

A REFERENCE GUIDE to the
**NORTH CAROLINA
JUDICIAL BRANCH**





THE MISSION *of the*
NORTH CAROLINA JUDICIAL BRANCH

TO PROTECT AND PRESERVE THE RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES
OF ALL THE PEOPLE AS GUARANTEED BY THE CONSTITUTIONS AND
LAWS OF THE UNITED STATES AND NORTH CAROLINA
BY PROVIDING A FAIR, INDEPENDENT, AND ACCESSIBLE FORUM
FOR THE JUST, TIMELY, AND ECONOMICAL RESOLUTION
OF THEIR LEGAL AFFAIRS.

ELECTED OFFICIALS *of the* NORTH CAROLINA JUDICIAL BRANCH

The North Carolina Judicial Branch includes about 555 independently elected judicial officials. These officials are:

- Justices of the Supreme Court
- Judges of the Court of Appeals, District Court, and Superior Court
- Clerks of Superior Court
- District Attorneys

The Judicial Branch has over 7,600 employees located in all 100 counties and 240 facilities across the state.

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OUR STATE'S LEADERS *Judicial Branch*

Chief Justice

In addition to presiding over the sessions of the Supreme Court of North Carolina, the chief justice has numerous administrative duties as head of the Judicial Branch, including appointing the director and assistant director of the Administrative Office of the Courts, designating the chief judge of the Court of Appeals and a chief district court judge for each district court district, creating the schedule of superior court sessions and assigning superior court judges to those sessions, transferring district court judges to other districts for temporary or specialized duty, appointing the chief administrative law judge of the Office of Administrative Hearings, and either serving on or appointing representatives of the Judicial Branch to serve on commissions.





TYPES *of* COURT

Appellate Division



The Supreme Court building is located at 2 East Morgan Street.

Supreme Court

The Supreme Court of North Carolina is the state's highest court, and there is no further appeal from its decisions on matters of state law. It is made up of the chief justice, who also serves as the head of the North Carolina Judicial Branch, and six associate justices. Each justice serves an eight-year term. The Supreme Court has no jury and makes no determinations of fact, but considers whether error occurred at trial or in judicial interpretation of the law.



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TYPES *of* COURT

Appellate Division

Court of Appeals

The Court of Appeals is the state's intermediate appellate court. The court has 15 judges who serve eight-year terms and hear cases in panels of three. The court is led by a chief judge, who is appointed by the chief justice of the Supreme Court of North Carolina. The Court of Appeals reviews the proceedings that occurred in the trial courts for errors of law or legal procedure. Most of the court's sessions are held in Raleigh, but individual panels sometimes meet in other locations throughout North Carolina.



The Court of Appeals building is located at 1 West Morgan Street.

Like the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeals decides only questions of law – not questions of fact. Its decisions are printed in the bound North Carolina Court of Appeals reports and posted online at appellate.NCcourts.org at the same site as opinions of the Supreme Court. Both appellate courts are located in downtown Raleigh.



TYPES *of* COURT

Trial Division

Superior Court Division

Unlike the appellate division that decides only questions of law when a party appeals a case, the superior and district court divisions are the trial court divisions that hold trials to determine the facts of cases. The superior court division consists of the superior court, which is the court with general trial jurisdiction. This court “sits” (holds court) at least twice a year in each county of the state. In the busiest counties, several sessions may be held concurrently each week.





TYPES *of* COURT

Trial Division

District Court Division

Like the superior court division, the state is divided into district court districts for electoral purposes and administrative purposes. A map of the district court judicial districts is available at [NCCourts.gov](https://www.nccourts.gov). Also like the superior court, the district court sits in the county seat of each county. It may sit in certain other cities and towns if authorized by the General Assembly. Most counties have only one seat of court, but a few counties have several. Each administrative district court district has a chief district court judge who manages the administrative duties of the court.



