

THE NAVAJO NATION

JUDICIAL BRANCH

FY 2024 4th Quarter Report

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A Message from Chief Justice

Yá'át'ééh, relatives and esteemed leaders of the Navajo Nation. As we close out the 4th quarter of FY2024, we reflect on a year of significant achievements and ongoing challenges. Much like the fall season that signifies change and renewal, this quarter has been marked by both progress and preparation for the future.

The Judicial Branch expresses its gratitude to the Navajo Nation Council for the approval of the Continuing Resolution, which ensures our courts remain operational and justice continues to be served. Additionally, we thank the Law and Order Committee for their unanimous support in moving three of our probationary judges to permanent status. This is a testament to our collective efforts to strengthen our judicial system.

Judicial independence remains paramount for our Nation, safeguarding the impartiality of our courts and ensuring decisions are grounded in Diné Fundamental Law. As we uphold this principle, we strengthen the sovereignty and self-determination of our people, ensuring justice is served free from outside influences.

This quarter, we saw significant progress in our judicial operations. Over 2,700 cases were filed, and 4,525 cases were closed, leading to a clearance rate of 163%, well above our target. This success highlights the dedication of our judges and court staff. We continue to prioritize filling vacancies across our districts, hiring 18 new employees, and transitioning 8 probationary staff to permanent roles, including filling critical positions within Probation and Parole Services.

Infrastructure projects are also moving forward. The Window Rock Judicial District's modular building is nearing completion, and construction on the Kayenta Judicial Complex is set to begin in 2025. These projects, along with ongoing training initiatives for staff, reflect our commitment to providing modern, effective judicial services.

We are also proud of our collaborations with local courts and continued advancements in our Peacemaking Program. These partnerships are essential to addressing the needs of our people and enhancing the justice system across the Nation.

Despite these accomplishments, challenges remain. Limited resources, growing caseloads, and the need for more facilities—particularly for the Shiprock Judicial District—are ongoing concerns. We ask for the Council's continued support in advocating for the necessary funding and resources to meet these challenges.

As we move into a new year, the Judicial Branch remains steadfast in its commitment to justice, fairness, and the preservation of Navajo traditions. Ahe'hee for your support, and together, we will continue to serve our people and strengthen the Navajo Nation.

JoAnn B. Jayne

Chief Justice of the Navajo Nation

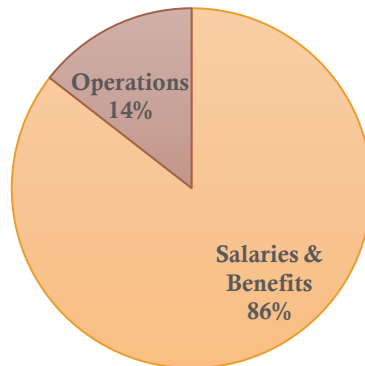
Highlights from the Chief Justice's 4th Quarter FY2024

- **Gratitude for Council Support:** Thank you to the Navajo Nation Council for approving the Continuing Resolution to keep courts operational, ensuring justice is served without interruption.
- **Permanent Appointment of Judges:** The Law and Order Committee's unanimous support led to the permanent appointment of three probationary judges, strengthening the judicial system.
- **Judicial Independence:** Reaffirmed the importance of judicial independence as essential for fair, impartial decisions based on Diné Fundamental Law, safeguarding Navajo sovereignty.
- **Case Management Success:** Navajo courts filed 2,782 cases and closed 4,525 cases, achieving a clearance rate of 163%, significantly exceeding the target of 100%.
- **Infrastructure Improvements:** Continued progress on judicial infrastructure projects, including the Window Rock Judicial District modular building set for completion in January 2025 and the Kayenta Judicial Complex slated for July 2026.
- **Critical Staffing Milestones:** 18 new hires and 8 employees transitioned from probationary to permanent status; significant progress in filling judicial vacancies and staffing Probation and Parole Services.

- **Judicial Facility Challenges:** Urged continued Council support for resolving facility challenges, particularly after water leaks at Chinle nearly closed the court, highlighting the importance of infrastructure maintenance.
- **Probation and Parole Staffing Successes:** Four vacant Probation Officer positions were filled in Dilkon, Tohajiilee, Alamo, and Chinle, with further interviews scheduled.
- **Staff Training Initiatives:** Over 10 training topics covered during the quarter, including ethics, white-collar crime, and judicial responsibilities, led by Judge Malcolm Begay to equip staff for public service.
- **Collaborative Court Efforts:** Tuba City Judicial District worked with Coconino County Courts to clear backlogged criminal cases and warrants, a critical post-pandemic recovery step.
- **Expansion of the Peacemaking Program:** Plans are in place to construct a new building for the Peacemaking Program, pending approval, allowing this vital service to reach more people.
- **Call for Continued Advocacy:** Requesting Council's advocacy for resources, particularly for the Shiprock Judicial District, and emphasize the importance of collective action to overcome challenges and ensure justice for all Diné citizens.

Budget and Operations

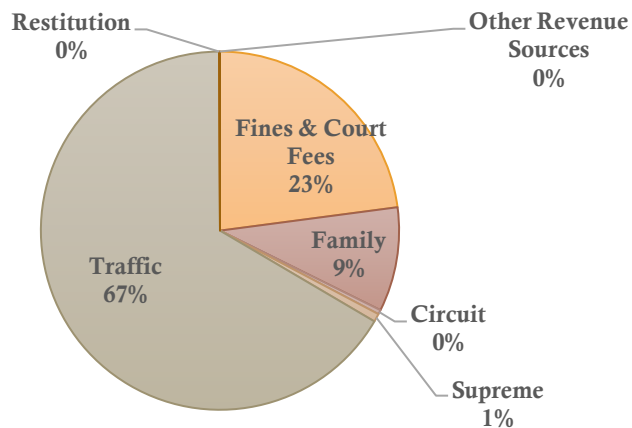
FY2024 GENERAL FUND APPROPRIATIONS NAVAJO JUDICIAL BRANCH



The FY 2024 General Fund Appropriation for the Navajo Judicial Branch consists of 86% in Salaries and Benefits and 14% in Operations.

\$400,592.83 collected in Fines & Fees for FY2024 4th Quarter. All funds are deposited into the Navajo Nation General Fund.

MONIES COLLECTED BY COURTS FY2024 4TH QUARTER



Navajo Justice Systems

Original Justice System

Peacemaking is a traditional justice system within the Judicial Branch of the Navajo Nation that can be used instead of or alongside the Navajo Nation court system. Its goal is to provide a non-adversarial forum for resolving disputes, promoting healing, and reestablishing harmony.

Hózhóji Naat'aah (Diné Traditional Peacemaking)

Traditional Diné Peacemaking starts from a place of chaos, hóochxq'/anáhóót'i', within an individual or between people. The Peacemaker guides individuals or groups to confront this chaos and move toward harmonious existence.

Áłchíní BáNdazhnit'á (Diné Family Group Conferencing)

This extension of peacemaking addresses the requirements of the Áłchíní Bi Beehaz' áannii Act of 2011. It seeks culturally appropriate methods for family preservation and reunification, facilitating harmony consistent with Navajo Nation statutes and Diné principles.

Nábináhaazláago Áłch'j yáti' (Life Value Engagements)

Life value engagements are traditional services where individuals or groups meet with a Peacemaker to learn how to address problems by opening to hózhó. These engagements focus on personal accountability and the willingness to confront and overcome chaos for the benefit of oneself, family, and community.

Navajo Justice Systems

Roles of the Supreme Court of the Navajo Nation

Appellate jurisdiction over trial court decisions.

Original jurisdiction over petitions for extraordinary writs (mandamus, prohibition and habeas corpus and other writs).

Final adjudication of decisions by administrative bodies such as the Tax Commission, Office of Hearings and Appeals and the Labor Commission.

Discretionary review of certified questions by trial courts and administrative agencies, and state/federal courts.

Authority over the practice of law and bar membership on the Navajo Nation.

Appellate jurisdiction over certain decisions of the Navajo Bar Association.

Authority to approve all new and revised rules, pleadings, and forms of the Navajo Nation courts.

Roles of the District Courts

Original jurisdiction over crimes, civil causes and other matters under Navajo statutory law, Diné bi Beehaz'áannii, and Navajo Nation Treaties.

Courts of general jurisdiction.

Small claims division within each district court.

Special Division of the Window Rock District Court.

