

CONNECTICUT JUDICIAL BRANCH SATISFACTION STUDY

Prepared for:



January 2015

Statement of Confidentiality and Ownership

All of the analyses, findings and recommendations contained within this report are the exclusive property of the State of Connecticut Judicial Branch.

As required by the Code of Ethics of the National Council on Public Polls and the United States Privacy Act of 1974, The Center for Research and Public Policy maintains the anonymity of respondents to surveys the firm conducts. No information will be released that might, in any way, reveal the identity of the respondent.

Moreover, no information regarding these findings will be released without the written consent of an authorized representative of the State of Connecticut Judicial Branch.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION 1

IntroductionPage 3

SECTION 2

MethodologyPage 5

SECTION 3

HighlightsPage 7

SECTION 4

Summary of Findings Page 11

Court History 11

Rating the Court System..... 16

Rating Court Personnel Overall..... 17

Rating Personnel, Systems and Programs 18

Strengths and Areas for Improvement 21

Communication 23

Demographics..... 24

SECTION 5

Appendix Page 26

1 INTRODUCTION

The Center for Research & Public Policy (CRPP) is pleased to present the results of a Satisfaction Survey conducted among individuals involved with the Connecticut Court System for divorce, legal separation, child visitation and/or child custody cases.

The survey was designed to collect user input on satisfaction with court personnel, process, programs, and systems.

The research study included a comprehensive telephone survey. CRPP, working together with Court Officials, designed the survey instrument to be used when calling users of the Court System.

This report summarizes information collected from telephone surveys conducted December 10, 2014 – January 7, 2015.

The survey instrument employed in the Satisfaction Survey included the following areas for investigation:

- History with the Courts;
- Rating the court system;
- Rating Court personnel overall;
- Rating personnel, systems and programs on specific characteristics;
- Perceptions of Court strengths and areas in need of improvement;
- Communication: web site ratings; and
- Demographics

Section II of this report discusses the Methodology used in the study, while Section III includes Highlights derived from an analysis of the quantitative research. Section IV is a Summary of Findings for the telephone surveys - a narrative account of the data.

Section V is an Appendix to the report containing a cross tabulation table and a copy of the survey instrument.

METHODOLOGY

Using a quantitative research design, CRPP completed 1000 interviews among users of The State of Connecticut Court System.

The Judicial Branch provided CRPP with the names and addresses of Court users involved in divorce, legal separation, child visitation and/or child custody cases.

CRPP sent the sample off for appendage of phone numbers after reverse lookup occurred.

All telephone interviews were conducted December 10, 2014 – January 7, 2015. Residents were contacted between 5:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. weekdays and 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. on the weekend.

Survey input was provided by Court Officials.

Survey design at CRPP is a careful, deliberative process to ensure fair, objective and balanced surveys. Staff members, with years of survey design experience, edit out any bias. Further, all scales used by CRPP (either numeric, such as one through ten, or wording such as strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree) are balanced evenly. And, placement of questions is carefully accomplished so that order has minimal impact.

CRPP utilized an nth name stratified sample derived from records provided by the Court. This process allows randomization of numbers, which equalizes the probability of qualified respondents being included in the sampling frame.

Respondents qualified for the survey if they confirmed they had an experience with Connecticut Courts. Researchers reminded prospective respondents that they should respond to questions based on their most recent experience with a Family Matters Case and not any other experiences they may have had.

Training of telephone researchers and pre-test of the survey instrument occurred on December 9, 2014.

All facets of the study were completed by CRPP's senior staff and researchers. These aspects include: sample design, survey design, pre-test, computer programming, fielding, coding, editing, verification, validation and logic checks, computer analysis, analysis, and report writing.

Completion rates are a critical aspect of any telephone survey research. Because one group of people might be easier to reach than another group, it is important that concentrated efforts are made to reach all groups to an equal degree. A high completion rate means that a high percentage of the respondents within the original sample were actually contacted, and the resulting sample is not biased toward one potential audience. CRPP maintained a 70% completion rate on all calls made during the Satisfaction Survey. And, a high completion rate, many times indicates an interest in the topic.

Statistically, a sample of 1000 surveys represents a margin for error of +/-3.0% at a 95% confidence level.

In theory, a sample of Court users will differ no more than +/-3.0% than if all users were contacted and included in the survey. That is, if random probability sampling procedures were reiterated over and over again, sample results may be expected to approximate the large population values within plus or minus 3.0% -- 95 out of 100 times.

Readers of this report should note that any survey is analogous to a snapshot in time and results are only reflective of the time period in which the survey was undertaken. Should concerted public relations or information campaigns be undertaken during or shortly after the fielding of the survey, the results contained herein may be expected to change and should be, therefore, carefully interpreted and extrapolated.

Furthermore, it is important to note that all surveys contain some component of “sampling error”. Error that is attributable to systematic bias has been significantly reduced by utilizing strict random probability procedures. This sample was strictly random in that selection of each potential respondent was an independent event, based on known probabilities.

Each qualified user had an equal chance for participating in the study. Statistical random error, however, can never be eliminated but may be significantly reduced by increasing sample size.

