
HASHKÉÉJÍ NAHAT'Á
(JUDICIAL BRANCH)
OF THE
NAVAJO NATION

FISCAL YEAR 2025
FOURTH QUARTER REPORT
JULY 1, 2025-SEPTEMBER 30, 2025

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NÁBINÁHAZLÁAGO

Comprehensive Approach

The Hashkééjį Nahat’á (Judicial Branch) of the Navajo Nation is realigning itself to its current Strategic Plan. The past quarter, and the past fiscal year, has brought much to light with the need to continue educating our people about their justice systems: Peacemaking and courts as well as Probation and Parole Services. By reinvigorating Navajo values and teachings through the Judicial Branch, we will be taking a comprehensive approach and focusing on improving services to the public.

Nábináhaazláago

A comprehensive approach to building public trust and confidence in our justice systems requires realigning Judicial Branch priorities. The success of our justice systems is measured by the Navajo people: the ability to rely upon our justice systems for integrity, independence, fairness, and respect. This includes centering Navajo teachings and values in our justice systems and developing Judicial Branch resources for the public. This comprehensive approach invests in building stronger relationships with the public, justice partners, and other participants in our justice system.

T’áá Shí Ádá’asht’į

True access to justice only comes with education and outreach to the public. The Judicial Branch initiative to create a self-help center that is focused on educating and informing the public on how to use their own justice systems is key to everyone having access to justice. Other key initiatives such as the Dził Yíjín Judicial District and Kayenta Judicial District’s continued outreach through the mobile courts are a prime example of how to fully engage Navajo people in their own justice systems. With the additional funding authorized by the Navajo Nation Council to specifically address probate and quiet title cases, the Judicial Districts will be working on developing critical initiatives to bring these specific cases to finality.

Enhancing Professionalism in the Workplace

Through workplace initiatives to improve our processes, encourage collaboration, advance technology and adopt best practices, we are revitalizing respect in our workplace. Our priorities of expanding judges’ excellence and leadership as well as upholding the highest ethical standards are key to serving the public. We are prioritizing initiatives that value our workplace, value professionalism, and the highest ethical standards – through improving technology, facilities, and reinvesting in our staff.

Eleanor Shirley, *Interim* Chief Justice
Office of the Chief Justice

STRATEGIC PLAN

VISION

It is our vision that the present judicial system, consisting of an adversarial-style tribal court system modeled on Anglo courts, a peacemaking system modeled on Diné original dispute resolution methods, and Probation and Parole Services, will fully embody the values and processes of the Navajo People, including family and clan-centered Navajo values. Our justice system as a whole will truly reflect the heart and soul of the Diné. It will be one that the People can recognize as their own and fully participate in the spirit of nábináhaazláago.

STRATEGIC PLAN

MISSION

The Judicial Branch will provide stability in the Navajo Nation government by providing court, peacemaking, and probation and parole services, to adjudicate cases, resolve disputes, rehabilitate individuals and families, restore harmony, educate the public, agencies, services and other governments in Diné bi beenahaz' áanii, and protect persons and property pursuant to Navajo Nation laws, customs, traditions, and applicable federal laws. Pursuant to Diné bi beenahaz' áanii, the Judicial Branch will carefully develop a justice system that fully embodies the traditional values and processes of the Navajo People.

Grand Opening of the Window Rock Judicial District Court

The Judicial Branch proudly celebrated the grand opening of the new Window Rock Judicial District Court and Probation and Parole Services in Fort Defiance, Arizona. For nearly a decade, the staff operated without a permanent facility. The new courthouse and offices now provide a space that enhances access to a fair and respectful administration of justice. This milestone symbolizes stability, progress, and the Judicial Branch's ongoing commitment to serving the Navajo people with excellence and integrity.

Judicial Facilities Progress

Following the success of the Window Rock opening, construction of the Kayenta Judicial District building continues with an anticipated opening in next calendar year. The facility will expand access to court and program services in the northwestern region of the Navajo Nation.

In addition, three major construction projects: the Peacemaking Program, Aneth Judicial District, and Ramah Judicial District, entered the contracting phases for construction or design, marking tangible progress in the Judicial Branch's long-term infrastructure development. Together, these projects demonstrate the Branch's commitment to modern, culturally grounded facilities that strengthen our justice systems across the Nation.

