

SRLN Brief: How Many SRLs? (SRLN 2019)



National SRL Estimates from srln.org

In the United States, civil legal disputes are handled in more than 15,000 courts, in a patchwork of jurisdictions among state, county, municipal authorities. Civil courts handle cases such as divorce, custody, child support, guardianship, probate, housing, and consumer. They consistently report through anecdotal evidence and sampling that 75% or more of their cases have at least one self-represented litigant (SRL). While the National Center for State Courts has developed a counting methodology for the courts, it is extremely difficult to implement for a variety of reasons, with the most notable being it requires a customization of a court's case management system. See http://www.courtstatistics.org/Other-Pages/SRL_Main.aspx

Therefore, to gain understand the scope of the SRL presence in the courts, we must rely on a combination of state summaries (see for example [NCSC 2006 SRL Stats](#))

[Summary, NCSC's 2015 Landscape of Civil Litigation in State Courts](#), or [2018 Alaska Justice for All Story Map](#)) and extrapolation of aggregate national data. The following is an analysis of 2012 national data from the [NCSC Court Statistics Project](#), which yields results consistent with the state level reports.

**Total Incoming Caseloads,
by Case Category and Tier, 2012 (in Millions)**

Case Category	Tier			Total
	Single	General	Limited	
Civil	2.4	6.0	9.5	17.9
Domestic Relations	0.8	3.8	0.6	5.2
Criminal	2.4	3.6	13.4	19.3
Juvenile	0.2	1.1	0.3	1.7
Traffic	9.8	3.2	39.0	51.9
Total Incoming	15.6	17.7	62.8	96.1

Chart is from page 8 of the NCSC's annual publication *Examining the Work of the State Courts* (2012)

http://www.courtstatistics.org/~media/Microsites/Files/CSP/NCSC_EWSC_WEB_NOV_25_14.as

Based on the above chart, civil + domestic relations = 17.9 + 5.2 = 23.10 million cases. Local sampling often shows that 25% of these cases have lawyers on both side, 50% have a lawyer on one side, and 25% have no lawyers. Traffic cases are slightly different in that there are often multiple citations for each person, and one side is the government. This analysis is based on an estimate of 4 citations per person, which results in 12.98 individuals per traffic stop represented in the 51.9 traffic cases filed. Applying these percentage to the total number of cases yields the following estimates in millions:

Civil cases w/2 lawyers	Civil cases w/ one lawyer	Civil cases w/no lawyer	Traffic Cases	Totals
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# of cases	5.775	11.55	5.775	51.9	75.00
# of litigants	11.55	23.10	11.55	12.98	59.18
# of SRLs	0	11.55	11.55	12.98	36.08
Percentage overall of SRLs	0%	50%	25%	100%	61%

While these numbers are estimates, and even assuming for argument significant margins of error, SRLs are without dispute the majority user of the court and impact its work significantly. With at least 75% of all civil cases including one SRL, the application of the innovations advanced by the SRLN become essential to improve access to justice.

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Topics

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Files

[National SRL Estimates - Oct 2015 srln.pdf](#)

[NCSC 2006 SRL stats summary.pdf](#)

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