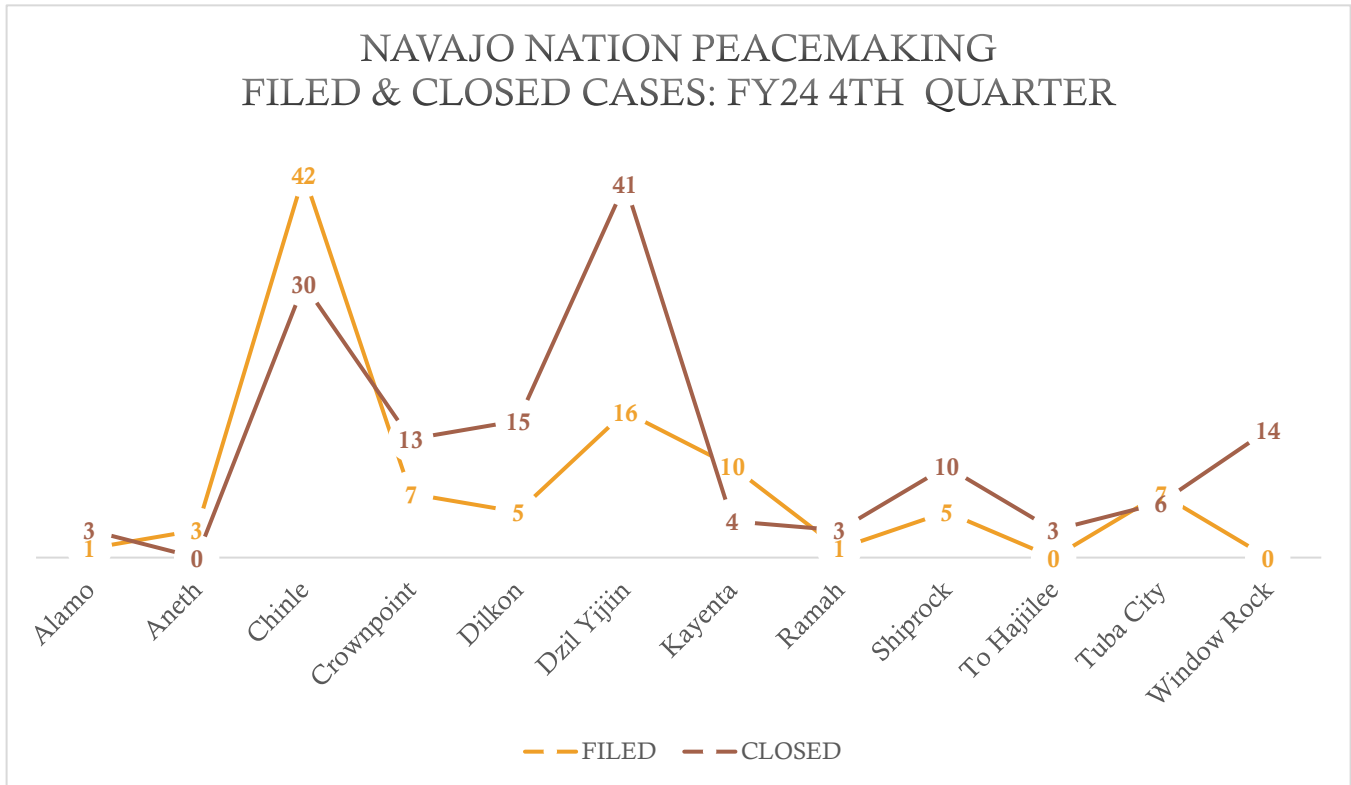
Exclusive jurisdiction to appoint a special prosecutor to investigate and prosecute ethics and corruption cases involving officials of the Navajo Nation government.

Roles of the Family Courts

Original exclusive jurisdiction over:

- Cases arising under the Navajo Nation Álchíní Bi Beehaz'áannii Act
- Domestic relations
- Probate
- Adoption
- Paternity
- Custody
- Child support
- Guardianship
- Mental health commitments
- Mental and/physical competency
- Name changes
- Elders

Navajo Nation Peacemaking



Navajo Peacemaking continues to be the original justice system of the Navajo Nation by providing a non-adversarial forum for resolving disputes, promoting healing, and reestablishing harmony.

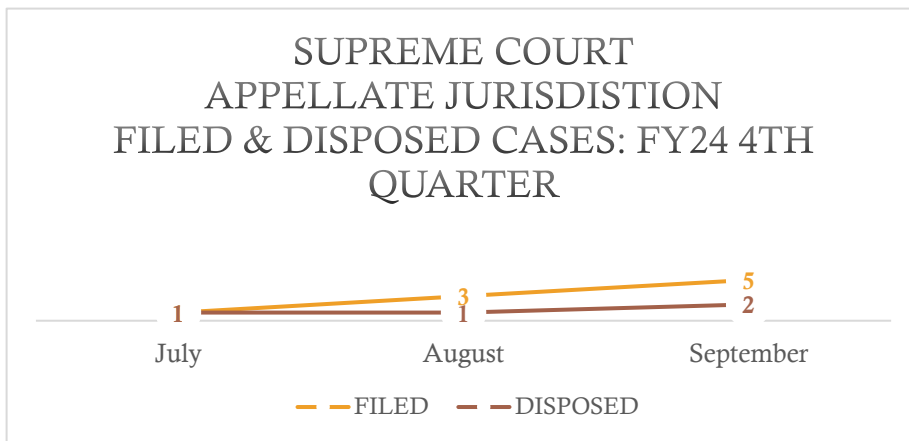
During FY2024 4th Quarter, a total of 97 cases were filed with Navajo Peacemaking and 142 cases were closed resulting in a 146% clearance rate.

Peacemaking had a final work session to revise their Plan of Operations, which had been approved in 2012 and not been revised since.

The program filled two Traditional Program Specialists positions, one being at Tuba City and the other at the Window Rock office.

Through the Hashkééjí Nahat'á Béeso Bá Hooghan (HNBBH) and the Program Coordinator working closely with the Construction Manager, the Construction funding for a new Peacemaking building is ready for legislation. As staff await legislation, they have visited the proposed site offering prayers, songs, and talks for this building to come to pass.

Navajo Nation Supreme Courts



9 Appellate cases were filed with the Navajo Supreme Court during the FY24 4th Quarter.

4 cases reached final disposition.

As the sole appellate court for the Navajo Nation, the Supreme Court reviews lower court records, transcripts, and legal briefs as well as hold oral arguments.

The Navajo Supreme Court serves as the Original Jurisdiction Court for bar members.

No additional bar members were admitted this quarter.

A total of 316 *Pro Bono* Appointments were made in FY24 4th Quarter. The Tuba City, Kayenta and Dilkon Judicial Districts have the highest need to *Pro Bono* appointments.

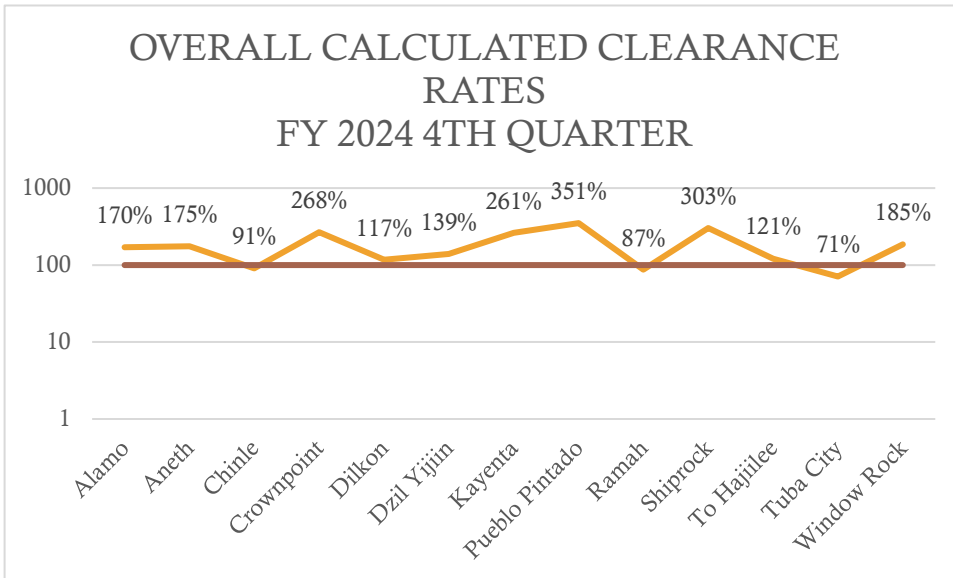
The Supreme Court recently welcomed their new Supreme Court Administrator Mrs. Cecelia G. Thomas.

Probationary Judges Letitia Stover, Victor Clyde, and Malcolm Laughing had just completed their two-year evaluations along with their Law and Order Committee Public Hearings. All judges were recommended by the Law and Order Committee for permanency to the Navajo Nation President.

Lastly, Chief of Justice has been researching options to invite back retired judges and justices as Pro Temp jurists to help assist caseloads.