HIGHLIGHTS

ON HISTORY...

- Three-quarters of all respondents, 75.8%, reported that their Family Court case involved a divorce or legal separation while 61.0% suggested their case involved child custody or visitation issues. Just over half of all respondents, 53.2%, said they were the defendants in their respective cases.
- Majorities of respondents indicated their cases involved money, custody and visitation issues – 59.9%, 55.3% and 50.1% respectively. Just over one-third, 34.0%, noted their case involved property.
- Nearly one-fifth, 17.1%, suggested a Guardian Ad Litem was appointed with their input (9.8%), without their input (6.0%) or they didn't recall if input was provided (1.3%).
- In the largest number of cases (39.2%), respondents said the Judge initiated the Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) appointment. Others, 19.3%, said they themselves made the request for a GAL. This was followed by the other party (13.5%), an attorney (9.4%), or a combination of the respondent and the other party (8.8%). Some, 6.4%, were unsure.
- Nearly one-half of all respondents, 47.4%, indicated the Guardian Ad Litem was paid for by the State while 25.1% indicated they paid the fee and 21.1% suggested the fee for the GAL was split with the other party. Some, 6.4% were unsure how the GAL fee was paid.
- Among those who paid the GAL fee themselves (or shared the cost), just 29.2% provided a positive rating on the reasonableness of the fee. Another 47.2% provided a poor rating on the reasonableness of the fee.
- On being neutral throughout their respective cases, those with a GAL provided a positive rating of 52.2%. Another 35.3% provided a poor rating on being neutral.

- At the time of the interview, 84.1% of all respondents reported their case was over. The average length of time for their respective cases was 7.43 months. Among those who still had open cases, the average number of months still pending was 20.22. Combined (those with open and closed cases) the average number of months was 9.16.

ON RATING THE COURT SYSTEM...

- The average overall positive rating for the Court System on six different characteristics was 64.55%. The highest positive ratings were recorded for the court facilities (71.9%) and on being consistent (67.9%). The lowest positive ratings were recorded for the length of the process (60.2%) and the time spent in court on a given day (56.8%).

The average overall poor rating across the same six characteristics was 19.41.

ON RATING COURT PERSONNEL OVERALL...

- Impressively, the average overall positive rating for court personnel, across six characteristics, was 78.51. The highest positive personnel ratings were recorded for respecting privacy (82.2%), being treated professionally (80.6%), and having knowledgeable staff (79.9%). The lowest positive rating was recorded for helping you understand the process (71.2%).

The average overall poor rating across the same six characteristics was 11.83.

ON RATING PERSONNEL, SYSTEMS & PROGRAMS...

- Fourteen different court support personnel, services or programs were rated by all respondents. The average overall positive rating across all fourteen was 71.11%. The highest positive ratings were recorded for the ADA Coordinator (90.0%), the Marshals (87.2%), Members of the Clerk's Offices (84.5%), and the Court Service Center (80.8%). The lowest positive ratings were collected for Family Relations Counselors (61.3%), the Court paid Attorney (60.8%), the AMC (58.7%) and the Guardian Ad Litem (53.2%).

The average overall poor rating across all 14 personnel categories, services and programs was 17.55.

Importantly, 73.6% of all respondents reported they were very (43.9%) or somewhat satisfied (29.7%) with their overall court experience. One-quarter, 26.4%, reported they considered themselves either somewhat dissatisfied (12.3%) or not at all satisfied (14.1%). Given that the Judicial Branch is a State service that most participants would likely rather not engage with, having three-quarters report out as “satisfied” is a positive finding. The inverted bell curve – 43.9% as “very satisfied” preceding 29.7% somewhat satisfied -- indicates the intensity of positive satisfaction.

Among the 1000 respondents interviewed, 1.9% said they filed one or more complaints against the Family Court System. In just a few of these cases, respondents filed two to five complaints and one respondent suggested having filed more than six complaints against the System.

Nearly one-third of those who filed complaints, 29.4%, said they were very or somewhat satisfied with the resolution of their respective complaints. The larger group, 70.6% indicated they were “not at all” satisfied with the outcome of their complaint.

ON COURT STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT...

In an open-end format opportunity, survey respondents were asked to report two or three things the Family Court System did well based on their own experiences. The most frequently cited responses centered on being helpful / providing assistance (25.2%), processing the case quickly / timely (21.0%), being fair / professional (15.4%), having polite and friendly staff (9.5%) and being efficient and organized (4.4%). “Other” mentions with less frequency are provided within the summary of this report. Some, 16.7%, indicated they could not recall anything the Family Court System did well.

In a similar open-end format question, respondents were asked to name two or three ways to improve the Family Court System. These recommendations centered on improving speed / organization of the process (18.7%), greater fairness / consistency for men and women (15.4%), better explaining the process (6.7%), being nicer / more professional (3.9%), protect privacy (3.5%), reduce fees (2.8%), improve buildings / infrastructure (2.5%) and spread out case scheduling (1.8%).

It is of note that the largest response, for ways to improve the Family Court System, was “nothing / don’t know” at 28.5%. “Other” mentions with less frequency are provided within the summary of this report.

ON COMMUNICATION: WEBSITE...

