

COLORADO SUPREME COURT

Updated July, 2023

In FYE 2023, 1,450 new cases were filed in the Supreme Court. Of those 1,254 cases were either petitions for certiorari, asking the court to review decisions of the intermediate appellate court, or original proceedings under C.A.R. 21, asking the court to intervene in cases pending in the trial courts. In both types of cases, the court has discretion to choose which cases it will hear. The remainder of the new filings are direct appeals which the Supreme Court must review. Included in this category are attorney discipline/regulation matters, water cases, Public Utility Commission cases, prosecutorial appeals from trial court orders suppressing evidence, and ballot title appeals. The civil cases are varied and may include any type of case tried in the state courts.

The court hears oral arguments in most of the cases it decides. Arguments are scheduled two days each September through June with approximately four to eight cases heard in each session. Unlike the court of appeals, which hears and decides cases in panels of three, all seven Supreme Court justices decide each case unless a justice is disqualified in a particular case. The Supreme Court writes approximately 60 to 100 opinions (majority and minority) per year. Many are matters of first impression which involve issues not previously decided in Colorado.

In addition to work directly connected with deciding cases, each justice participates in two or three committees which address particular matters related to the court system or the administration of the Judicial Branch. Examples include the Supreme Court Attorney Regulation Advisory Committee, Civil Rules Committee, Criminal Rules Committee, Judicial Advisory Council, Fairness Committee, and Probation Advisory Committee. Other duties include serving as ex officio chairs of judicial nominating commissions and speaking to legal and civic groups.

To perform successfully, a justice must be able to organize and comprehend a large and ever-increasing volume of written materials. Screening cases is a time-consuming process, but the heart of the court's work is its opinions. Although each justice has a small staff of three employees, the work of the justice is one of "hands on" personal responsibility and public accountability for each decision made. Each justice authors approximately fourteen majority opinions per year, plus any concurring or dissenting opinions the justice chooses to write.

The goal of each opinion is to clearly and persuasively set forth the law, the facts, and the court's decision in order to provide guidance to the lower courts, lawyers and the public. Excellent research and writing skills, decisiveness, and good judgment are essential qualities for every justice. Because the Supreme Court hears such a variety of cases, each justice must be able to move easily from one area of law to another on a daily basis. Finally, the justice must be able to make decisions collegially and to function effectively within the constraints of court.

For additional information, please contact Cheryl Stevens, Clerk of the Supreme Court, 2 East 14th Avenue, Denver, CO 80203; 720-625-5150 or cheryl.stevens@judicial.state.co.us.

