

SECTION II

EVALUATION DATA

SECTION II(A)

FILING TRENDS

II. EVALUATION DATA

A. Filing Trends

It was hypothesized by some that open hearings/records might have a “dampening” effect on the number of dependency/neglect cases filed, because concern over privacy might inhibit families from seeking assistance from the courts and professionals from making referrals of clients to the courts (if they had concerns for clients’ privacy). In order to test this hypothesis, the NCSC project team reviewed dependency/neglect filing trends in the trial courts and appellate courts participating in the Open Hearings Pilot Project. The number of filings for the first two full years after open hearings/records (1999 and 2000) was compared to the number for the last two full years prior to open hearings/records (1996 and 1997). It can be seen that filings increased in eight of the 12 pilot counties. There was a very slight decrease in Watonwan County, and more substantial percentage decreases in three other counties. It is not possible to tell with any degree of certainty whether the changes in dependency/neglect filings were the result of open hearings/records or some other phenomenon, such as population growth, changes in local filing practices, or some other change occurring among the counties.

Figures A through T that follow provide the number of dependency/neglect filings for 1996 – 2001 for each county participating in the pilot project. For purposes of comparison, the number of dependency/neglect filings for the State Judicial District containing the county or counties in question is also presented. The filings for the pilot counties were removed from the totals for each district, to permit a more unbiased comparison. Large differences in the trend of dependency/neglect cases filed between the pilot counties and the other counties in their respective districts could be the result of the impact of open hearings/records.