Just over one-half of all respondents surveyed, 54.6%, noted they have visited the Judicial Branch or Connecticut Court System website.

Of this group, positive ratings for the website on maneuverability, graphics and being informative were – 71.6%, 62.8%, and 77.1% respectively.

4 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Readers are reminded that the following section summarizes statistics collected from surveys among 1000 Court system users involved in divorce, legal separation, child visitation and/or child custody cases.

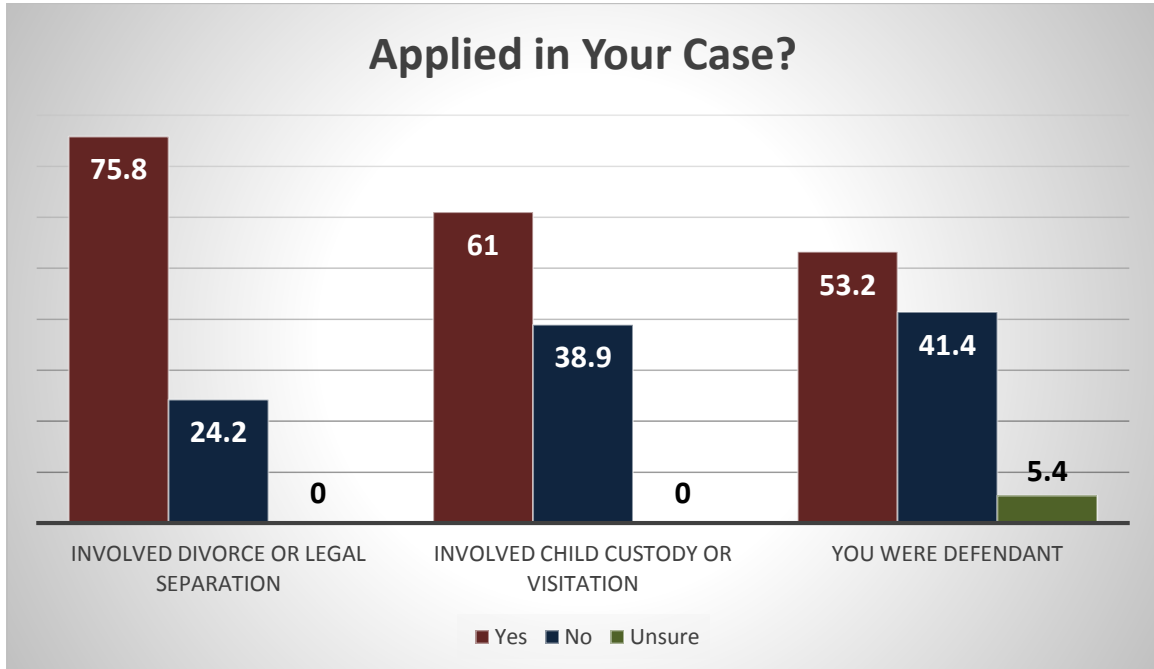
COURT HISTORY...

All respondents were asked by researchers if their case involved a divorce or legal separation, child or children custody or visitation and if they were the defendant in their respective cases.

Three-quarters of respondents, 75.8%, indicated their case did involve a divorce or legal separation while 61.0% suggested their case involved child or children custody or visitation.

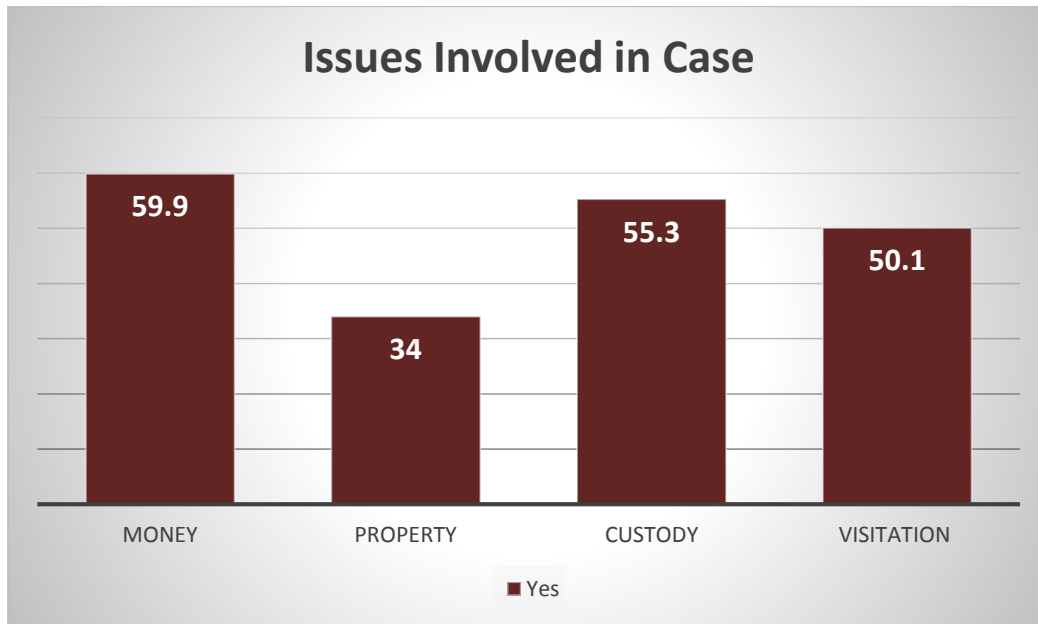
Just over one-half, 53.2%, reported being the defendant in the case.