Navajo Nation Courts

Judicial District (Trial Courts)



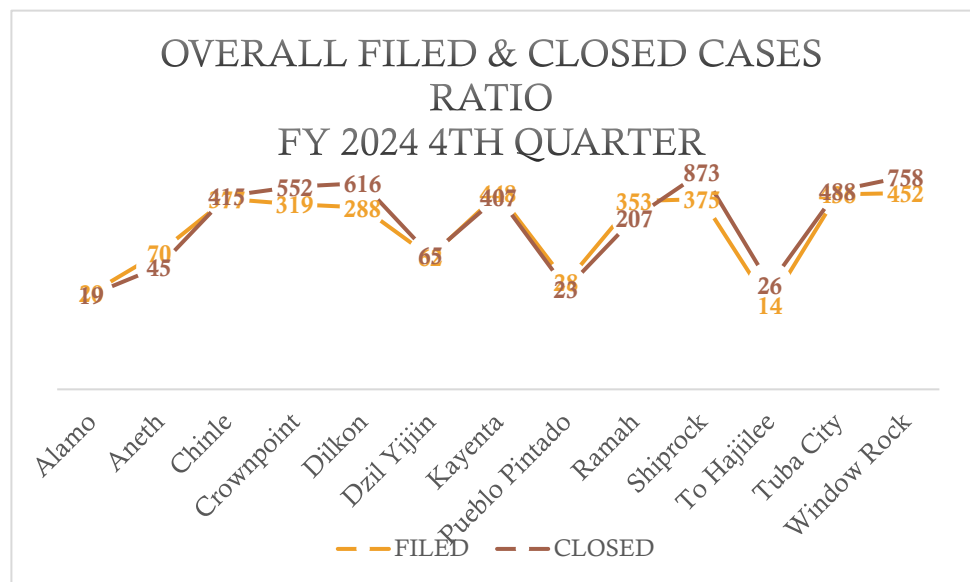
Navajo Judicial District Courts (trial courts) are closing more cases than filed per quarter.

Staying above 100% is crucial to address pending and backlog cases.

Judicial District Courts Overall, Clearance Rate is 163%.

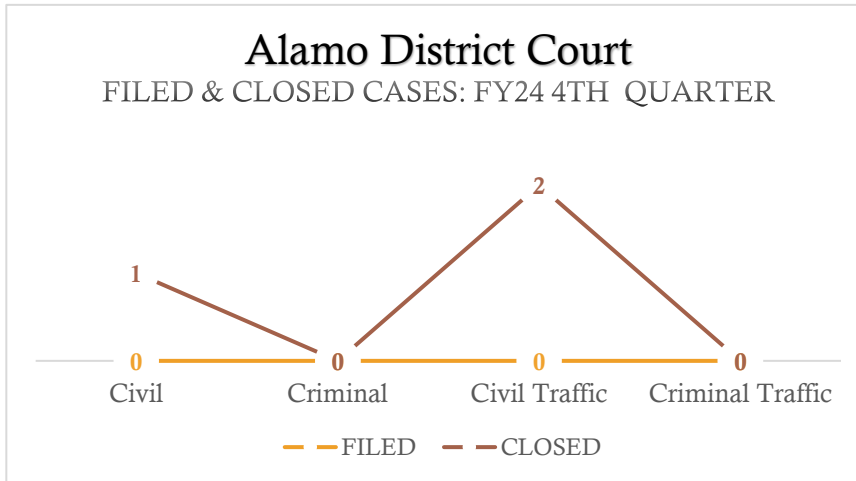
The overall ratio of filed and closed cases for the trial courts identifies a positive trend.

The closed protectory should at least mirror the filed to effectively manage caseloads.



Alamo/Tó Hajiilee Judicial District

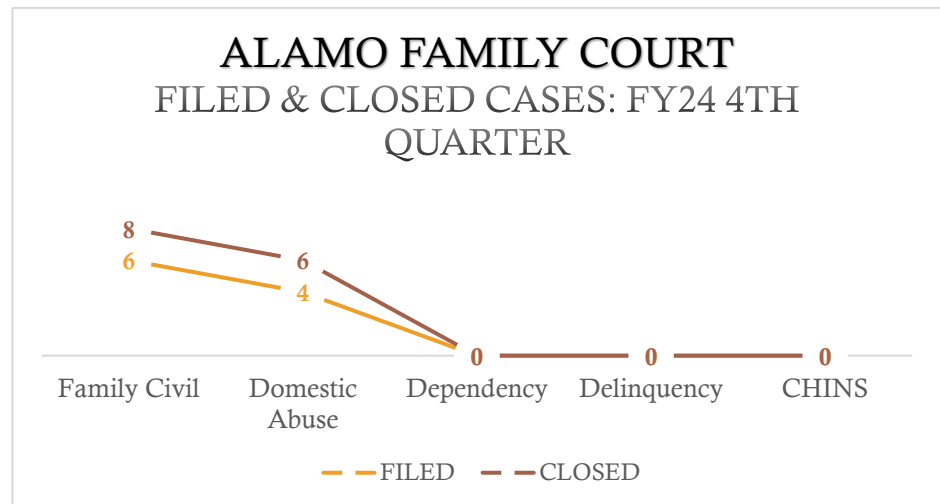
Alamo District Court



10 cases were filed in both the Alamo District and Family courts during the FY24 4th Quarter.

17 cases were closed.

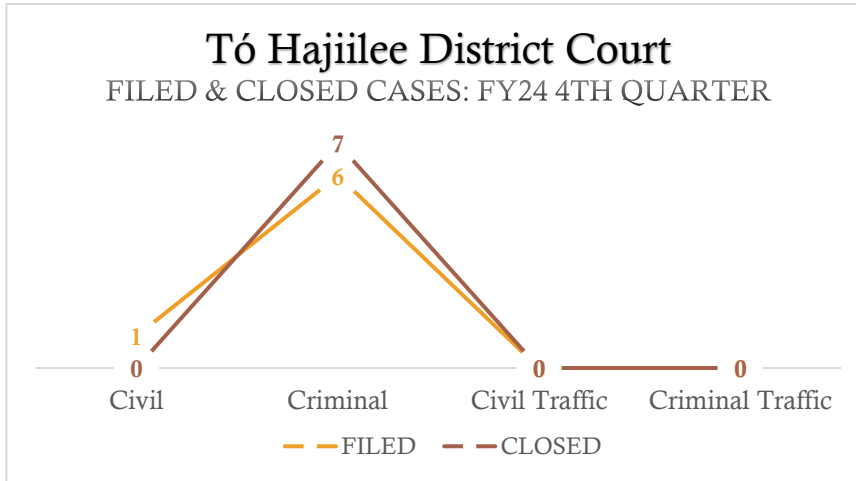
Clearance Rate is 170%



Court Administrator, Lauren A. Billy, has completed her probationary period and is now a permanent employee for Alamo District Court.

On September 30, 2024, the Law and Order Committee confirmed Judge Laughing's appointment. Judge Laughing will continue to be assigned to the Alamo District Court. His primary focus is to enhance court efficiency and oversight by continuing to have in-person hearings, case reviewing, performance assessments, and supervision of the Court Administrator.

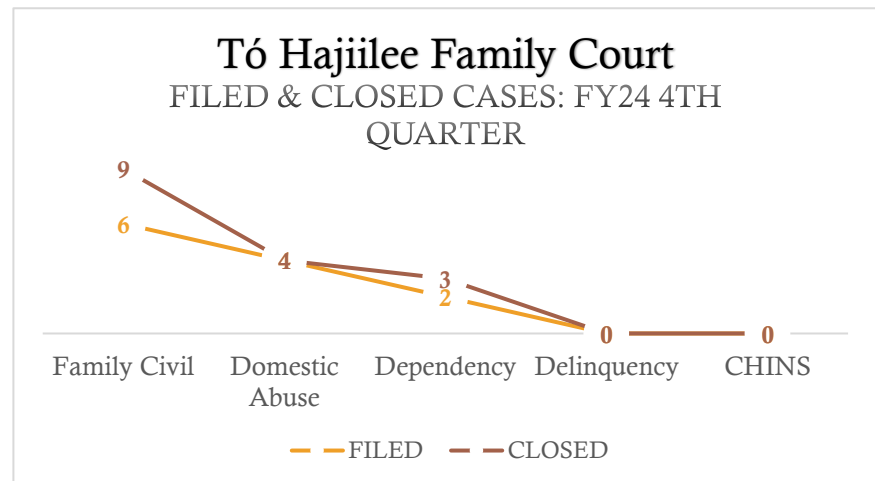
Tó Hajiilee District Court



19 cases were filed in both the Tó Hajiilee District and Family courts during the FY24 4th Quarter.

23 cases were closed.

