State of Michigan
Probate Court
Van Buren County
212 Paw Paw Street, Suite 220
Paw Paw, Michigan 49079-1495
(269) 657-8225
FAX (269) 657-7573

Probate Judge
Frank D. Willis

Sec./Court Recorder
Kelly R. Cowgill

Probate Register
Barbara A. Dundon

Deputy Register
Christina A. King

Probate Clerks
Lynn Hess
Brandy Antonowitsch

October 24, 2013

Tonya Schuitmaker
State Capitol Bldg.
PO Box 30036
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Senator Schuitmaker,

We are contacting you regarding the number of district court judgeships that we believe Van Buren County requires. If you recall, about three years ago or so, one of our judgeships was eliminated by legislation which will reduce us to one district court judge by attrition. At that time all of the judges but one in this county opposed the elimination but we were unsuccessful.

Please be advised that we still take the position that two district court judges are required for Van Buren County. We believe that the caseload count that was relied upon to reduce the total number of judges was flawed and inaccurate. The current caseload for the 7th District Court has not fallen and indeed, from the last review, has risen. In addition the comparisons of our statistics with other counties prove that Van Buren County was treated differently and unfairly in regard to the weighing of the quasi judicial officers.

Testimony of William C. Buhl, Retired Circuit Judge

House Judiciary Committee Hearing November 14, 2013

On SB 653

My name is William C. Buhl and I am a retired Circuit Judge from Van Buren County. Senate Bill 653 includes a provision restoring five judges to Van Buren County. By 19 PA 2012 Van Buren County lost one district judge, after an initial proposal to lose a circuit judge. The reduction of judicial numbers in Van Buren County, in district or circuit court was ill-advised.

I am uniquely equipped to comment on Van Buren County's judicial history and needs. I was Assistant Prosecutor for the County when the first two district judges were elected in 1968, served as Prosecuting Attorney from January 1, 1969 to December 9, 1974 when I was appointed District Judge, and served in that capacity until I was elected to Circuit Court in 1988. I retired at the end of 2010.

Judicial Resource Recommendations were made in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2009. Van Buren County had its lowest rating in 2009 at 4.4 judges needed, yet not one of these studies suggested that the county lose a judge.