Figure A

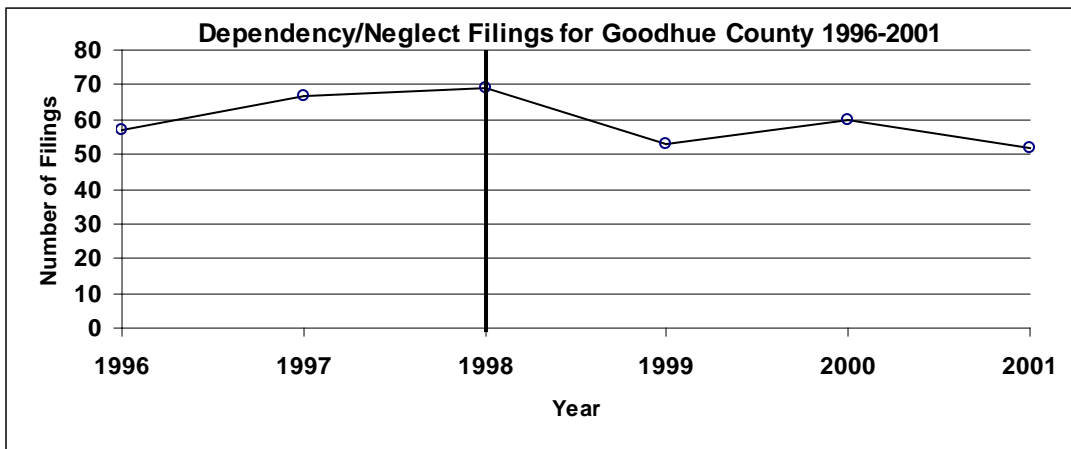


Figure B

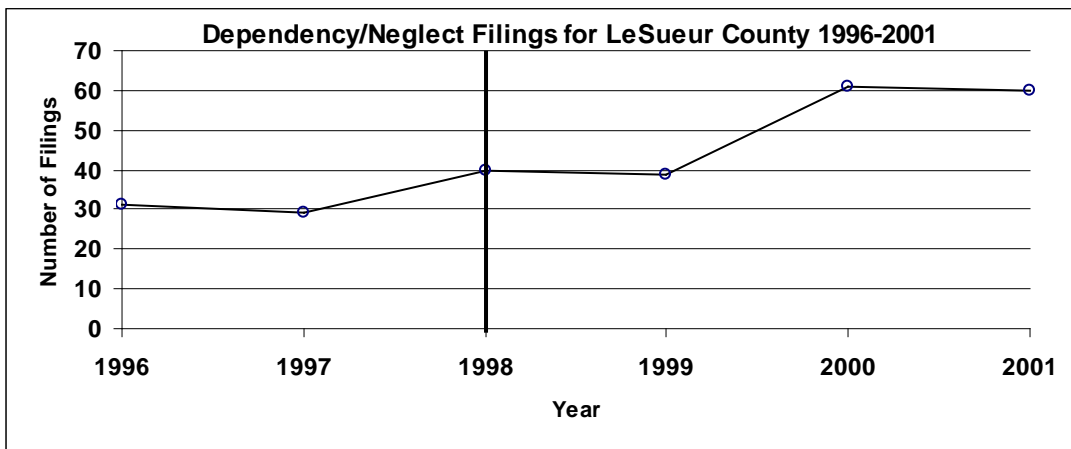


Figure C

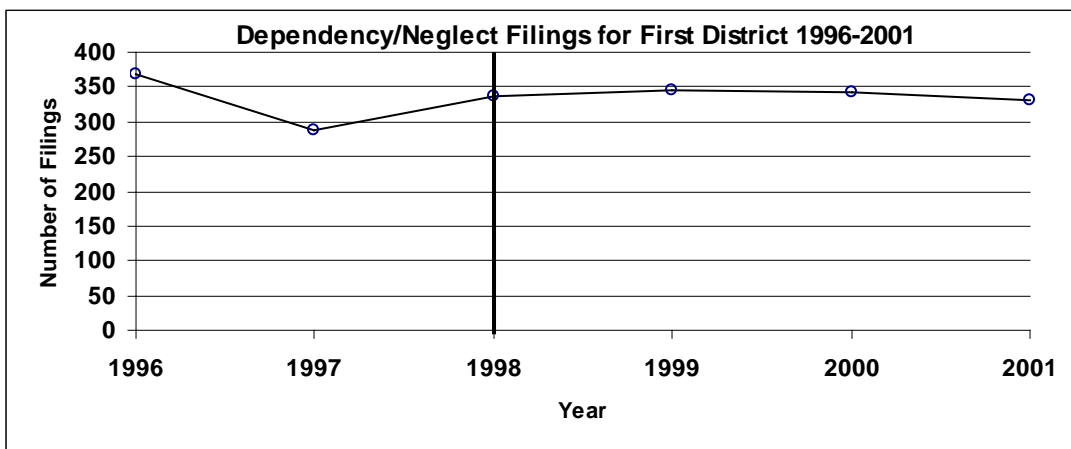