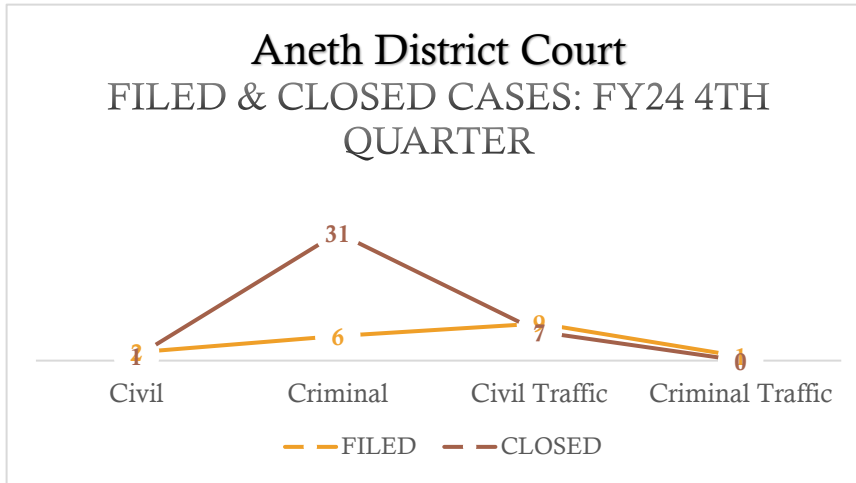
Clearance Rate is 121%



Staff attorney, Alisha R. Thompson, has conducted comprehensive *Pro Se* Forms training sessions. These sessions focus directly on enhancing the court's capacity to serve the community members more effectively. These training sessions have an invaluable impact on the court staff.

The new Judicial Hearing Officer, Sandra K. Taylor, presides over domestic abuse hearings in multiple Judicial District courts such as Tohajiilee district, in addition to Alamo district.

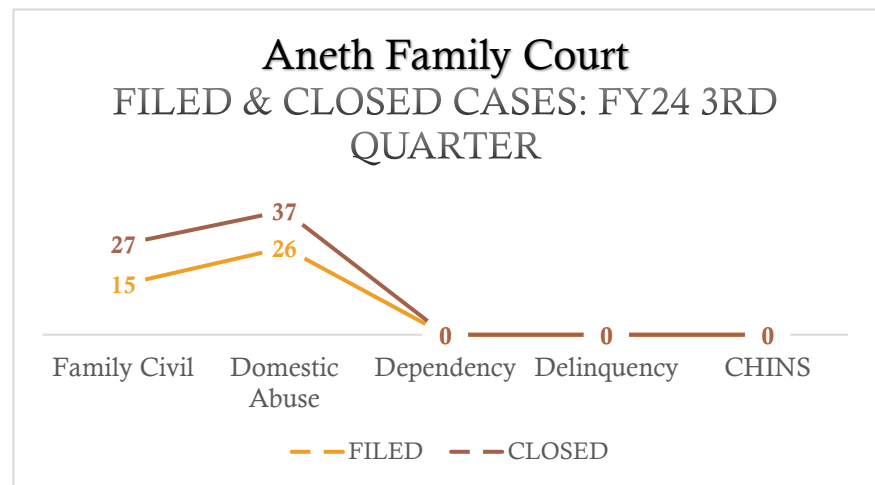
Aneth Judicial District



59 cases were filed in both the Aneth District and Family courts during the FY24 4th Quarter.

103 cases were closed.

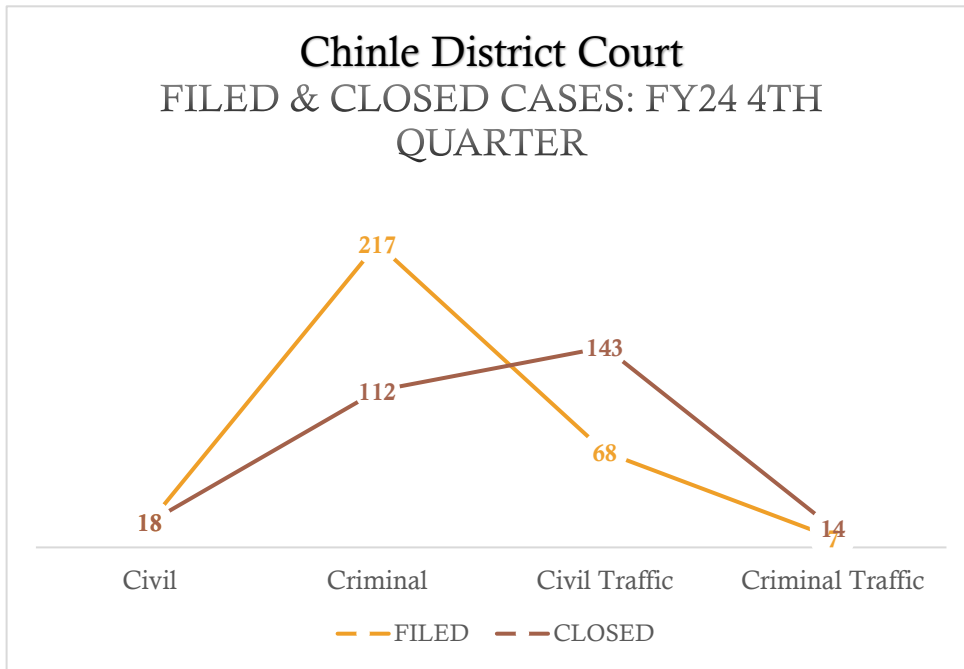
Clearance Rate is 175%



Aneth Judicial District developed a prudent expenditure plan to utilize its general funds budget for Fiscal Year 2024. By the end of the fiscal year 2024, Aneth district court has expanded over 80%.

On August 1, 2024, the district court staff participated in a staff development and a wellness day. They were also able to receive knowledgeable information from a Navajo Nation Employee Benefits program presentation as well.

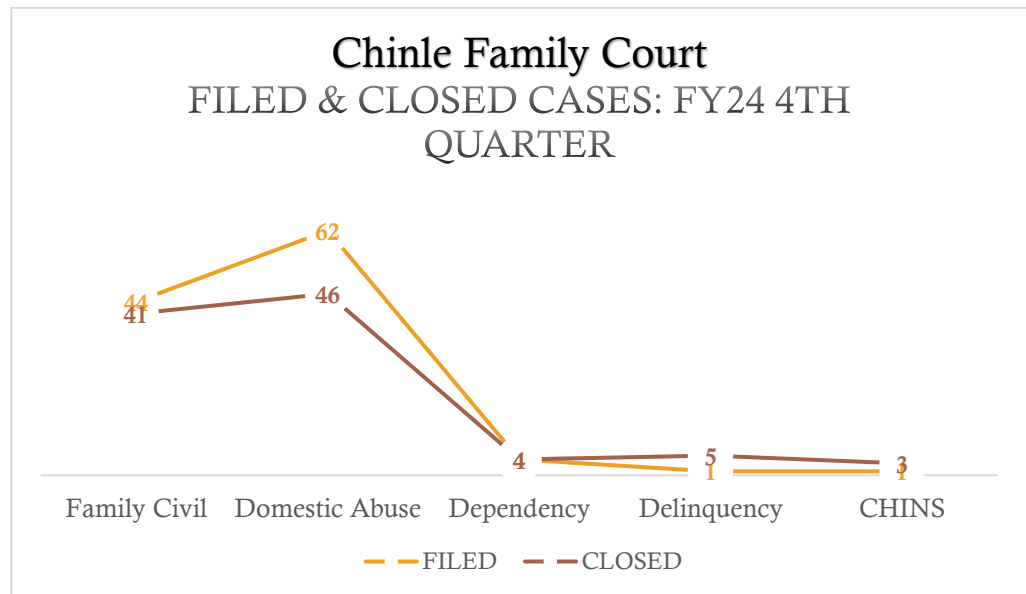
Chinle Judicial District



422 cases were filed in both the Chinle District and Family courts during the FY24 4th Quarter.

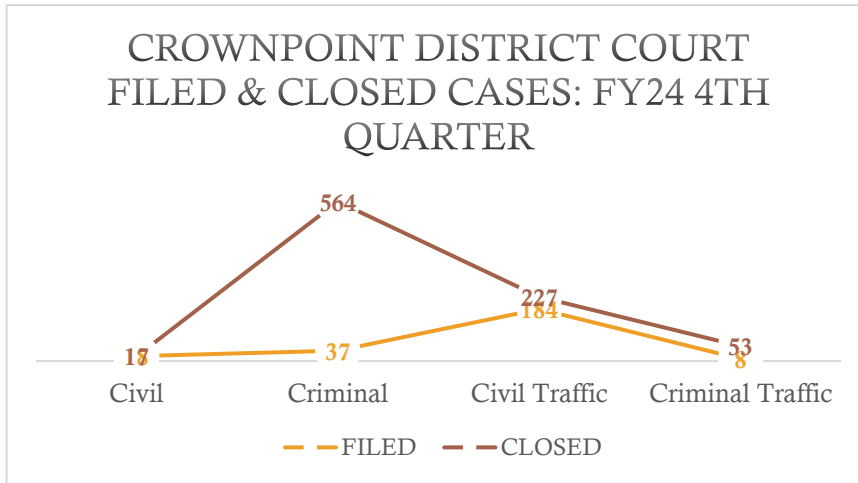
386 cases were closed.