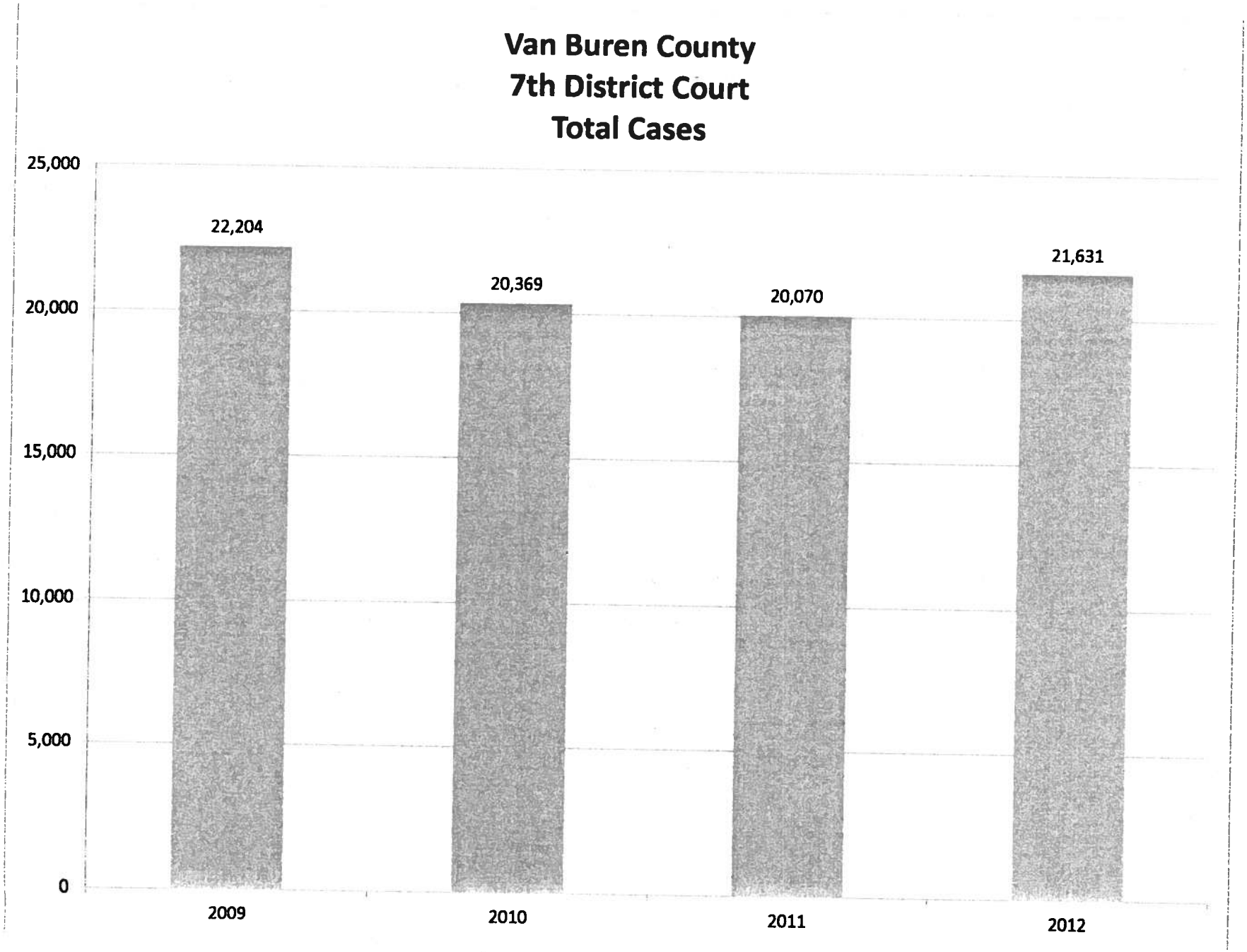
One of the easiest ways to demonstrate trends in case load is to study District Court traffic misdemeanor and civil infraction new case filings and drinking driving new case filings:

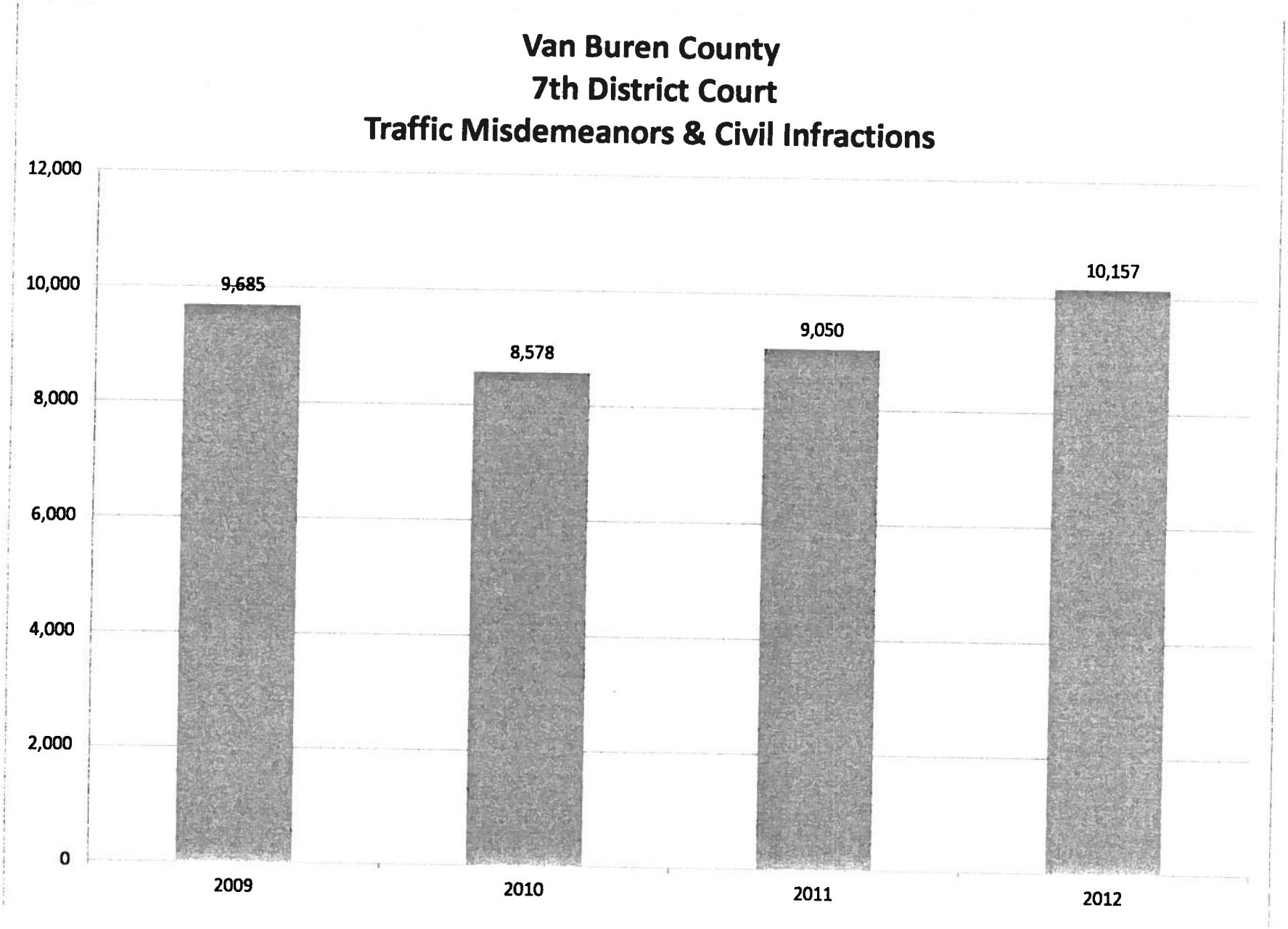
	STATEWIDE		VAN BUREN COUNTY	
Year	Traffic misd. and civil infractions	OWI/OUIL	Traffic misd. and civil infractions	OWL/OUIL
2002	2175625	60572	14443	619
2003	2177786	59809	13240	552
2004	2011146	56140	12589	586
2005	2062952	55668	13185	572
2006	2101832	54096	11855	560
2007	2128535	50966	11230	497
2008	1983146	48443	8578	552
2009	1858254	46550	9685	566
2010	1787769	41531	8578	552
2011	1634736	36493	9050	476
2012	1588357	36084	10157	506

Since 2010 the statewide figures show that we are still feeling the effects of the economic downturn. Traffic case new filings from 2010 to 2012 dropped another 11% with OWI/OUIL case down another 13%. **But in Van Buren County traffic new filings for the same period are up 18%. OWI/OUIL filings dropped only 8%.** The Seventh District Court reports to me that 2013 new filings continue to rise. It is very possible that with the economic recovery, slow as it is, MSP Post 55 could be restored.

