



NORTH CAROLINA'S GENERAL COURT *of* JUSTICE: AN OVERVIEW *of* THE STATE COURT SYSTEM



Under the North Carolina Constitution, the Judicial Branch is established as an equal branch of state government with the Legislative and Executive branches. North Carolina's court system, called the General Court of Justice, is a state-operated and state-funded unified court system. The General Court of Justice consists of three divisions: appellate, superior court, and district court.



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

APPELLATE DIVISION

SUPREME COURT

The Supreme Court is the state's highest court. This court has a Chief Justice and six associate justices, who sit as a body and decide cases appealed from lower courts, including the Court of Appeals. The Supreme Court has no jury, and it makes no determination of fact; rather it considers only questions of law, which means resolving a party's claim that there were errors in legal procedures or in judicial interpretation of the law in the trial court or the Court of Appeals.



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

COURT OF APPEALS

The Court of Appeals is an intermediate appellate court that was created to relieve the Supreme Court of a portion of its heavy caseload. Like the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeals decides only questions of law. It has 15 judges, who sit in panels of three to hear cases. One of the judges is the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals, who is appointed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.



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, and empanel juries to determine the facts of cases.

Superior courts hear cases involving felony crimes, civil cases involving \$25,000 or more, and appeals from district courts. 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.

justice for all



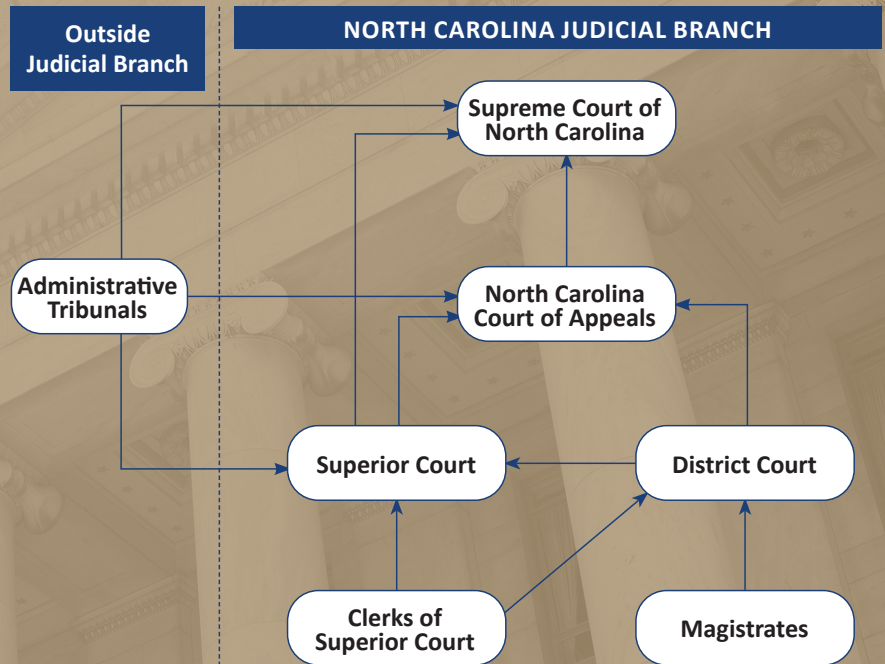
DISTRICT COURT DIVISION

Like the superior court division, district courts hold trials and empanel juries to determine the facts of specific cases. District courts handle serious, but lower level crimes, and civil cases between \$10,000 - \$25,000. The state is divided into district court districts where the court usually sits in the county seat of each county. Each district has a chief district court judge who manages the administrative duties of the court.

Magistrates hold court in both civil and criminal matters as officers of the district court under the authority of the chief district court judge. In the civil context, magistrates are generally assigned to preside over “small claims” court which hears disputes for claims under \$10,000. For criminal matters, magistrates conduct certain preliminary proceedings and are authorized to dispose of some cases by pleas of guilt or by trial.

COURT STRUCTURE *and* ROUTES of APPEAL

North Carolina’s unified court system handles nearly 3 million cases each year; cases that help keep our citizens safe, our economy vibrant, and our rights and liberties secure.



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