Peacemaking Groundbreaking - A Milestone for the Judicial Branch

The groundbreaking ceremony for the new Peacemaking building marks a historic step in advancing traditional and community-based justice. Rooted in Diné Bi Beehaz'áanii, Peacemaking emphasizes restoration, balance, and harmony as a traditional means of resolving conflict. This facility will be first of its kind not only on the Navajo Nation - a space for community Peacemakers, the public, and stakeholders to learn and utilize traditional methods of dispute resolution. This initiative aligns with key goals of the Judicial Branch Strategic Plan, enhancing accessibility, cultural relevance, and infrastructure for the benefit of the Navajo people and future generations.

Case Certification and Backlog Reduction

The Judicial Branch successfully completed the 2024 case certification process at the beginning of this year, ensuring accurate records across all districts and continued progress in reducing case backlogs. Judges and staff conducted thorough reviews of both physical and electronic case files, demonstrating diligence and accountability. The results show measurable improvements in court operations, reflecting greater efficiency, timely case resolution, and enhanced service to pro se litigants, attorneys, and the public. The courts and programs continue to improve efficiency while maintaining independence and high ethical standards.

Advancing E-Filing and Technology

Under the Chief Justice's direction, the Judicial Branch is developing an electronic filing (e-filing) system to improve how cases are submitted, tracked, and managed. This initiative will streamline processes, reduce paperwork, and enhance accessibility for litigants and attorneys. E-filing is a major step toward modern, efficient court operations and is expected to begin implementation by the end of calendar year 2026. This project represents the Branch's commitment to innovation, transparency, and responsive service to the Navajo people.

Spend Down Plan for Federal Funds - Fiscal Accountability

The Judicial Branch is implementing a spend down plan to address previously unspent federal funds, ensuring compliance and full utilization of resources. The plan addresses prior fiscal years federal funds that were held in abeyance by the Office of the Controller. Working with the Office of Management & Budget and the Office of the Controller, the Branch created a streamlined financial plan that supports staffing for Judicial Hearing Officers and Document Technicians. These actions strengthen fiscal accountability, eliminate underutilized funds, and direct resources where they have the greatest impact. The plan demonstrates responsible financial stewardship and a commitment to operational integrity.

T'áá Shí Ádá'asht'í Bá Hooghan - Access to Justice Initiative

The Judicial Branch launched T'áá Shí Ádá'asht'í Bá Hooghan, an access to justice initiative designed to help individuals prepare their cases through self-help tools, legal forms, and legal informational guidance. The initiative will educate the public on both court and Peacemaking options, empowering them to make informed decisions about their cases. The pilot program will begin in Window Rock, focusing on probate and quiet title cases this fiscal year. The goal will be to expand to all judicial districts, with Judicial Navigators providing remote and in-person assistance. This first-of-its-kind initiative in Indian Country strengthens access to justice, reduces burdens on court staff, and builds public trust through culturally responsive and wrap-around services.

Investing in Our Staff and Strengthening the Judicial Branch

Significant investments were made to strengthen staff expertise and organizational capacity across the Judicial Branch. Under the leadership of the Chief Justice, the Judicial Branch continues to invest in its workforce to ensure excellence in service to the Navajo people. Program managers are developing individualized training plans to build specialized expertise, promote professional growth, and strengthen operational continuity.

From July to September, eight key positions were filled, including the Financial Director and Court Solicitor, enhancing administrative capacity and efficiency. The Interim Chief Justice also identified key statutory mechanisms to recall former judges/justices to assist in case backlog.

Together, these efforts reflect a strong commitment to staff development, organizational capacity, and effective judicial service for the Navajo Nation.

The Judicial Branch still faces key vacant judicial positions. Large judicial districts such as Window Rock, Crownpoint, Tuba City, Shiprock and Chinle need at least two judges - currently all of these judges are covering multiple positions. Some of the judges are also faced with covering more than one judicial district. This is a critical juncture for our justice system as our judges and staff continue to bring down the number of backlog cases, but face increasing numbers of new cases.

KEY TERMS IN THE JUDICIARY CASE MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS

Clearance Rate

The ratio of outgoing cases (disposed) to incoming cases (filed) over a period of time, expressed as a percentage. A rate of 100% or higher indicates the court is keeping up with its caseload.

Case Backlog

A case that has been pending in the court for more than one calendar year. During the annual case certification process, each court does a manual count of all cases to identify which cases have been filed and not disposed of within a calendar year time period. This count does not include cases filed during the current calendar year.

Pending Cases

A court case is one that has been filed but is not yet disposed of, meaning it is still open and active until a final judgment is reached. This includes cases filed in the calendar year and backlog cases.