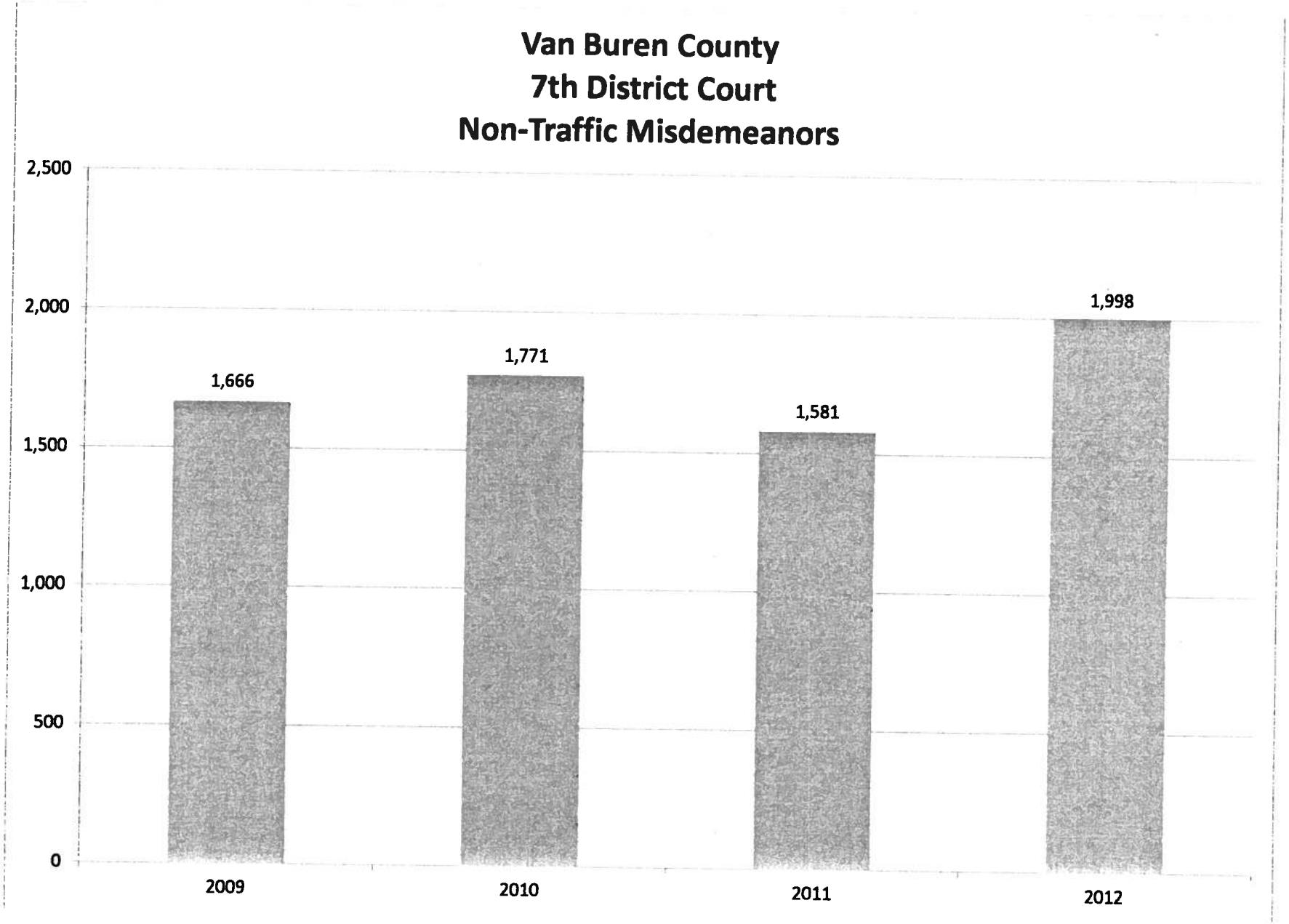
It is also unhealthy to have a county living on a time bomb. Will we continue with five judges until 2028, or will one of our judges decide to retire, or will an unexpected death reduce the county to four judges?

For all these reasons, SB 653 should become law.