Clearance Rate is 91%



Chinle Judicial District was given recognition by Chinle Chapter who recognized and honored Judge Thompson for her years of dedication and service to her community, especially the youth. She offered positive public services as a former DNA worker, prosecutor, and now a judge.

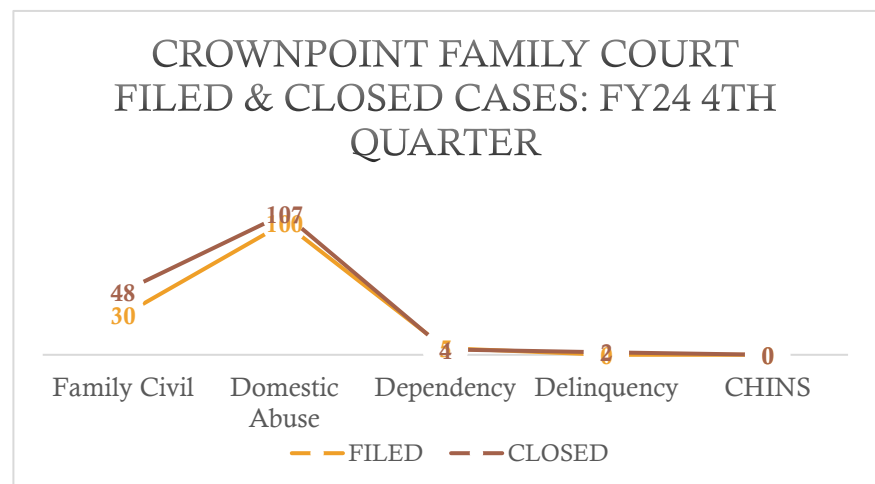
Crownpoint Judicial District



382 cases were filed in both the Crownpoint District and Family courts during the FY24 4th Quarter.

1022 cases were closed.

**Clearance
Rate is 268%**



Crownpoint Judicial District court staff successfully closed a total of 1,022 court cases by the end of FY24 4th quarter.

With the new hire of a Judicial Hearing Officer, the district was able to provide in-person hearings for domestic violence cases. This also had a significant impact on the court's positive performance.

One challenge Crownpoint district court has had is the necessary demolition of the old courthouse and Judicial housing complex.

Pueblo Pintado Circuit Court Of the Crownpoint Judicial District

PUEBLO PINTADO DISTRICT COURT FILED & CLOSED CASES: FY24 4TH QUARTER

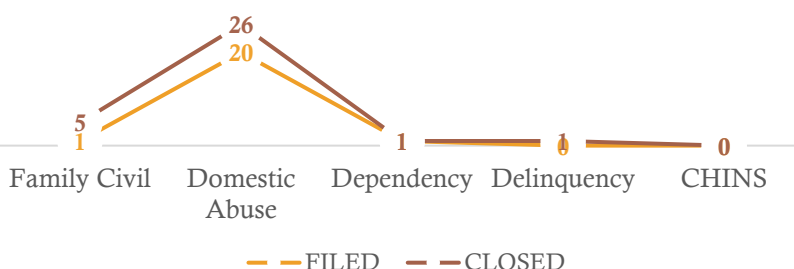


37 cases were filed in both the Pueblo Pintado District Court and Family courts during the FY24 4th Quarter.

130 cases were closed.

**Clearance
Rate is 351%**

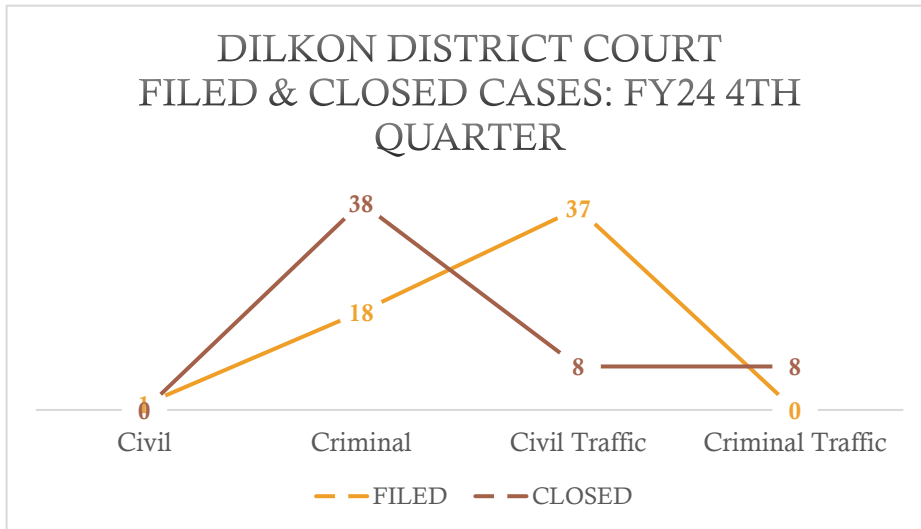
PUEBLO PINTADO CIRCUIT FAMILY COURT FILED & CLOSED CASES: FY24 4TH QUARTER



Crownpoint Judicial District Administration continues to work towards reopening the Pueblo Pintado.

The district court has hired a new Judicial hearing Officer who has been hearing in-person domestic violence cases leading to positive court performance.

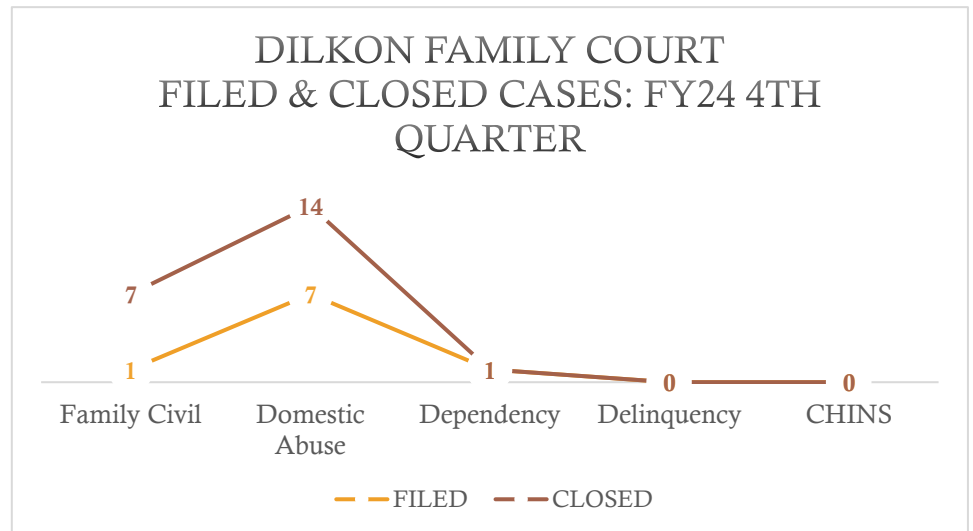
Dilkon Judicial District



65 cases were filed in both the Dilkon District and Family courts during the FY24 4th Quarter.

76 cases were closed.

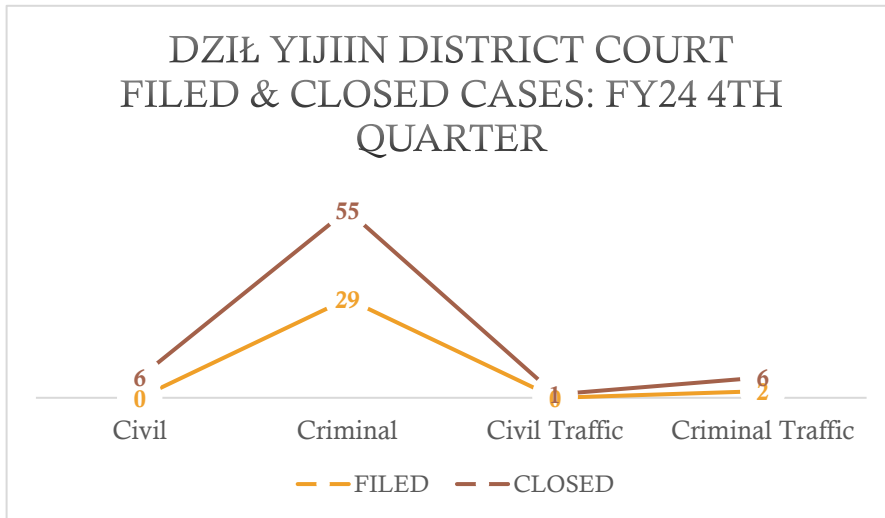
**Clearance
Rate is 117%**



Dilkon district court staff have been proactive in the improvements with case management and JustWare data entry, so that the data accurately reflects final judgements entered and cases active after a judgement.