The following graph depicts the results as collected.

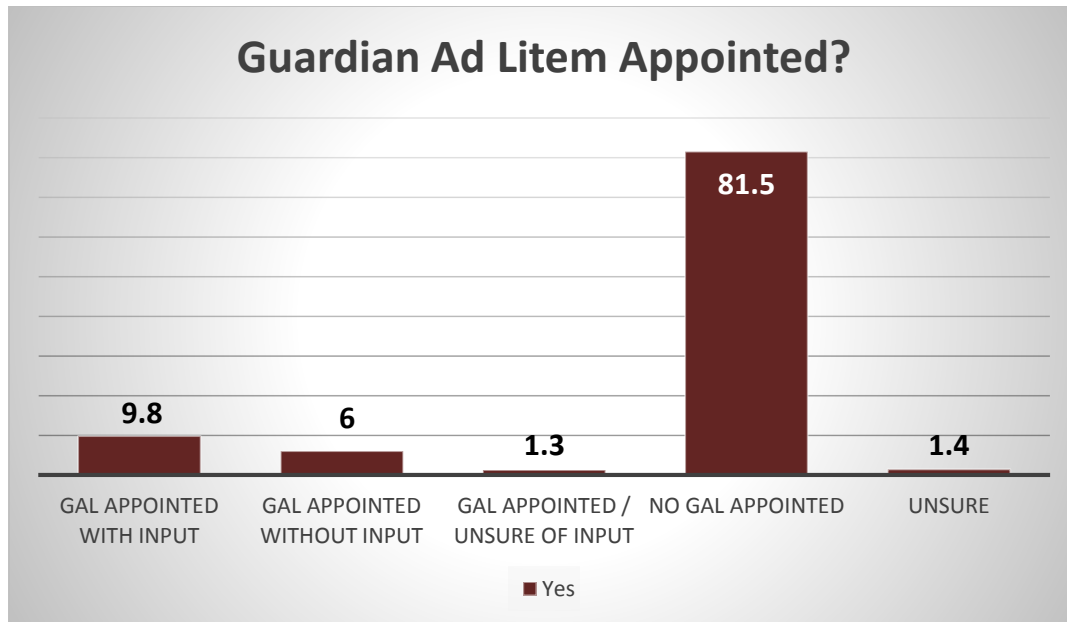


Researchers also asked each respondent if their own case involved money, property, custody and/or visitation. Over one-half of respondents reported their cases did involve money, custody or visitation. Just over one-third said their case involved property.

Results, as collected, are presented in the following graph.



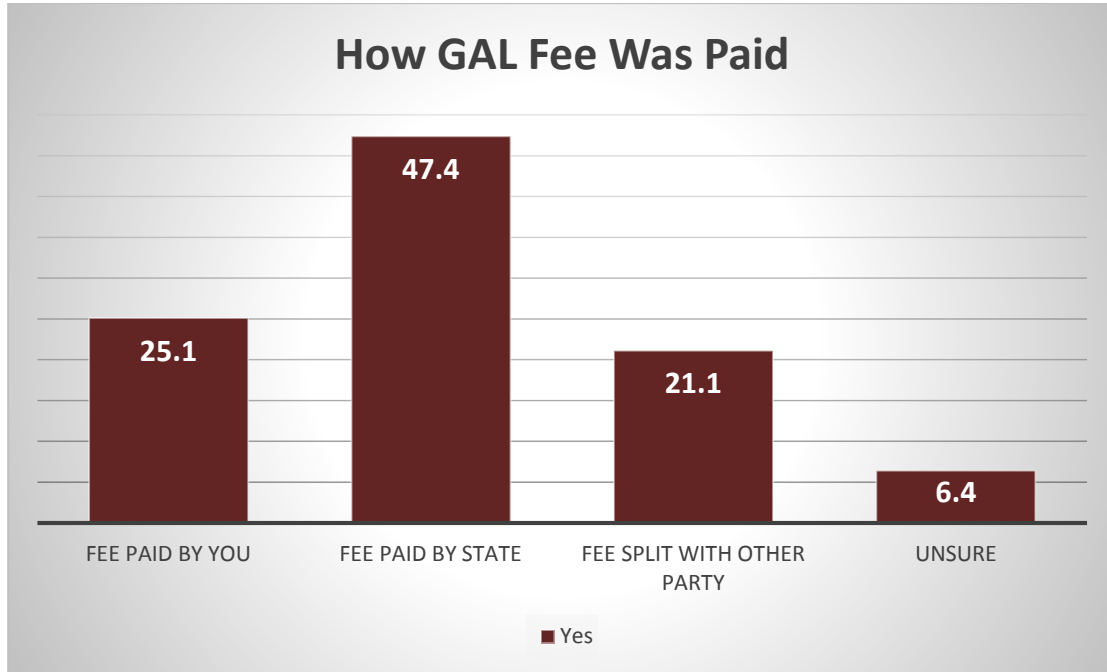
Respondents were asked if a Guardian Ad Litem was appointed by a judge in their respective cases. If a Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) was appointed, each was asked if the appointment was made with or without their input. Just under one-fifth, 17.1% suggested a GAL was appointed. Results are held in the following graph.