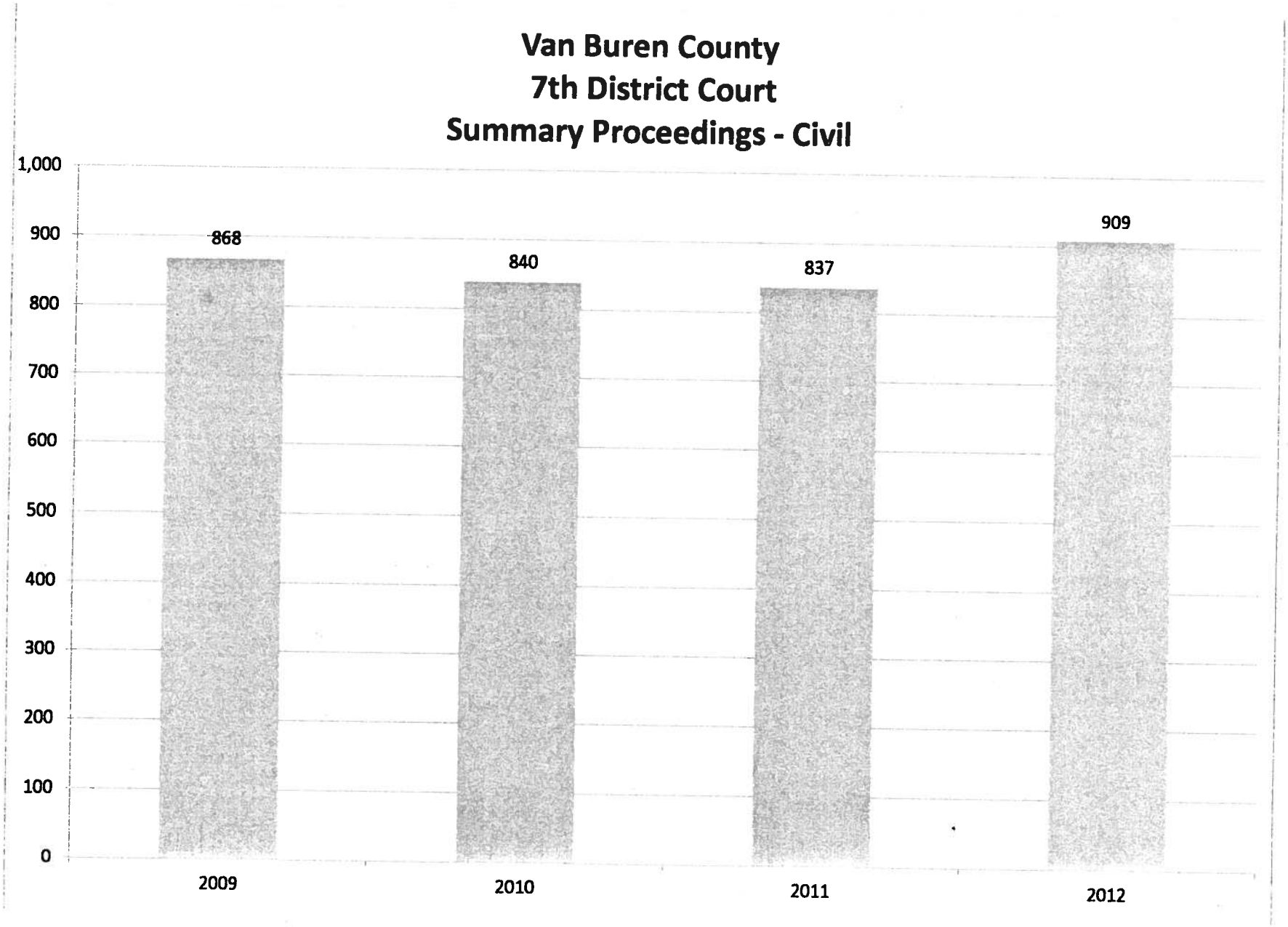

Van Buren County
7th District Court
Total Cases
25,000
20,000
15,000
10,000
5,000
0
22,204
20,369
20,070
21,631
2009
2010
2011
2012