The district courts security contract project has also been approved and assigned a contract number for the vendor to move forward on providing a reliable security system.

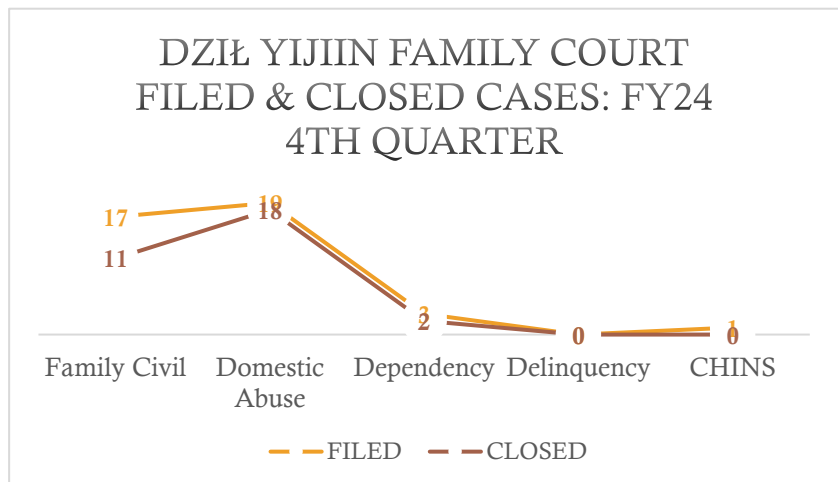
Dził Yijiin Judicial District



71 cases were filed in both the Dził Yijiin District and Family courts during the FY24 4th Quarter.

99 cases were closed.

Clearance Rate is 139%

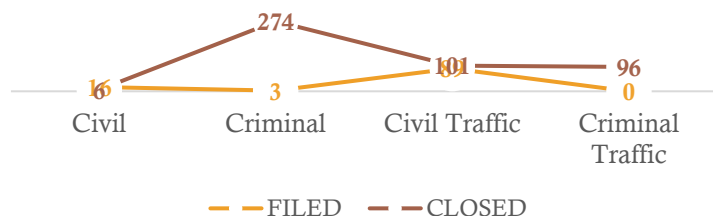


Dził Yijiin Judicial District hired, Mr. Derran Yazzie, to fill their Bailiff position effective September 30, 2024. The newly hired Bailiff has tremendous expertise, knowledge, and skills from his previous employments and his service in the United States Marine Corps. Overall, Mr. Yazzie has great potential and will be a great asset to the Navajo Nation Judicial Branch.

In the month of August, the district’s personnel staff attended the Staff Development Day held at Wheatfields Lake. This event focused on staff health and wellness training, and it also included stress buster events.

Kayenta Justice District

KAYENTA DISTRICT COURT FILED & CLOSED CASES: FY24 4TH QUARTER

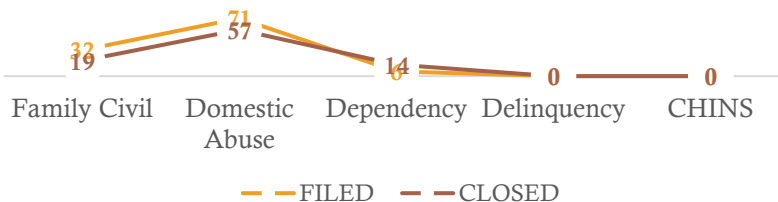


217 cases were filed in both the Kayenta District and Family courts during the FY24 4th Quarter.

567 cases were closed

**Clearance
Rate is 261%**

KAYENTA FAMILY COURT FILED & CLOSED CASES: FY24 4TH QUARTER



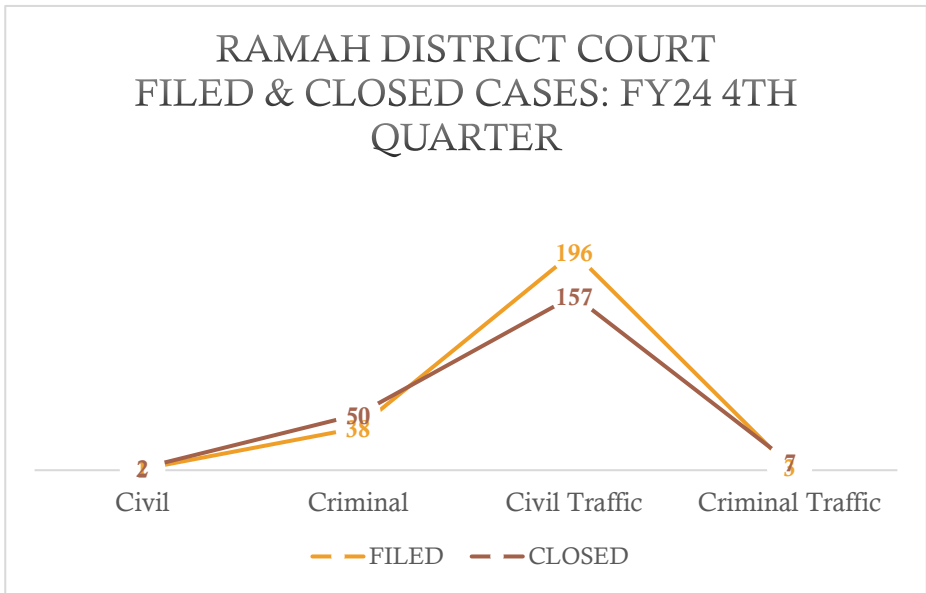
On September 30, 2024, the Law and Order Committee unanimously recommended permanently appointing honorable Letitia M. Stover as a Navajo Nation Court Judge.

September 25, 2024, the Kayenta Township Commission approved project initiation and contract signing for bid and construction administration services for the new Kayenta Judicial Complex facility.

The 16,937 square foot facility construction completion timeline is set for July 2026.

The Kayenta District Court has also been providing mobile court services to the Navajo Mountain and Inscription House Chapter. These mobile services include new case filings, pending case inquiries, and fine and fee payments. Overall, the community appreciates the district's "Justice on Wheels" efforts.

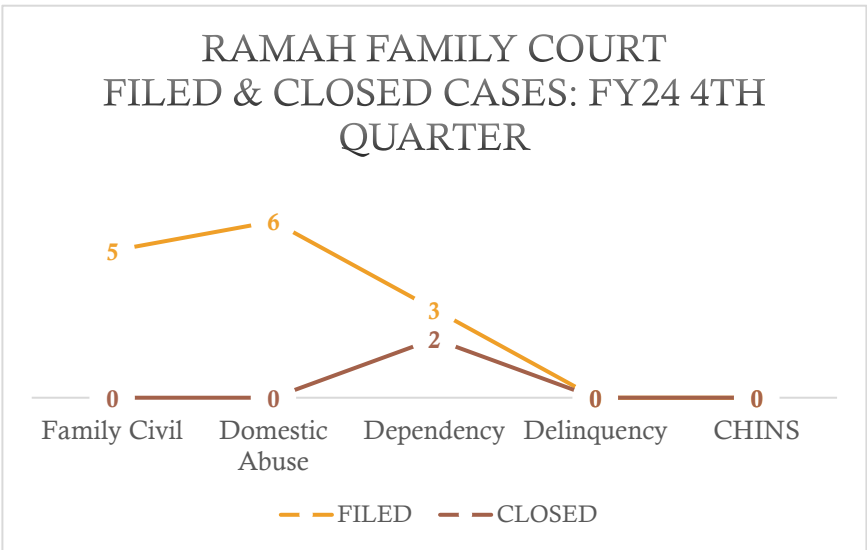
Ramah Judicial District



252 cases were filed in both the Ramah District and Family courts during the FY24 4th Quarter.

218 cases were closed.