Those respondents who did have a Guardian Ad Litem appointed were asked who requested the appointment. The largest number, 39.2%, indicated it was the judge who requested the appointment. Results, in declining order, are shown in the following table.

Who Requested the Appointment	Percent
The Judge	39.2
You	19.3
The other party	13.5
Your attorney or the attorney for the other party	9.4
Both you and the other party	8.8
Unsure	6.4
None of these	3.5

Respondents were asked how the Guardian Ad Litem fee was paid. The largest group, 47.4%, suggested the fee was paid by the state. Results are shown in the following graph.



Respondents rated the Guardian Ad Litem on the reasonableness of their respective fees and their ability to remain neutral throughout the case. Respondents used a scale of one to ten where one was very good and ten was very poor. The following table depicts results for ratings of one through four (good) and seven through ten (poor).

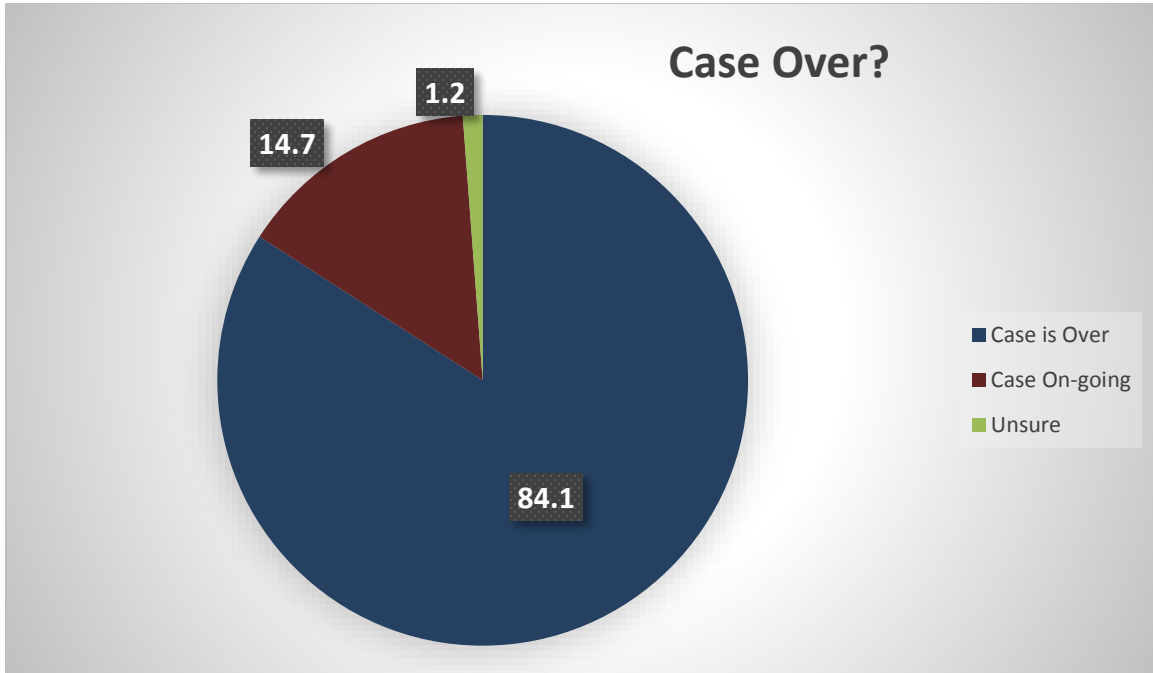
A majority, 52.2%, provided a positive rating for the ability of the Guardian Ad Litem to remain neutral throughout their cases. Another 35.3% provided poor ratings on neutrality.

Just under one-half, 47.2%, provided a poor rating on the reasonableness of the cost or fees for their Guardian Ad Litem while 29.2% provided a positive rating on cost.

Characteristics of GALs	Good 1 – 4	Poor 7 - 10
On the reasonableness of the cost/fee*	29.2	47.2
On being neutral throughout the case	52.2	35.3

*Note: Only those who paid for or paid a share of the attorney fees was asked about reasonableness of cost.

Most respondents, 84.1%, indicated their case was over at the time of the survey while 14.7% suggested their own case was still ongoing. Some, 1.2% were unsure. Results are shown here.



Respondents provided, in months, how long the case took from start to finish or how long the case has been on-going. The average overall was reported to be 9.16 months.

Among those who have cases still on-going (14.7%), the average number of months still pending is 20.22.

For those who reported their case has concluded (84.1%), the average number of months from start to finish was 7.43.

RATE THE COURT SYSTEM...

Respondents were asked to rate the Court System on six different characteristics.

Researchers read the following to all 1000 respondents:

“Again, despite the outcome in your own case, please rate the Family Court System as fairly and objectively as you can. This will help them in areas needing improvement.

