



Austin Municipal Court

Annual Report Fiscal Year 2019

SD23 Goal #1

Provide prompt, effective, efficient and impartial administration of justice and processing of all cases filed with the Court

In fiscal year (FY) 2019, 73% of cases were adjudicated within 60 days of the filing date. 89% of cases were adjudicated within 180 - the standard deferred adjudication time period. The average age of terminated cases in was 255 days, slightly over the target of 215 days. This overage is reflected in the Court's closure rate which was 130%, meaning more cases were closed than were filed.

SD23 Goal #2

Provide accurate, readily accessible information through multiple channels to the public and to all individuals participating in Municipal Court cases about (1) the Court's procedures, (2) the rights and duties of defendants in cases before the Court, and (3) alternative sentencing options that allow individuals to resolve their cases when they cannot afford fines or costs.

In FY 2019, the Court ensured its website provided current and easily accessible information describing legal options. Forms were updated to allow for efficient mail/email communication including the financial affidavits necessary to determine eligibility for alternative sentencing options. Court clerks responded to more than 300,000 inquiries via telephones and email providing information on legal options, including alternative sentencing, available to for individuals to address their cases.

SD23 Goal #3

Minimize jail commitments for non-payment of fines whenever effective alternatives are available.

Arrests on solely Class C misdemeanors decreased 32% in FY 2019. 2,554 people were arrested versus 3,751 people in the previous fiscal year. For those arrested on both misdemeanors and felonies, only 28 defendants were remanded to jail. This is a decrease of 46% from FY 2018, down from 51 defendants.

SHERRY M. STATMAN
JUDGE

Judge

SD23 Goal #4

Make alternative sentencing options available whenever appropriate under the law and ensure sentencing is consistent with all federal and state laws restricting jail commitments.

In FY 2019, 47,400 cases (22% of cases filed at the court) were placed on payment plans and given extensions of time to pay. In addition, 2,255 cases - over \$480,000 in fines, costs, and fees - were satisfied entirely or partially with community service credit.

SD23 Goal #5

Minimize the issuance of warrants whenever alternatives are available and through the imposition of alternative sentences.

In FY 2019, the court issued 29,388 warrants. This signifies a 40% decrease from the previous fiscal year. Two-thirds of the warrants issued were a result of defendants failing to appear in court. Of all warrants cleared in FY 2019, 93.4% were cleared by defendants contacting the court; only 6.6% were cleared due to an arrest.

While an overwhelming majority of cases are adjudicated within 60 days, the Court actively seeks to minimize adverse consequences such as collection fees, warrants and jail commitments on its cases. The Court initiated over 330,000 contacts to remind citizens of upcoming court dates, due dates for proof or payment, or to notify them of delinquent cases. All citations and delinquent notices included information on alternative sentencing options to facilitate compliance.

SD23 Goal #6

Minimize unintended adverse consequences of Class C fines and fees on low-income individuals and families.

In FY 2019, more than 11,000 cases received reductions or waivers of fines, costs, and fees; This includes over 2,800 cases where indigency was determined. As a result, almost \$1.5 million was waived.

Citizens may be granted the opportunity to comply with court orders by performing community service. Alternative sentencing options resulted in non-monetary payments that totaled over \$4,000,000.

SD23 Goal #7

Perform timely magistration at the Travis County Central Booking Facility to minimize the timeframe between a person's arrest and their opportunity to be released from detention, and when setting bonds, hewing closely to the minimum bond necessary to secure a defendant's presence in court, and prioritizing release on personal bonds when possible.

The Austin Municipal Court judges provide magistration services at the Travis County Central Booking Facility by arraigning or magistrating all defendants on charges ranging from Class C misdemeanors to Capital felonies. During this process, the judge will read the charge(s) to the defendant, and explain the penalties. The defendant is also advised of his/her right to trial, and if applicable the right to counsel (legal representation). The judge will then set the amount of bail or release the defendant on personal bond.

In FY 2019, 80% of those arrested were released on personal bonds.

SD23 Goal #8

Treat all people with respect and dignity and to create a culture of sensitivity to the diversity of income levels and circumstances of individuals residing in Austin.

In addition to the City of Austin's Annual Community Survey, the Court seeks immediate feedback from citizens visiting the Court. During FY 2019, 326 citizens participated in the Court's survey. Of those, 98% found their interaction with the Court satisfactory or above. Prospective jurors are also encouraged to complete a survey regarding their experience and interaction with the Court. Over 5,000 jurors took the survey with over 99% describing the process going "as expected" or better.

To further achieve the fair administration of justice, the Court partnered with the Texas Fair Defense Project and The University of Texas Law School on a quarterly basis to offer legal services and alternate access to the Court. During these clinics, citizens had the opportunity to consult with legal counsel free of charge in a neutral environment. As a result, 852 Department of Public Safety (DPS) Surcharge Waivers were granted based on economic criteria.

In addition, the Court held a Warrant Amnesty program in which 9,274 warrants were cancelled and approximately \$466,785 in warrant fees waived.