Clearance Rate is 87%

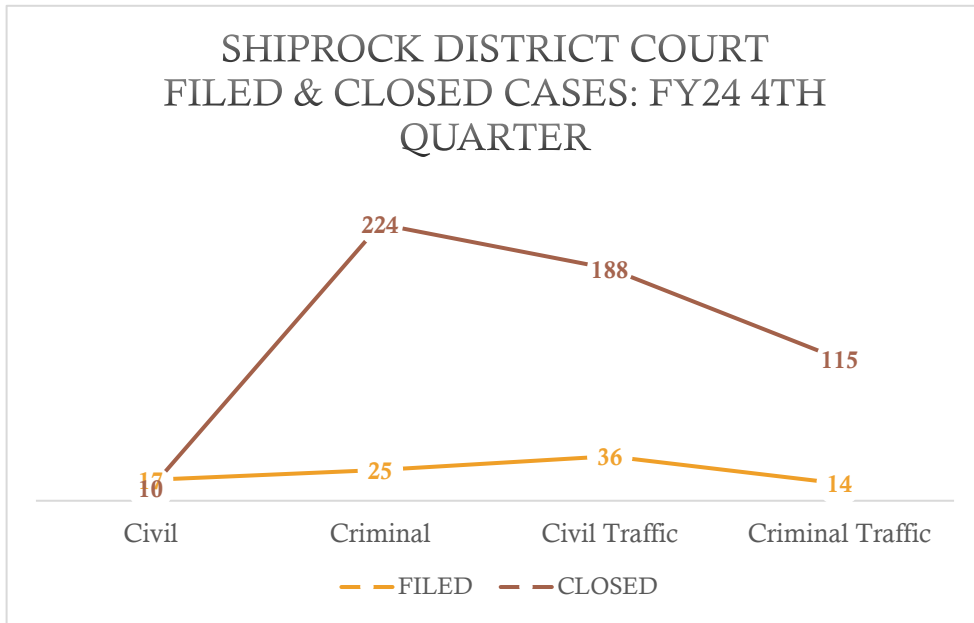


Ramah Judicial District has hired a Document Technician and an Office Technician. These new hires have resulted in Ramah Judicial District being fully staffed at the end of the 4th quarter.

The Law and Order Committee of the 25th Navajo Nation Council held public hearings to evaluate Judge Malcolm Laughing which was held on August 23, 2024.

The staff of the district court also participated in two staff development meetings, to help strengthen their teamwork within the court.

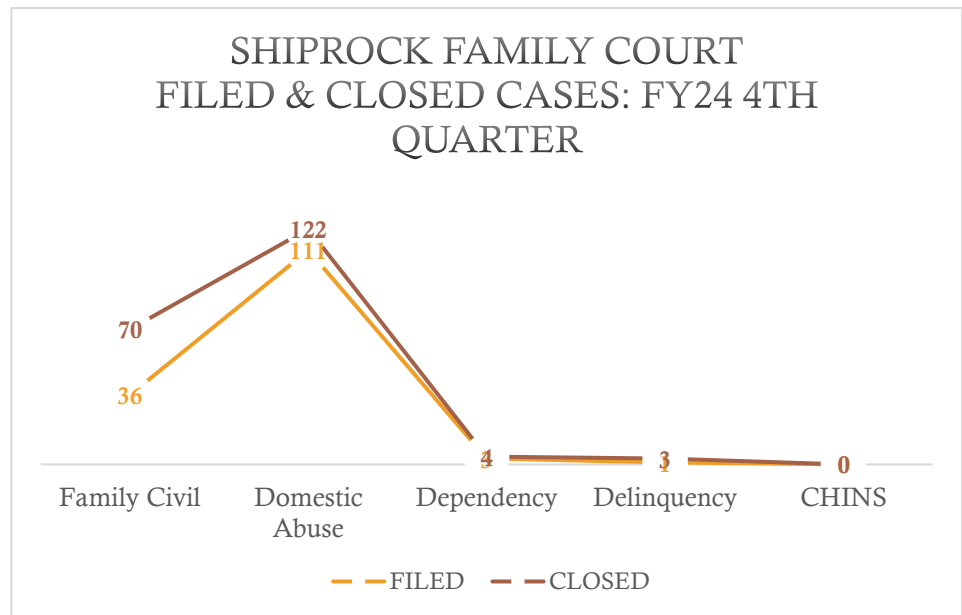
Shiprock Judicial District



243 cases were filed in both the Shiprock District and Family courts during the FY24 4th Quarter.

736 cases were closed.

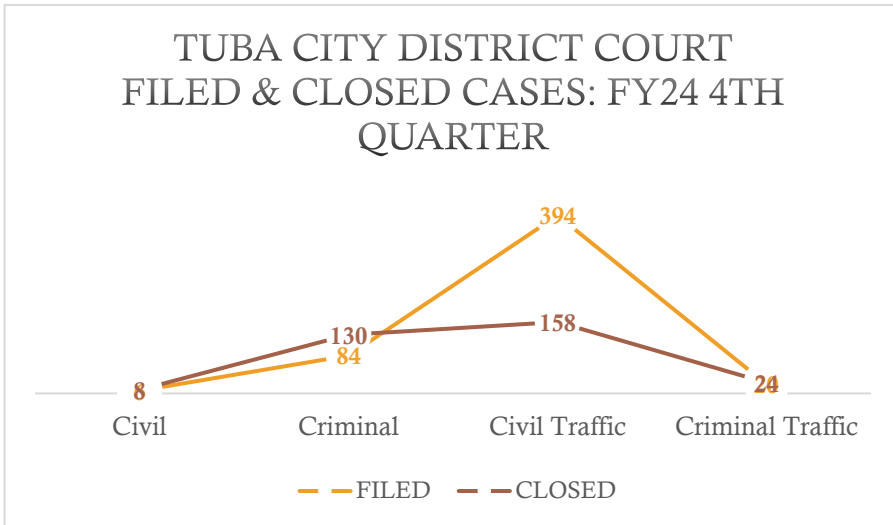
Clearance Rate is 303%



Shiprock Judicial District continues to work with other justice partners in the development of a permanent judicial facility.

The Judicial District provides court services through in person, telephonic, postal, fax and drop box methods, receiving over 5,000 inquiries.

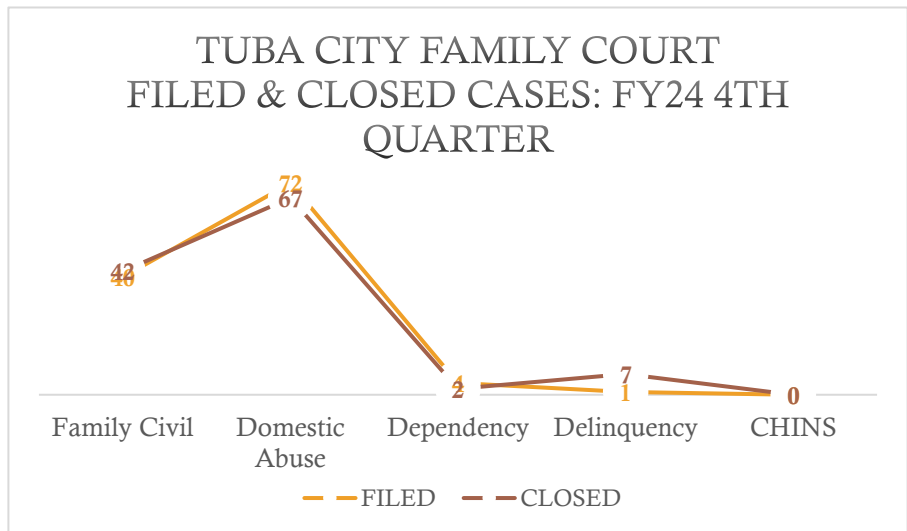
Tuba City Judicial District



621 cases were filed in both the Tuba City District and Family courts during the FY24 3rd Quarter.

438 cases were closed.

Clearance Rate is 71%



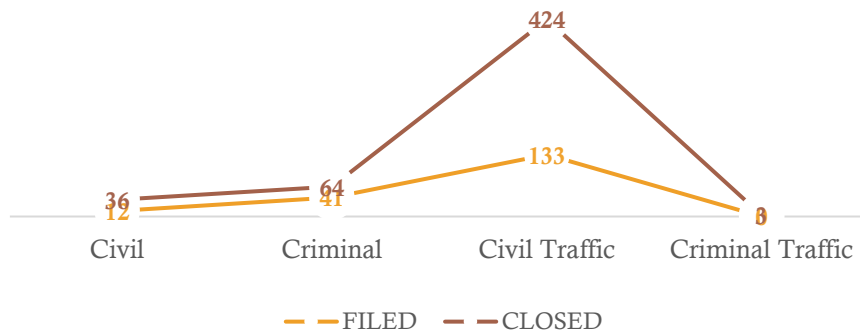
Tuba City Judicial District’s Court Administrator, Alice Huskie, retired after 33 years of dedicated service to the Judicial Branch.

On September 20, 2024, the Coconino County Courts reconvened at the Tuba City Judicial Court. This was the first time since the pandemic that the Coconino County Court hearing was held at the Tuba City Judicial District Court again. The next sessions are scheduled for April and September 2025.

The staff of the district court also participated in a staff development meeting held in Wheatfields, AZ, to help strengthen their teamwork within the court.