Court Caseload

The total number of cases that the court is handling within a specific time period. It includes both newly filed cases and backlog cases, and can be used to measure workload, staff needs, and the efficiency of the judicial system.

Case Certification Process

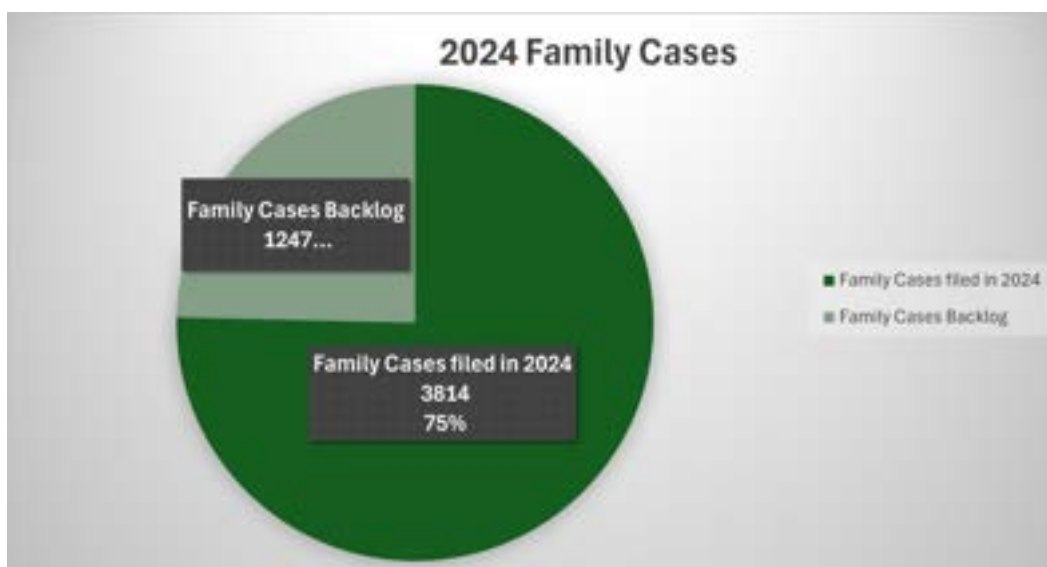
The following pages addressing court backlog is based upon the past two years of case certification. This process requires each court to manually count each case, identifying cases filed more than a calendar year prior, and demonstrate how the court expects to address current backlog caseloads. The case certification process is completed in February of the subsequent year: for example, Case Certification Calendar Year 2023 was completed in February, 2024 and Case Certification Calendar Year 2024 was completed in February, 2025. The Judicial Branch restarted this process in 2023 to assist the courts and programs in addressing the backlog of cases.

BACKLOG REDUCTION- FAMILY COURT CASES

In 2023, the Judicial Branch faced a backlog of **1,894 Family Court Cases**.



In 2024, the Judicial Branch reduced the Family Court Case backlog to **1,247**, a reduction of **34%**



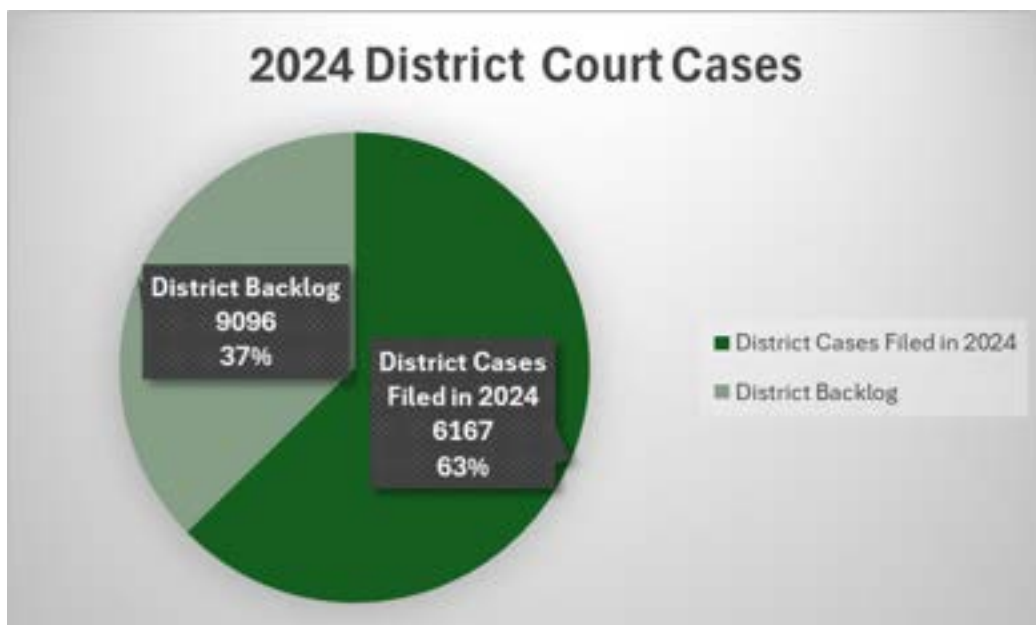
The case certification that is completed on an annual calendar basis is showing a downward trend in backlog of cases over the last two year period.