Figure D

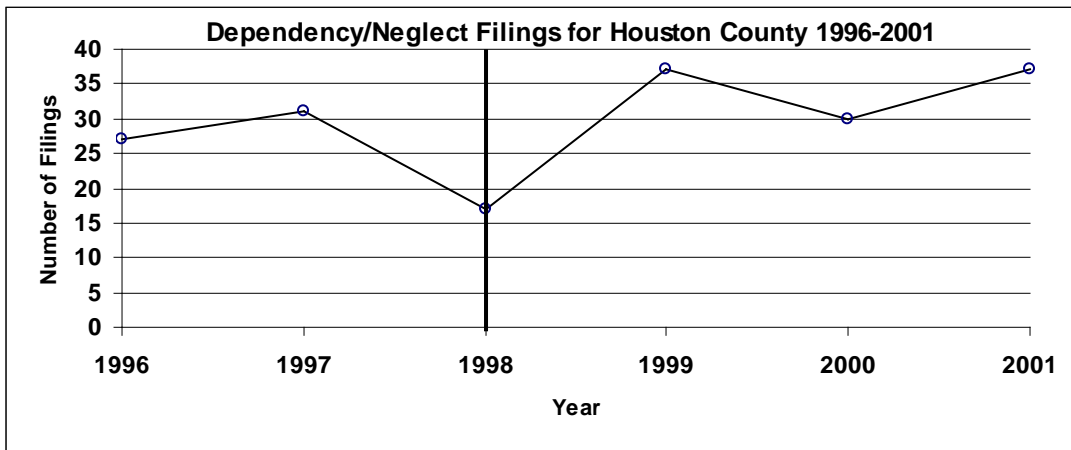


Figure E

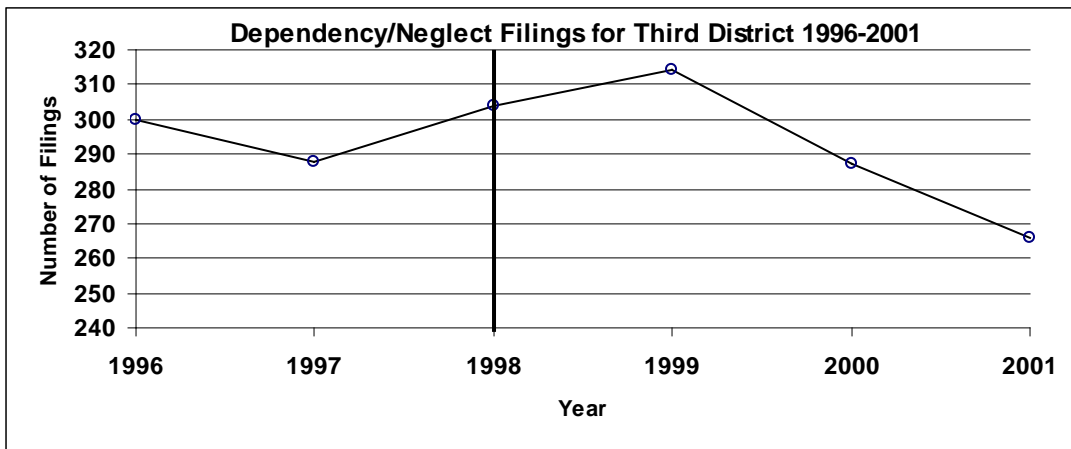


Figure F

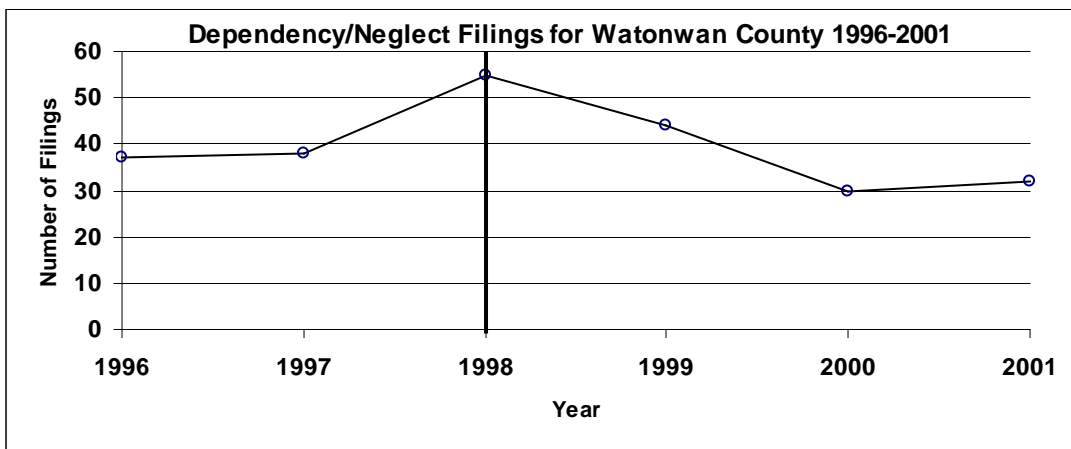


Figure G