Van Buren County
7th District Court
Traffic Misdemeanors & Civil Infractions
12,000
10,000
8,000
6,000
4,000
2,000
0
9,685
8,578
9,050
10,157
2009
2010
2011
2012

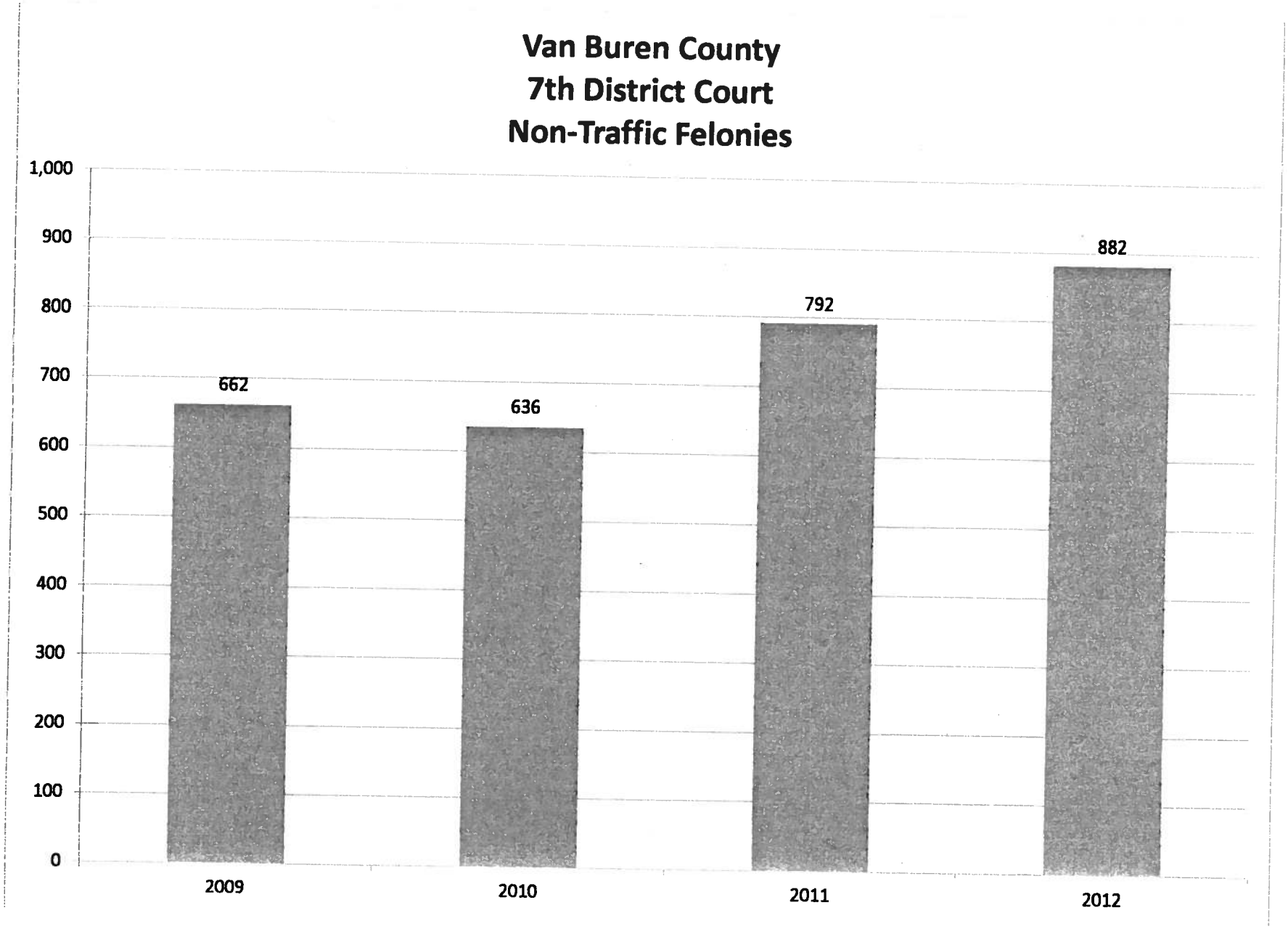
11/13/13


Van Buren County
7th District Court
Non-Traffic Misdemeanors
2,500
2,000
1,500
1,000
500
0
1,666
1,771
1,581
1,998
2009
2010
2011
2012