BACKLOG REDUCTION- DISTRICT COURT CASES

In 2023, the Judicial Branch Faced a backlog of **16,297 District Court Cases**.



In 2024, the Judicial Branch reduced the District Court Case backlog to **9,096**, a reduction of **44%**



The case certification that is completed on an annual calendar basis is showing a downward trend in backlog of cases over the last two year period.



Peacemaking

The goal of Peacemaking is returning to Hózhó. When there is disharmony or Anáhóót'í' with our children and families, among adults, or in our community, it is our personal responsibility to restore harmony and balance. We must learn to resolve our own problems and teach our children Traditional Diné values that will be a positive influence in their lives.

Peacemaking emphasizes that our Diné people solve their own problems by talking it out and finding justice, rather than depending on the courts. This concept is based on the Traditional teaching: "T'áá hó ájít'éego". Teaching traditional Dine values to our younger generation is vital to the well-being of the Diné. Youth engagement in Peacemaking is a high priority.

Priorities:

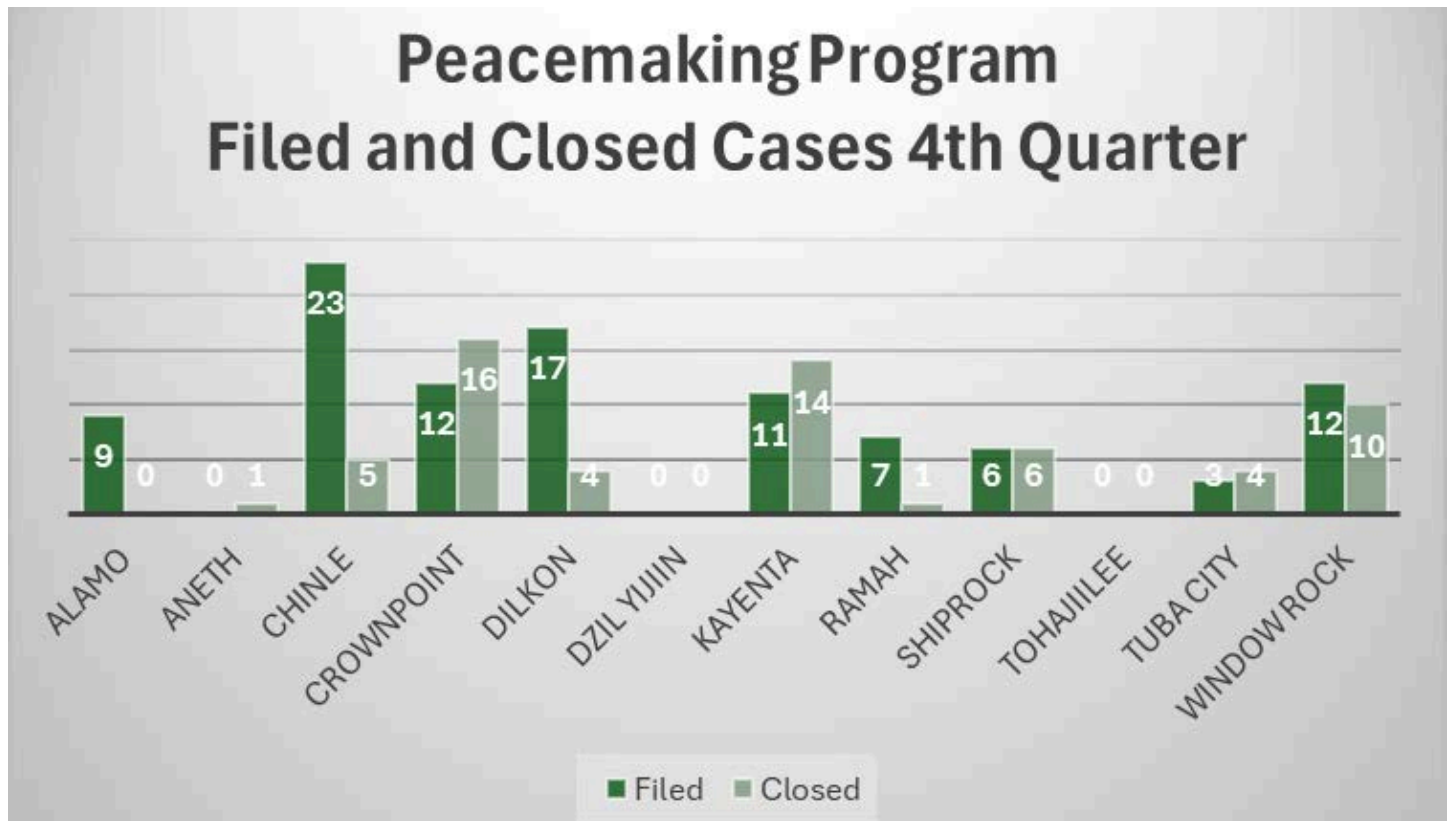
- Restorative Justice
- Traditional Teachings – Language & Culture
- Inclusiveness of all Faiths / Faith-Based
- Children & Family Hózhó
- Status Accorded to Elders
- Vulnerable Adults
- Extreme Family Discord