Window Rock Judicial District

WINDOW ROCK DISTRICT COURT
FILED & CLOSED CASES: FY24 4TH
QUARTER

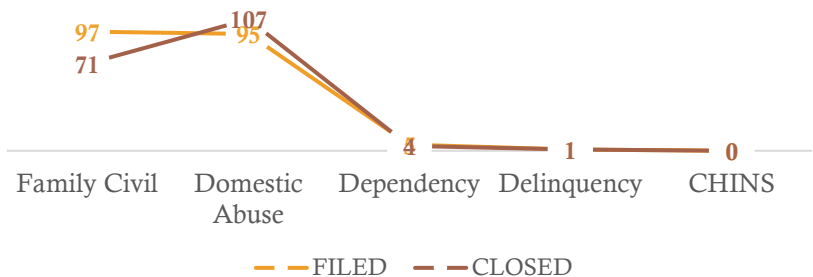


384 cases were filed in both the Window Rock District and Family courts during the FY24 3rd Quarter.

710 cases were closed.

**Clearance
Rate is 185%**

WINDOW ROCK FAMILY COURT
FILED & CLOSED CASES: FY24 4TH
QUARTER



Window Rock Judicial District, with the Administrative Office of the Courts, is finalizing the construction of its new court facility. The building project came back to surface in October 2023. It is approximately 90% complete and anticipated that the modular building should be delivered by the end of the year 2024.

The Window Rock Modular Building will be set up west of the United States Postal Office in Fort Defiance, AZ. Once the new modular building is set up, it can then immediately be opened to the public.

Work towards the Tsehootsoi Judicial/Public Safety Center has begun. Window Rock Judicial District will have a permanent building in the near future.

Navajo Nation Probation & Parole Services

Probation and Parole Services of the Navajo Nation is committed to enhancing community wellness and fostering *hozho* restoration. It is achieved through community-based supervision aimed at rehabilitating client-offenders. Probation prioritizes the involvement of families, communities, and relevant agencies.

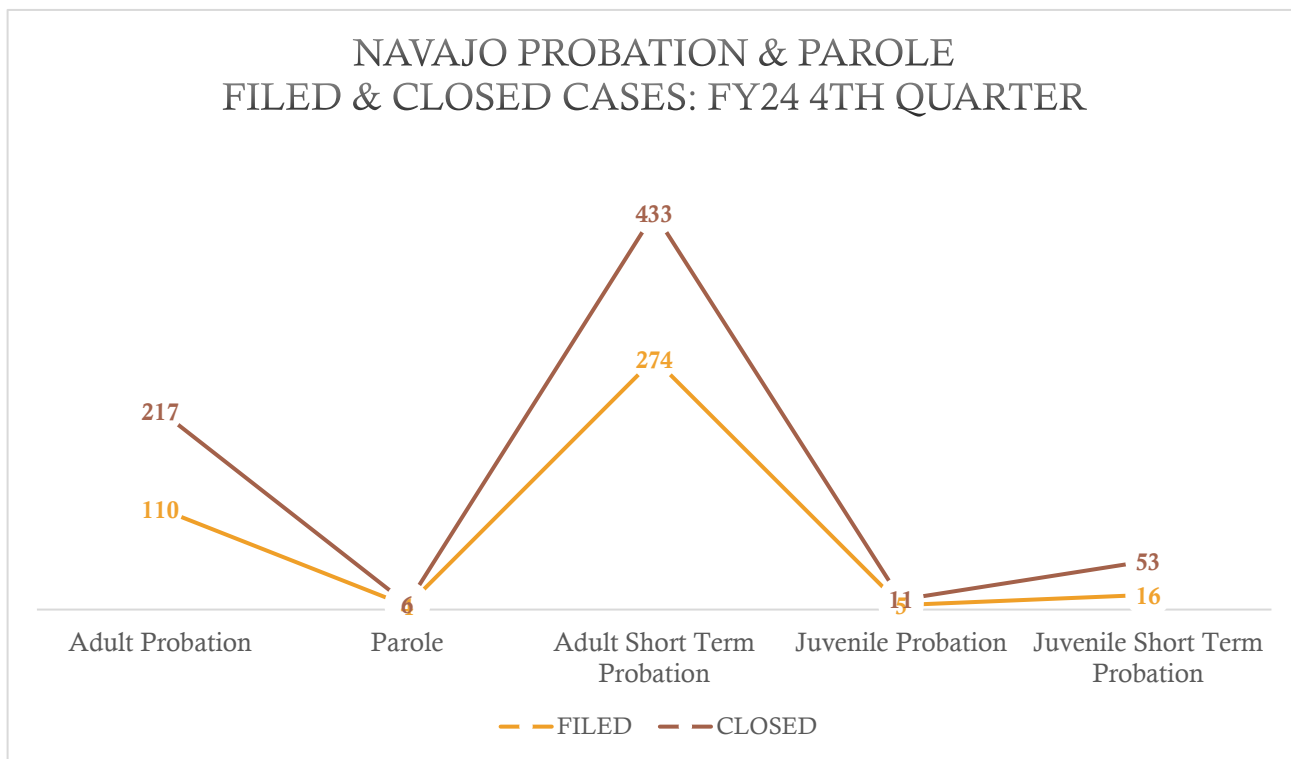
Restoration of *hozho*, accountability, personal responsibility, and community wellness are fundamental principles of traditional restorative justice. In Navajo justice, "restorative justice" literally means restoring justice in accordance with these principles. It involves engaging client-offenders, victims, and affected communities in seeking solutions that promote restoration and rebuilding.

Our justice system holds the responsibility of restoring *hozho* by providing necessary resources to rehabilitate offenders and reintegrate them into their communities, following traditional principles. This includes active communication with victims and advocates.

Probation and Parole Services offers programs designed to help client-offenders, their traditional support structures, and communities achieve crime-free and successful reintegration. Our approach emphasizes accountability, personal responsibility, and supports competence, self-worth, and self-improvement. Through rigorous risk assessment and supervision, we ensure public safety and facilitate client-offenders' compliance with court-imposed conditions and obligations.

Chief probation officer, Lucinda Yellowhair, met the goal of coordinating Navajo Nation staff development and training development to be able to provide four (4) progressive training sessions for staff. Chief Yellowhair had also filled four vacant probation officer positions. Two of them being at Dilkon, one in Chinle, and another in Tohajiilee/Alamo districts. She will also be conducting interviews for two more probation officers for the Pinon and Kayenta districts.

NAVAJO PROBATION & PAROLE FILED & CLOSED CASES: FY24 4TH QUARTER



Probation and Parole Services are long-term services based on court ordered services and not all cases should be cleared within one quarter.

409 cases were filed with Probation and Parole Services during the FY24 4th Quarter.

720 cases were closed or completed.

**Clearance Rate is
176%**

Probation and Parole staff have been proactive in participating in two Dine Action Plan meetings. The meetings consist of identifying solutions and recommendations to combat Nayee' (current day monsters) such as alcohol/drugs, domestic violence, mental health, and suicide. They have represented the Judicial Branch and PPS's direct services' efforts.

Administrative Office of the Courts

The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) serves as the central administrative body for the entire Navajo Nation Judicial Branch, which includes the Navajo Nation Courts, the Peacemaking Program, and Probation and Parole Services. It plays a pivotal role in ensuring that the branch operates smoothly by providing essential support across various functions, including human resources, construction management, facilities maintenance, and information technology.

Recently, the Judicial Branch welcomed Andy Thomas as the new Construction Project Manager, who is tasked with overseeing all construction-related projects within the branch. Key projects currently under his management include the construction of the Window Rock District Modular building, the development of the Kayenta Judicial Complex Center, and the upgrading of security systems at the Dilkon Judicial Complex. These projects are critical to improving infrastructure and enhancing security across the Judicial Branch.

In the 4th Quarter of Fiscal Year 2024, the AOC Human Resources Unit successfully filled 18 key positions within the Judicial Branch. Additionally, HR played a significant role in supporting the Office of the Chief Justice by facilitating evaluations for probationary judges and justices. This involved assisting with the preparation of materials for the Navajo Nation Council's Law and Order Committee during probationary hearings, ensuring a smooth process for these evaluations.

Looking ahead, the AOC is planning to restructure several of its internal units to better meet the evolving needs of the courts, programs, and the public. This reorganization aims to enhance operational efficiency and improve service delivery across the branch.

The AOC's Information Technology Unit has also been highly active, successfully completing over 500 IT service requests from various Judicial Branch entities across the Navajo Nation. These services have been critical in maintaining technological support for court operations.

Despite having only one staff member dedicated to facility maintenance, the AOC has managed to provide comprehensive maintenance services to all court and program facilities throughout the Navajo Nation. Additionally, the AOC has recently hired a custodian who is responsible for ensuring the cleanliness of the AOC offices, the Supreme Court, the Office of the Chief Justice, and the Peacemaking Program facilities. This addition has contributed to maintaining a clean and professional working environment for these key judicial offices.