*Now, please think about the court system **overall**. I’m going to ask you to rate the court system on several important characteristics. Please use a scale of one to ten where one is very good and ten is very poor.”*

The following table presents the cumulative totals for ratings of one through four (good) and seven through ten (poor) for each of the six characteristics.

Results are presented in declining order by positive ratings.

Court Process / System	Good 1 – 4	Poor 7 - 10
On the Court facilities	71.9	10.5
On being consistent	67.9	17.0
On treating you fairly	66.4	23.0
On the overall court fees and charges	64.1	16.3
On the length of the process overall	60.2	23.9
On the time you spent in court on a given day	56.8	25.8
AVERAGE	64.55	19.41

RATE COURT SYSTEM PERSONNEL OVERALL...

Similarly, respondents were asked to rate Court personnel on six different characteristics using the same scale where one was very good and ten was very poor.

The cumulative totals for one through four (good) and seven through ten (poor) are presented within the following table. Results are presented in declining order by positive ratings.

Court Personnel	Good	Poor
On respecting your privacy	82.2	9.8
On being treated professionally	80.6	11.3
Having knowledgeable staff	79.9	9.6
On being treated with respect by court staff	79.7	12.4
Having courteous, friendly court staff	77.5	11.0
On helping you understand the process	71.2	16.9
AVERAGE	78.51	11.83

RATE PERSONNEL, SYSTEMS AND PROGRAMS...

Researchers read the following to all respondents surveyed:

“There were potentially a large number of Family Court System personnel, systems or programs with which you had contact during your case. For each of the following, please tell me if you had contact with this person, or if you used the service or program. For each that you did use, I’ll ask you to rate this person, service or program overall using the same scale of one to ten where one is very good and ten is very poor.”

Respondents who did have contact with the personnel named or used a service provided went on to provide a rating. Results are shown in declining order by positive ratings.

The highest positive ratings were recorded for the ADA Coordinators, Marshals, Clerk Office staff and Court Service Center.

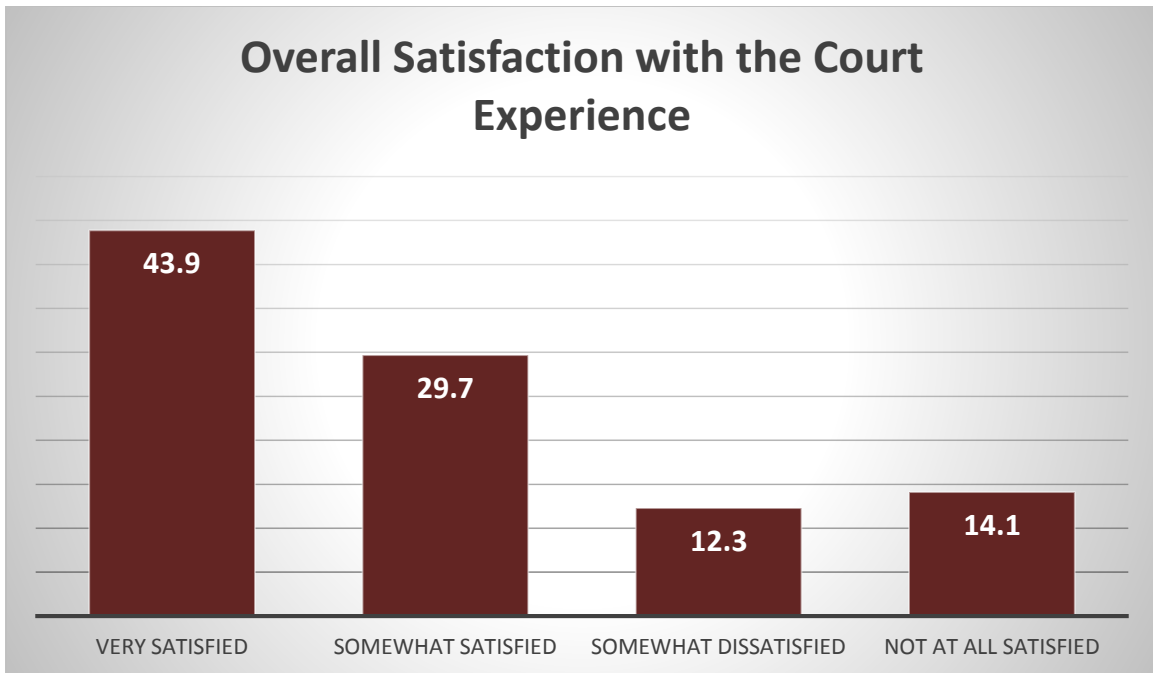
The lowest positive ratings were recorded for the Court paid attorneys, the AMC and the Guardian Ad Litem. Readers are reminded that the higher the number of cases (N=), the lower the margin for error. Cells with fewer than 50 cases should be viewed with care.