11/13/13


Van Buren County
7th District Court
Summary Proceedings - Civil
1,000
900
800
700
600
500
400
300
200
100
0
868
840
837
909
2009
2010
2011
2012

11/13/13


Van Buren County
7th District Court
Non-Traffic Felonies
1,000
900
800
700
600
500
400
300
200
100
0
662
636
792
882
2009
2010
2011
2012

11/13/13

7th District Court

01/01/2009 through 12/31/2009

	Non-Traffic			Traffic		Civil				
	Felony	**Misdemeanor**	**Civil Infractions**	**Misdemeanor and Civil**	**OWI/OWVI**	**Civil**	**Small Claims**	**Summary**	**Parking**	**Total**
Beginning Pending	88	414	43	641	117	1,353	126	52	1	2,835
New Filings	662	1,666	496	9,685	566	2,857	571	868	104	17,475
Reopened	421	679	0	669	71	37	8	9	0	1,894
Total Caseload	**1,171**	**2,759**	**539**	**10,995**	**754**	**4,247**	**705**	**929**	**105**	**22,204**
Jury Verdict	0	5	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	6
Bench Verdict	4	19	8	235	3	12	55	82	3	421
Guilty Plea/Admis/Waiver	213	1,470	94	5,461	510	0	0	0	58	7,806
Uncontested/Dflt/Settled	0	0	0	0	0	2,226	266	523	0	3,015
Bindover/Transfer	432	0	0	0	33	6	14	0	0	485
Dismissed by Party	48	256	77	2,100	59	356	189	198	5	3,288
Dismissed by Court	9	23	43	136	0	429	57	11	3	711
Default	0	0	295	1,835	0	0	0	0	32	2,162
Inactive Status	424	674	0	649	80	35	0	0	0	1,862
Other Disposition	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	10
Case Type Change	1	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	5
Total Dispositions	**1,131**	**2,450**	**517**	**10,417**	**686**	**3,074**	**581**	**814**	**101**	**19,771**
Ending Pending	**40**	**309**	**22**	**578**	**68**	**1,173**	**124**	**115**	**4**	**2,433**

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7th District Court

01/01/2010 through 12/31/2010

	Non-Traffic			Traffic		Civil				
	Felony	**Misdemeanor**	**Civil Infractions**	**Misdemeanor and Civil**	**OWI/OWVI**	**Civil**	**Small Claims**	**Summary**	**Parking**	**Total**
Beginning Pending	50	328	27	606	71	979	119	60	4	2,244
New Filings	636	1,771	564	8,578	552	2,754	466	840	78	16,239
Reopened	388	716	0	644	65	45	11	17	0	1,886
Total Caseload	**1,074**	**2,815**	**591**	**9,828**	**688**	**3,778**	**596**	**917**	**82**	**20,369**
Jury Verdict	0	6	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	8
Bench Verdict	1	6	8	127	1	9	49	74	1	276
Guilty Plea/Admis/Waiver	155	1,444	141	4,883	450	0	0	0	42	7,115
Uncontested/Dflt/Settled	0	0	0	0	0	2,022	193	609	0	2,824
Bindover/Transfer	456	0	0	0	26	4	12	0	0	498
Dismissed by Party	30	280	92	2,063	29	279	149	176	7	3,105
Dismissed by Court	4	9	16	105	4	307	26	7	0	478
Default	0	0	311	1,427	0	0	0	0	32	1,770
Inactive Status	395	734	0	619	75	39	3	1	0	1,866
Other Disposition	0	0	0	0	0	26	2	0	0	28
Case Type Change	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	5
Total Dispositions	**1,043**	**2,481**	**568**	**9,225**	**587**	**2,686**	**434**	**867**	**82**	**17,973**
Ending Pending	**31**	**334**	**23**	**603**	**101**	**1,092**	**162**	**50**	**0**	**2,396**

