



Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans

Let your voice be heard in rebuilding the Greater New Orleans Area


[Home](#)
[About Us](#)
[Our Reform Initiatives](#)
[Resources & Collaborations](#)
[Archives](#)
[Contact Us](#)

Media

[Criminal Justice Home](#)
[Criminal Justice Committee Activities](#)
[Committee Members](#)
[Legislative Activity](#)
[Resources](#)
[Archives](#)

Times-Picayune

EDITORIAL: Moving faster in court

September 03, 2009

Slow, inefficient courts impede justice: An aging case is harder to prosecute and continual delays deny closure to victims and their families and create hardships for witnesses.

Graham Da Ponte, executive director of Court Watch NOLA, called efficient courts a "cornerstone for a safer city," and there is a direct connection between public safety and an effective criminal justice system.

Thankfully, cases have been moving more quickly through New Orleans Criminal District Court. Court Watch NOLA is the second watchdog group that has noted improvements in efficiency.

The group's findings are in line with a Metropolitan Crime Commission report released in June that found the court's processing time had decreased from a median of 232 days in 2007 to 140 in 2008.

Court Watch NOLA puts unpaid volunteers in courtrooms as monitors, and they observed 991 proceedings from January until June of this year, mostly major felony cases. A final conclusion was reached either by trial or plea in 46 percent of the cases in the first half of 2009, compared to only 30 percent in the last half of 2008.

It's encouraging to see progress continuing this year. Court Watch NOLA also noted that most of the court's 12 judges are ordering fewer continuances.

The study found that Chief Judge Arthur Hunter, Section K, had one of the highest rates of continuances. The Crime Commission also took issue with Judge Hunter for taking longer than other judges to process cases. That group found he had a median processing time of 214 days, compared to the overall 140-day median for all the judges.

Judge Hunter described the Court Watch findings as interesting but said anecdotal evidence isn't as useful as long-term academic study.

But the data gathered by two independent groups offer a pretty clear picture of what's going on: There have been some real gains in terms of efficiency. But there's still room for improvement.