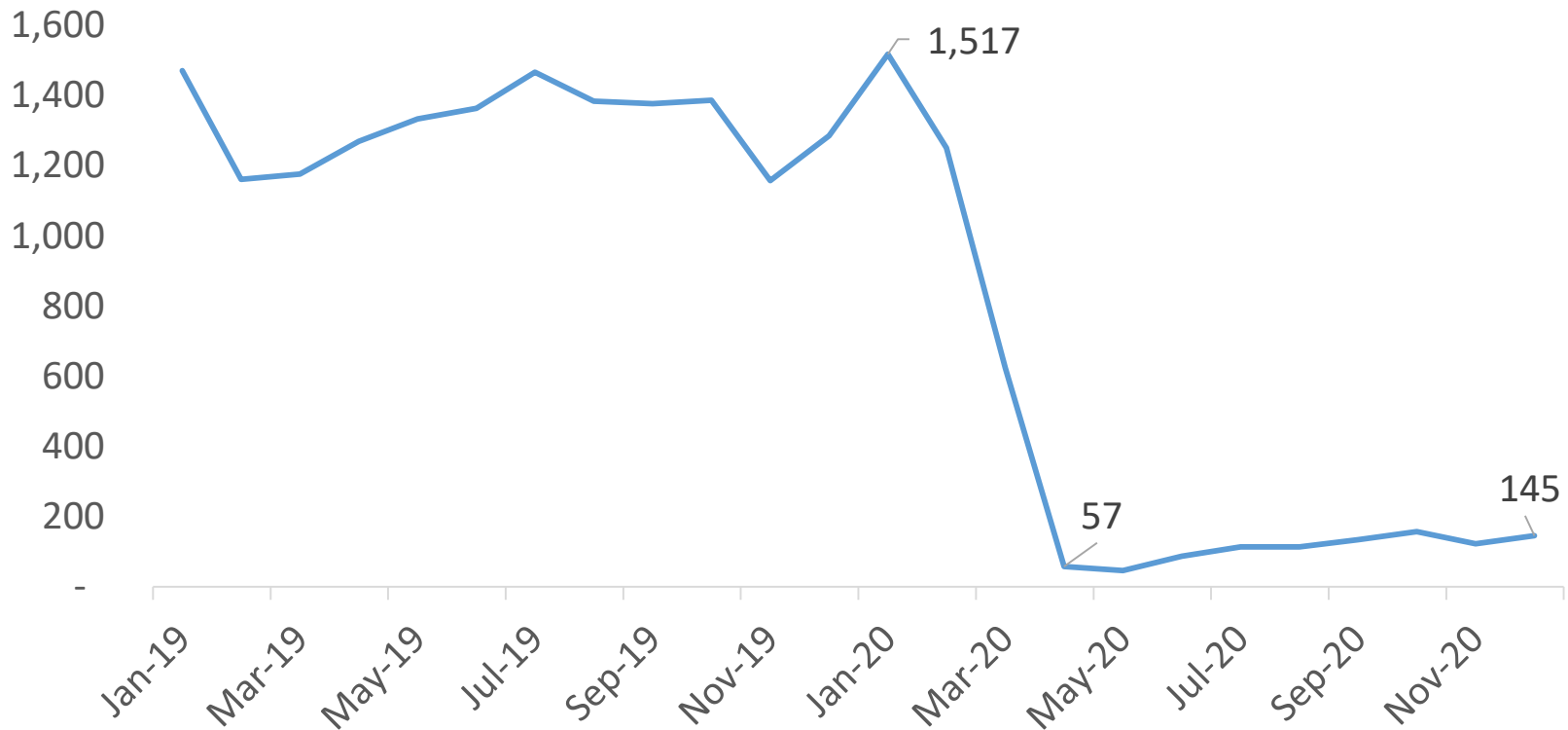


Backlog: Pending – Felony and Gross Misdemeanor



Eviction Filing Trends

Monthly Eviction Filings, 2019 to 2020



Pandemic Response – Appellate Courts

- Caseload and hearing schedule maintained through remote technology innovations
- No backlog of pending cases
- The Bar Exam was successfully conducted in July and September.
- New attorneys continued to be sworn in.

Moving Forward

- Continue to rely on public health guidance
- Expand on lessons learned
 - Continuation of remote hearings
 - Expansion of on-line services
- Continue dialog with justice partners and litigants