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7th District Court

01/01/2011 through 12/31/2011

	Non-Traffic			Traffic		Civil				
	Felony	**Misdemeanor**	**Civil Infractions**	**Misdemeanor and Civil**	**OWI/OWVI**	**Civil**	**Small Claims**	**Summary**	**Parking**	**Total**
Beginning Pending	51	348	29	627	101	971	144	41	0	**2,312**
New Filings	792	1,581	529	9,050	476	2,294	450	837	52	**16,061**
Reopened	382	620	0	577	51	47	9	11	0	**1,697**
Total Caseload	**1,225**	**2,549**	**558**	**10,254**	**628**	**3,312**	**603**	**889**	**52**	**20,070**
Jury Verdict	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**2**
Bench Verdict	7	23	4	142	1	6	36	55	0	**274**
Guilty Plea/Admis/Waiver	195	1,266	89	5,259	419	0	0	0	33	**7,261**
Uncontested/Dflt/Settled	0	0	0	0	0	1,961	241	590	0	**2,792**
Bindover/Transfer	523	0	0	0	20	3	7	0	0	**553**
Dismissed by Party	23	267	78	2,136	38	364	142	169	6	**3,223**
Dismissed by Court	5	15	13	179	0	251	93	10	2	**568**
Default	0	0	353	1,264	0	0	0	0	11	**1,628**
Inactive Status	411	620	0	575	63	37	3	0	0	**1,709**
Other Disposition	0	0	0	0	0	28	0	2	0	**30**
Case Type Change	1	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	**5**
Total Dispositions	**1,165**	**2,194**	**537**	**9,558**	**541**	**2,650**	**522**	**826**	**52**	**18,045**
Ending Pending	**60**	**355**	**21**	**696**	**87**	**662**	**81**	**63**	**0**	**2,025**

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7th Distriet Court

01/01/2012 through 12/31/2012

	Non-Traffic			Traffic		Civil				
	Felony	**Misdemeanor**	**Civil Infractions**	**Misdemeanor and Civil**	**OWI/OWVI**	**Civil**	**Small Claims**	**Summary**	**Parking**	**Total**
Beginning Pending	70	356	37	721	85	684	79	62	1	**2,095**
New Filings	882	1,998	405	10,157	506	2,397	396	909	50	**17,700**
Reopened	503	597	0	622	64	36	5	9	0	**1,836**
Total Caseload	**1,455**	**2,951**	**442**	**11,500**	**655**	**3,117**	**480**	**980**	**51**	**21,631**
Jury Verdict	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	**3**
Bench Verdict	1	25	3	197	4	12	43	84	1	**370**
Guilty Plea/Admis/Waiver	256	1,237	106	5,943	419	0	0	0	29	**7,990**
Uncontested/Dflt/Settled	0	0	0	0	0	1,803	189	623	0	**2,615**
Bindover/Transfer	560	0	0	0	28	8	13	0	0	**609**
Dismissed by Party	36	646	81	2,333	21	326	120	189	7	**3,759**
Dismissed by Court	9	43	4	194	1	176	36	7	0	**470**
Default	0	0	234	1,523	0	0	0	0	10	**1,767**
Inactive Status	523	605	0	591	73	38	1	1	0	**1,832**
Other Disposition	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	3	0	**10**
Case Type Change	0	1	0	5	2	0	0	0	0	**8**
Total Dispositions	**1,385**	**2,558**	**428**	**10,787**	**549**	**2,370**	**402**	**907**	**47**	**19,433**
Ending Pending	**70**	**393**	**14**	**713**	**106**	**747**	**78**	**73**	**4**	**2,198**

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