Personnel or Service	N=	Yes, Used	Good	Poor
		Percent	1 – 4	7 - 10
American Disability Act or ADA Coordinator	10	1.0	90.0	10.0
A Court Security Officer (Judicial Marshal)	536	53.6	87.2	6.4
Member of the Clerk’s office	676	67.6	84.5	5.8
Court Service Center	359	35.9	80.8	7.2
The Volunteer Attorney Program	68	6.8	79.4	11.8
A Court Translator or Translation Services	28	2.8	77.8	11.1
A Judge	884	88.4	75.2	14.9
A Caseflow Coordinator	155	15.5	69.5	14.3
Support Enforcement Officer(s)	207	20.7	68.0	20.9
An attorney you paid for	407	40.7	63.2	24.4
Family Relations Counselor(s)	421	42.1	61.3	22.8
An attorney the Court paid for	74	7.4	60.8	27.1
AMC or Attorney for the Minor Child	75	7.5	58.7	28.0
Guardian Ad Litem(s)	173	17.3	53.2	41.0
Average	---	---	72.11	17.55

Researchers asked respondents, overall, how satisfied they considered themselves with their court experience. Each was asked if they were very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied or not at all satisfied.

Nearly three-quarters, 73.6%, indicated they considered themselves very (43.9%) or somewhat (29.7%) satisfied. One-quarter, 26.4% suggested they considered themselves to be somewhat dissatisfied (12.3%) or not at all satisfied (14.1%).

Results are presented in the following graph.



Surveyed respondents were asked if they have ever filed a complaint against the Family Court System. Just under two percent, 1.9% / N=19 respondents, indicated they had filed anywhere from one to “six or more” complaints.

Nearly one-third of those 19 respondents who filed a complaint, 29.4%, suggested they were very (17.6%) or somewhat satisfied (11.8%) with the resolution of their complaints. Another 70.6% said they were not at all satisfied with the resolution.

STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT...

Respondents were asked, in two open-end format questions, to report two or three things that the Family Court did well during their court experience and two or three ways the Family Court could improve the system.

The results follow.

Through your court experience you have likely become more familiar with the court system. Please tell me two or three things that the Family Court System did well.	
Things Family Court Does Well	Percent
Helpful/provided assistance	25.2
Processed case in quick/timely manner	21.0
Nothing/don't know	16.7
Fair and professional	15.4
Staff polite/friendly	9.5
Other	7.9
Efficient and organized	4.4

Examples of “Other” (7.9%) responses mentioned less frequently:

- Allowed a prearranged agreement
- Classes
- Did the best they could
- Do it yourself divorce guide.
- Family relations did well
- Got my child support
- I didn't have any financial problems with my case. They did not ask me to pay any fees
- I really liked that they gave us the privacy that we needed
- I think mandating the parenting class is very good
- I think the overall experience was fine
- It was an undisputed divorce and have to go back to court
- Let me waive the marshal fee
- Online documentation was very good
- Overall it's pretty good.
- Overall outcome was good.
- Put my divorce through

- The annulment
- The building is secure
- The judge decided the right thing
- They required parenting class
- They actually helped resolve the case. The bottom-line was a favorable decision for my child
- They helped me sort out that my ex had to help me pay for a nanny
- They took my daughter out of a bad situation
- They're trying to find people with the right education for the jobs
- Working with my granddaughter

Similarly, researchers asked for two or three ways to improve the Family Court system. Results are depicted here.

And, two or three ways to improve the Family Court System.	
Ways to Improve Family Court	Percent
Nothing/don't know	28.5
Improve speed/organization of process	18.7
Other	16.5
Greater fairness/consistency for men and women	15.4
Better explain process	6.7
Be nicer/more professional	3.9
Protect privacy of each case	3.5
Reduce Fees	2.8
Improve building/infrastructure	2.5
Spread out case scheduling	1.8

Examples of “Other” (16.5%) responses mentioned less frequently:

- A client with no attorney or self-attorney needs to be treated as well as the other side
- Advocate for fathers
- Can you offer some kind of program to help people who don't have attorneys, instead of a brochure?
- Connecticut has been pushing fatherhood development at the expense of children
- Destructive for family units
- Different degrees for restraining orders
- Follow through with parent study