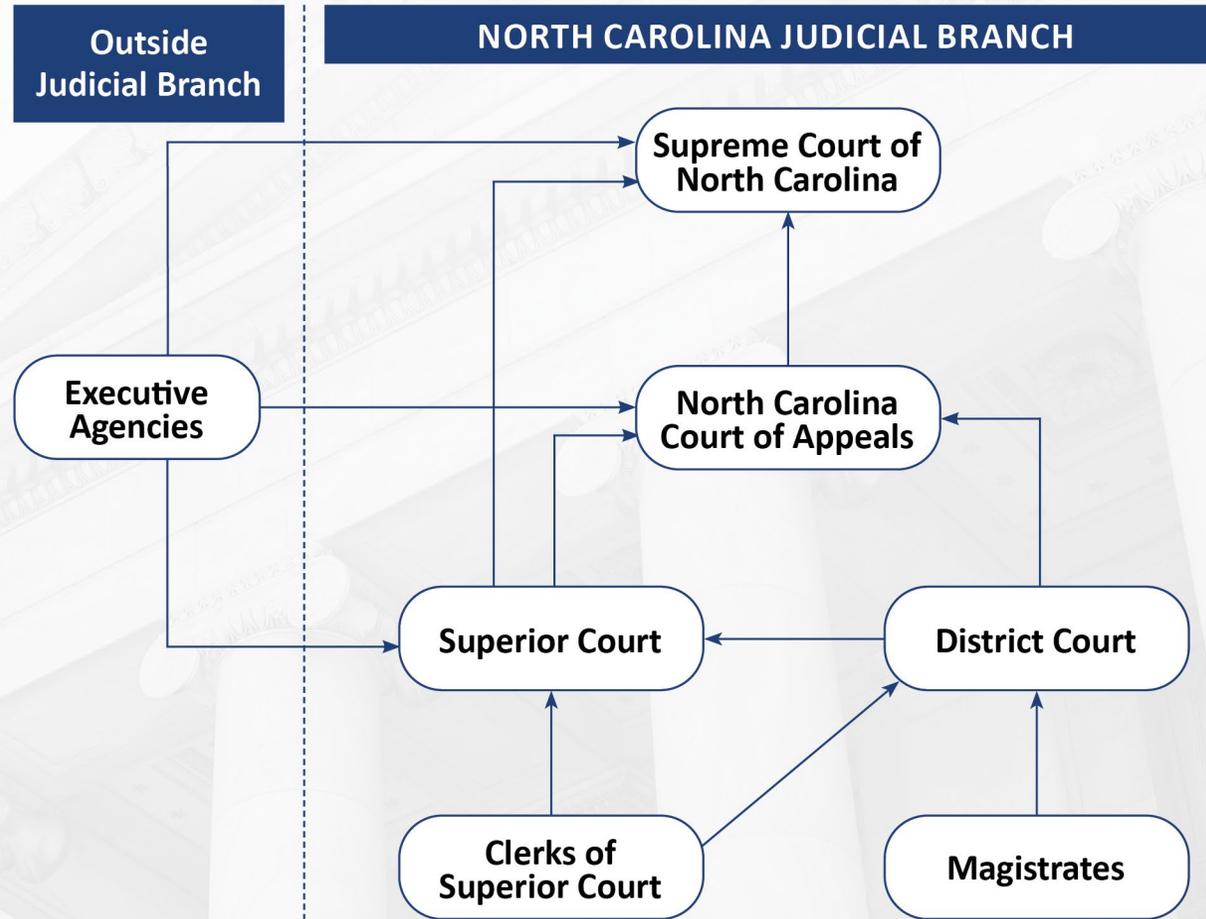
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NCAOC

The North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC) provides services to help North Carolina's unified court system operate more efficiently and effectively, taking into account each courthouse's diverse needs, caseloads, and available resources. The NCAOC's approach is to apply professional expertise consistently and uniformly in the best interest of the court system. NCAOC is intently focused on expanding court programs and services to expand access to justice. Learn more at [NCcourts.gov](https://www.nccourts.gov).



COURT STRUCTURE *and* ROUTES *of* APPEAL



North Carolina's unified court system handles over 2 million cases each year; cases that help keep our citizens safe, our economy vibrant, and our rights and liberties secure.