A major milestone this quarter was the groundbreaking ceremony for the Peacemaking Administration Building, achieved through the tireless efforts of Judicial Branch staff and the support of the Law and Order and the Budget & Finance Committees. A traditional hózhó-jí ceremony was conducted, and a gish was used for breaking ground, to plant the seed for the program's continued growth for present and future generations. The new facility will serve as the foundation of the program, a place where Diné cultural teachings can be shared to keep Diné values and traditions thriving.

Several key initiatives are coming to completion, including finalizing the Peacemaking Program Mission and Vision, the Plan of Operation, and a Memorandum of Understanding with the Coconino County Attorney's Office. The proposed MOU recognizes the importance of culturally relevant services to Navajo people in Coconino County justice system and builds strong collaboration between our two sovereigns utilizing restorative justice. Peacemaking continues to develop and strengthen partnerships through the redevelopment of its Peacemaking Guidelines and Memorandum of Understanding with local schools to enhance service delivery.

Supporting staff wellbeing and developing professionalism, remains a priority. By providing opportunities to gain both traditional and western knowledge through program-led projects, the Peacemaking Program ensures continued development of our staff. Efforts to streamline processes and create more efficient systems is key to the continued development of the program.

PEACEMAKING PROGRAM



97

PENDING CASES

The Peacemaking Program is unique as cases are opened based upon court, agency, and school referrals as well as walk-ins.

61%

CLEARANCE RATE

During the Fiscal Year 2025 4th Quarter, a total of 100 new cases were filed with the Peacemaking Program; 61 cases were closed.

Probation and Parole Services

Navajo Nation Probation and Parole Services play a vital role in enhancing community safety and supporting rehabilitation across the Judicial Branch. Their work focuses on accountability, treatment, and reintegration to reduce future criminal behavior and strengthen families.

Purpose:

- Enhance public safety by reducing criminal acts among convicted offenders
- Conduct needs assessments for adults, juveniles, diversion participants, and their families
- Provide case management, supervision, and referrals for treatment and counseling
- Promote reintegration of clients as law-abiding, productive members of society
- Perform indigency determinations for court proceedings

Objectives for Next Quarter

- Identify and plan FY2026 training programs.
- Provide leadership training for the management team.
- Conduct case reviews in preparation for annual evaluations.

Operational Improvements

Significant progress was made on departmental operations. Senior Probation Officer, Joann Holyan-Terry, with the subject matter expert team began revising and updating the JustWare User Guide for Probation and Parole Services, while the management team continued revising the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) Manual, with finalization anticipated by year-end. These initiatives focus on ethical considerations, technology advancements, and professionalism.

Training and Staff Development

Training was a major accomplishment this quarter. All probation staff successfully completed the annual defensive tactics training to ensure officer safety, and staff participated in mental wellness and self-care training. These trainings are critical to improved services and wellness of our staff.