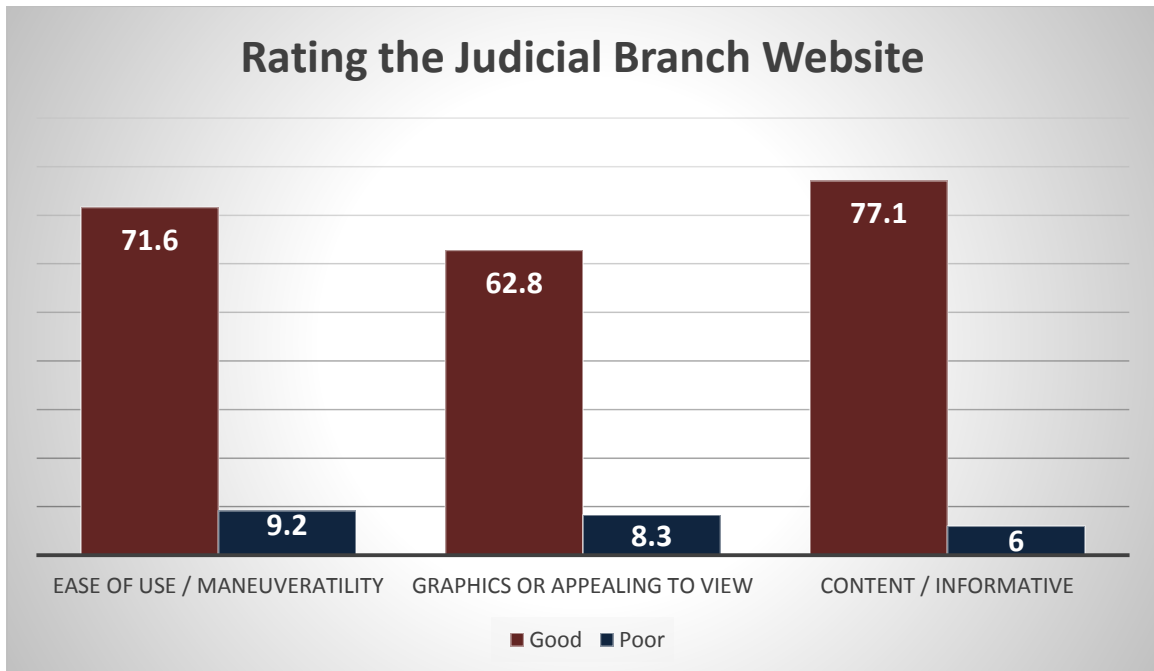
- Get rid of the court enforcement
- Give more time to visit my kids
- Have coffee in courtroom.
- Have two days instead of one
- I feel that the system is corrupt. The judge and the guardian ad litem and the family counselor are working together to make money and are not interested in the people at all
- I think I should've had an advocate, as I had a trauma that just happened to me
My son had just got hit by a car, and I had just found out that my husband was cheating on me
- I think the courts should be more apt to punish people that lie in court regardless of the case

COMMUNICATION: THE WEBSITE...

Over one-half of all respondents, 54.6%, reported they have visited the Judicial Branch or Connecticut Court System website.

This group was asked to rate the website on maneuverability, graphics and content using a scale of one to ten where one was very good and ten was very poor.

The following graph presents the positive ratings of one through four and the poor ratings of seven through ten.



DEMOGRAPHICS

Age	Percent
Mean	42.09

Income	Percent
Under \$25,000	18.1
\$25,000 to less than 75,000	33.6
\$75,000 to less than \$150,000	16.0
Over \$150,000	6.3
Unsure	1.6
Refused	24.4

Education	Percent
Eighth grade or less	0.2
Some high school	3.6
High school graduate or GED	22.1
Some technical school	2.1
Technical school graduate	3.8
Some college	22.1
College graduate	22.7
Post-graduate or professional degree	15.3
Refused	8.1

Hispanic, Latin American, Puerto Rican, Cuban or Mexican	Percent
Yes	15.0
No	83.7

Ethnicity (Among Non-Hispanics)	Percent
White	84.2
Black, African-American	9.3
Asian, Pacific Islander	1.3
Aleutian, Eskimo or American Indian	0.6
Other	1.4
Native Hawaiian	---
Two or more races	---
Refused	3.2
Don't know/unsure	---

Disability (besides eyeglasses)	Percent
Yes	11.6

Gender	Percent
Male	47.6
Female	52.4

5 APPENDIX

INTERPRETATION OF AGGREGATE RESULTS

The computer processed data for this survey are presented in the following frequency distributions. It is important to note that the wordings of the variable labels and value labels in the computer-processed data are largely abbreviated descriptions of the Questionnaire items and available response categories.

The frequency distributions include the category or response for the question items. Responses deemed not appropriate for classification have been grouped together under the “Other” code.

The “NA” category label refers to “No Answer” or “Not Applicable.” This code is also used to classify ambiguous responses. In addition, the “DK/RF” category includes those respondents who did not know their answer to a question or declined to answer it. In many of the tables, a group of responses may be tagged as “Missing” – occasionally, certain individual’s responses may not be required to specific questions and thus are excluded. Although when this category of response is used, the computations of percentages are presented in two (2) ways in the frequency distributions: 1) with their inclusion (as a proportion of the total sample), and 2) their exclusion (as a proportion of a sample sub-group).

Each frequency distribution includes the absolute observed occurrence of each response (i.e. the total number of cases in each category). Immediately adjacent to the right of the column of absolute frequencies is the column of relative frequencies. These are the percentages of cases falling in each category response, including those cases designated as missing data. To the right of the relative frequency column is the adjusted frequency distribution column that contains the relative frequencies based on the legitimate (i.e. non-missing) cases. That is, the total base for the adjusted frequency distribution excludes the missing data. For many Questionnaire items, the relative frequencies and the adjusted frequencies will be nearly the same. However, some items that elicit a sizable number of missing data will produce quite substantial percentage differences between the two columns of frequencies. The careful analyst will cautiously consider both distributions.

The last column of data within the frequency distribution is the cumulative frequency distribution (Cum Freq). This column is simply an adjusted frequency distribution of the sum of all previous categories of response and the current category of response. Its primary usefulness is to gauge some ordered or ranked meaning.