STATEWIDE CASE FILINGS FY 2024

	FILINGS
Civil District	195,216
Civil Magistrate	208,801
Civil Superior	20,593
TOTAL CIVIL	424,610
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Infractions	324,118
Criminal District	1,121,915
Criminal Superior	81,614
TOTAL CRIMINAL	1,527,647
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TOTAL ESTATES	86,390
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TOTAL SPECIAL PROCEEDINGS	125,384
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TOTAL FILINGS	2,164,031



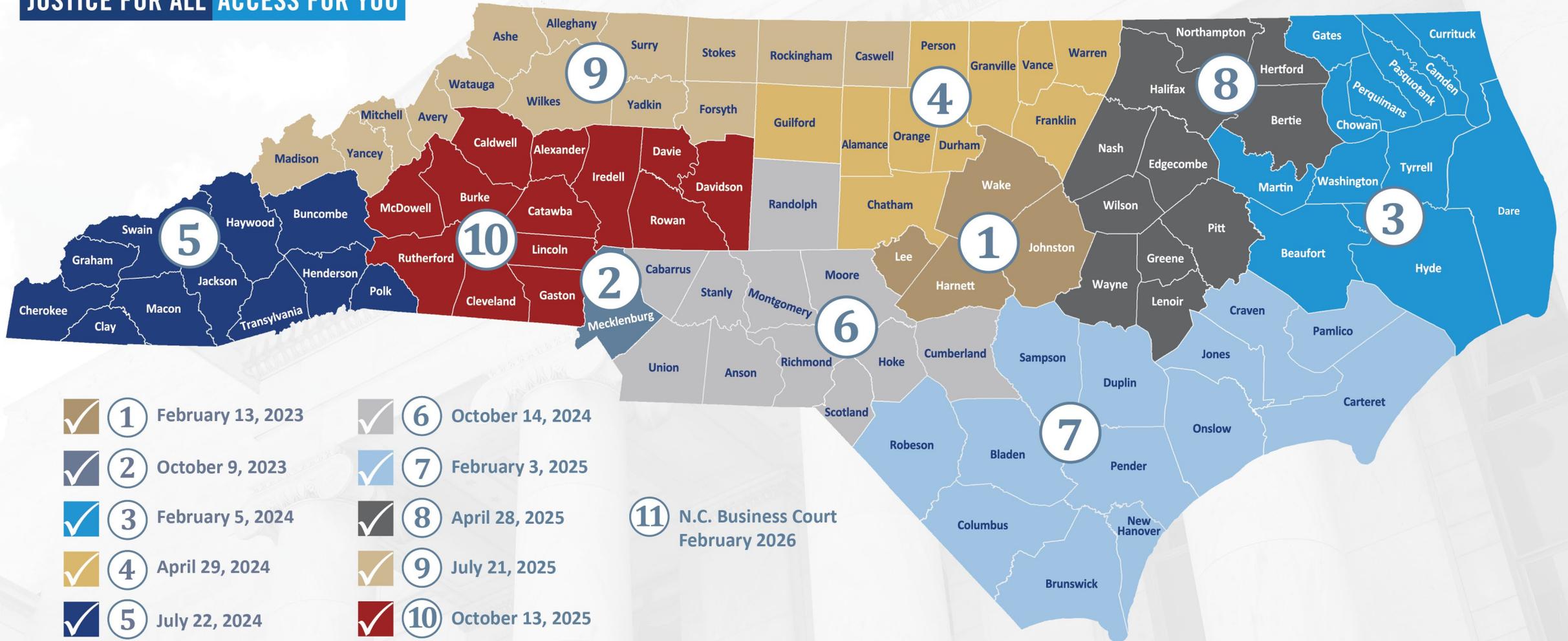


CURRENT INITIATIVES



eCourts

JUSTICE FOR ALL ACCESS FOR YOU





24/7 ELECTRONIC ACCESS BENEFITS ALL NORTH CAROLINIANS

- Provides 24/7 statewide service to judges, magistrates, district attorneys, clerks, law enforcement, attorneys, and the public – across rural and urban areas
- Small business owners (after-hours access)
- Law enforcement officers (remote appearances)
- Rural North Carolinians (reduced travel to courthouses)
- Victims of domestic violence (reduces the emotional trauma of in-person appearance)
- Sheriffs and corrections officers (inmates appearing virtually reduces security risks and transportation costs)
- Families (remote appearances for children and guardians ad litem in custody disputes)
- Doctors and expert witnesses (remote appearances means less time waiting in court and cost reduction)
- Attorneys (increased availability of records and ease of case management)
- Judicial officials (swifter administration of justice)