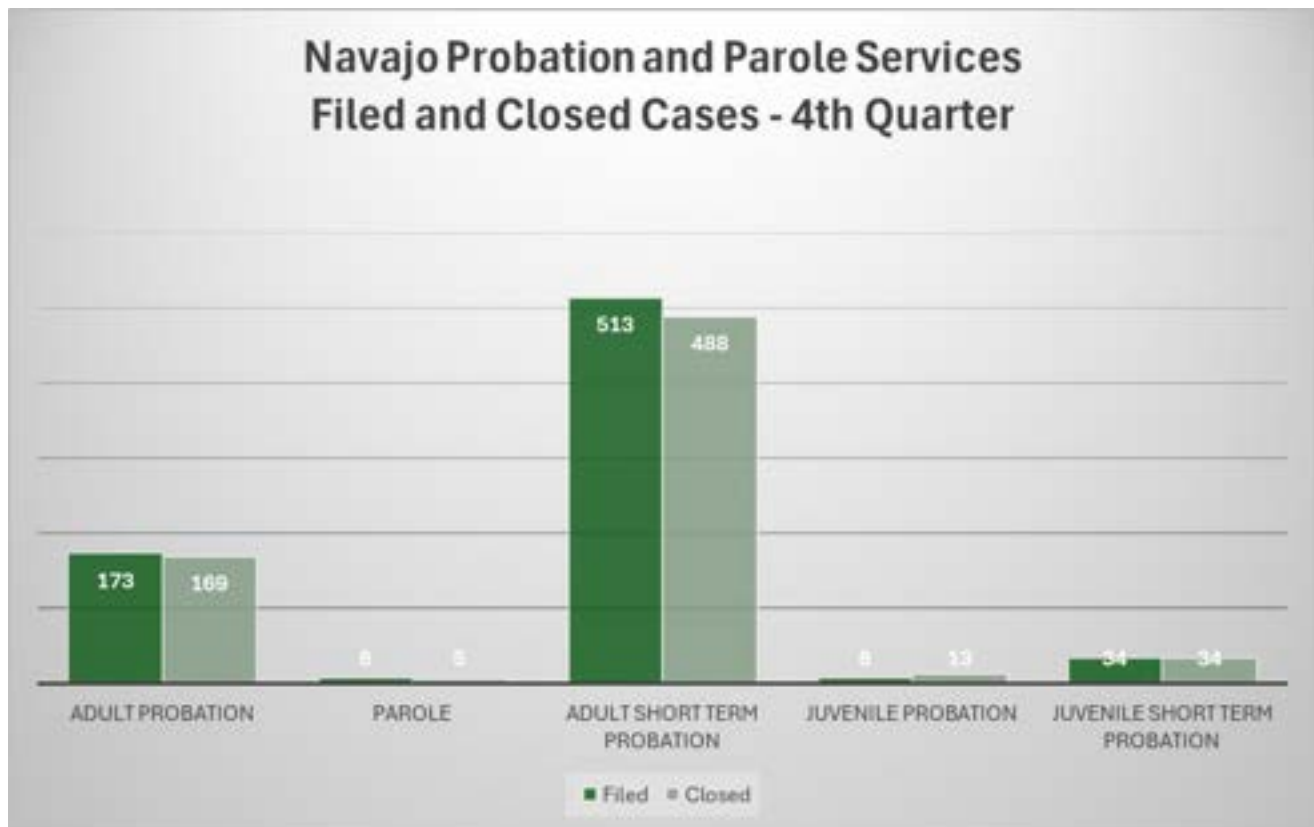
Leadership and Supervision

To address increased workload and responsibilities, Chief Probation Officer Yellowhair appointed Genevieve Curley as Acting Senior Probation Officer to supervise the Western Region districts of Kayenta, Chinle, and Tuba City, allowing the Chief to focus on administrative priorities.

Case Management and Quality Assurance

The management team conducted audits and case reviews, identifying areas for improvement, ongoing training, and operational adjustments to ensure proactive and efficient case management focused on restorative client care. Bi-annual reviews are planned to maintain consistency and quality. Chief Probation Officer Yellowhair continues to lead the department with a focus on collaboration, teamwork, and strategic growth initiatives.

PROBATION AND PAROLE SERVICES



930

PENDING CASES

The Probation and Parole Services provides short and long term probation and parole services.

96%

CLEARANCE RATE

During the Fiscal Year 2025 4th Quarter, a total of 736 new cases were filed with the Probation and Parole Services; 709 cases were closed.