NCCOURTS.GOV/SERVICES STAY CONNECTED



PORTAL: FREE RECORDS AND DATA SEARCH

- Open to lawyers, law enforcement and the public
- Free search; no account required
- NC users are averaging over 5 million searches per month
- Available at nccourts.gov/portal



Portal

- Search free 24/7
- No registration required
- Use your mobile device

NCCOURTS.GOV/PORTAL



GUIDE AND FILE

- Free online document preparation tool available 24/7
- 120,000+ interviews completed, 90% satisfaction in surveys
- Provides Help Center support for users by chat, phone, email
- Assistance supported for these actions and more:
 - Domestic violence protective orders
 - Speeding reduction or dismissal
 - Small Claims, money owed, repossession of property
 - Petition to proceed as indigent
 - Adult guardianship
 - Probate
 - Requests for relief from fines and fees

The advertisement is a vertical rectangular graphic with a dark blue border. It is divided into three horizontal sections. The top section features a photograph of a man with glasses and a grey t-shirt looking at his smartphone. To the left of the photo is a white rounded rectangle containing the text 'Guide&File' in a dark blue font, followed by a smaller line of text: 'Creating court filings is easier than ever with free step-by-step assistance from Guide & File'. The middle section features a photograph of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a yellow top, also looking at her smartphone. To the left of the photo is a white rounded rectangle containing a numbered list of three steps: '1 Answer online questions to prepare the case filing', '2 Automatically create legal documents for free', and '3 File documents with the clerk of court (eFiling available for select case types)'. The bottom section is a solid dark blue horizontal bar with the text 'NCCOURTS.GOV/GUIDE&FILE' in white, uppercase letters.

Guide&File

Creating court filings is easier than ever with free step-by-step assistance from Guide & File

- 1 Answer online questions to prepare the case filing
- 2 Automatically create legal documents for free
- 3 File documents with the clerk of court (eFiling available for select case types)

NCCOURTS.GOV/GUIDE&FILE





Empowers the public with electronic search and filing.

Electronic Filings Accepted:
6.3 million+



Replaces paper records with online access to justice.

Sheets of Paper Saved:
24 million+



Saves countless trips to the courthouse.

Registered for Elevated Access:
16,268 Attorneys,
Law Enforcement,
DV Agencies



Delivers online access to case events and court dates.

Monthly Portal Searches:
5.5 million+



Integrates system applications and processes statewide

Criminal Processes Issued:
2.6 million+

eCitations Issued:
2.9 million+

eWarrants Registered Users:
47,694



eCourts
Guide & File

Creating court filings is easier than ever with free step-by-step assistance from Guide & File.

Guided Filing Interviews Completed:
120,602



SAFE BABIES COURT

- Specialty court program seeking to expedite permanence for children aged 0-3.
- Initial pilot launched in July 2024 comprising New Hanover, Mitchell, and Yancey counties.
- Pilot expanded to Avery, Brunswick, Durham, Madison, McDowell, and Rutherford counties.
- Currently serving 76 children among 47 families.
- Early data showing a reduction in time to permanent placement.



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JURY IMPROVEMENTS

Juror Payment Cards

- Replace paper checks mailed via USPS.
- Jurors receive payment the same day after completing service.
- Funds can be transferred to a bank account.
- Currently available in 84 counties.

Online Jury Excusal

- Secure online portal for jurors to submit excusal requests.
- Expedites response time from clerk and chief district court judge's office.
- Currently available in 46 counties.



MORE INFORMATION

Learn more about North Carolina's state government at [NC.gov](https://www.nc.gov).

Learn more about the North Carolina Judicial Branch
and court system at [NCcourts.gov](https://www.nccourts.gov).

Learn more about North Carolina Judicial Branch Speakers Bureau
and civics education resources at [NCcourts.gov/learn](https://www.nccourts.gov/learn).

justice for all





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NC courts



North Carolina Administrative
Office of the Courts



All Things Judicial