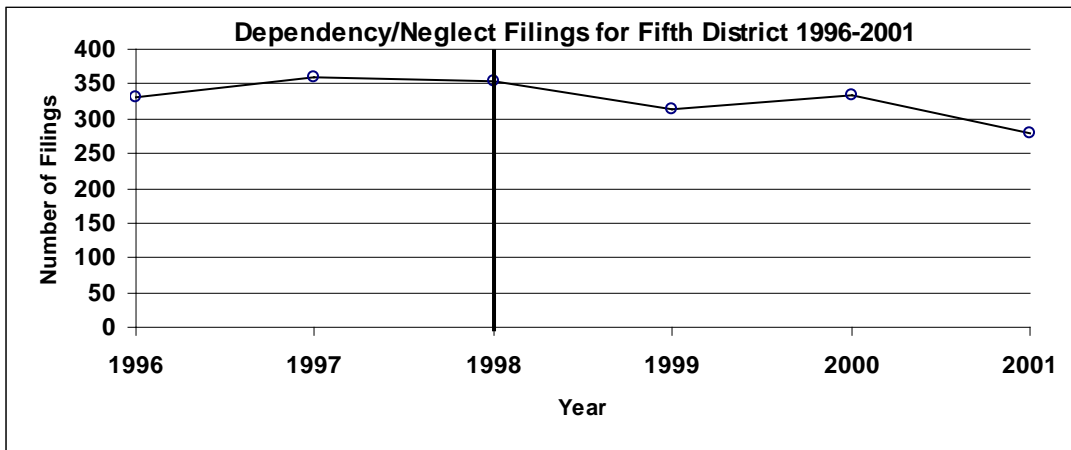


Figure H

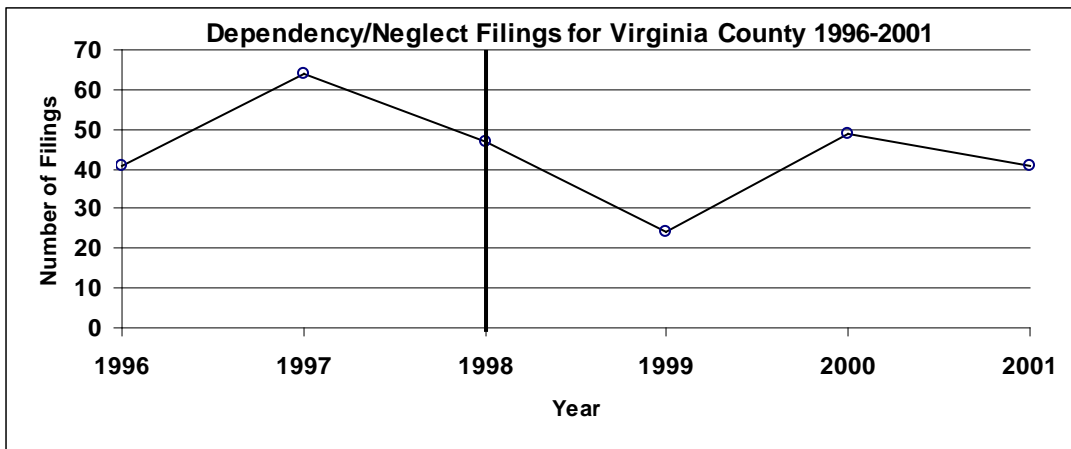


Figure I

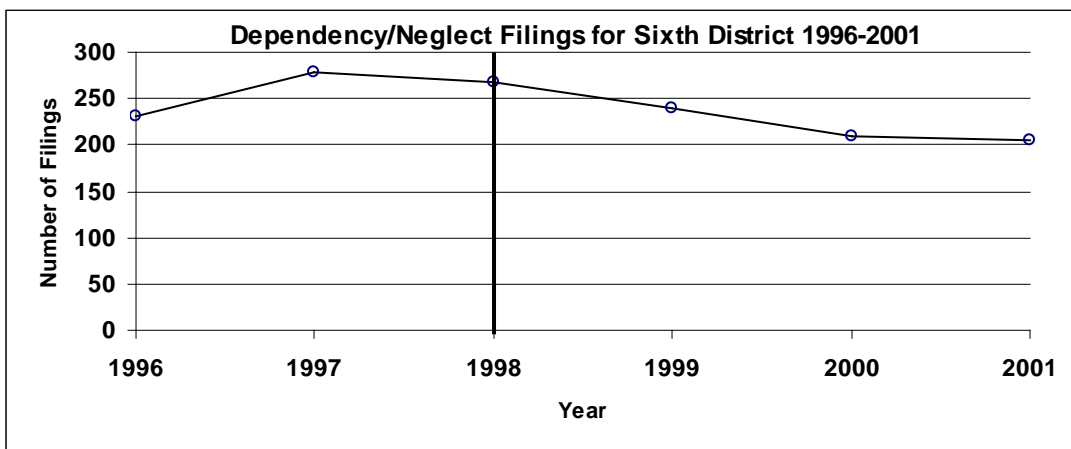


Figure J

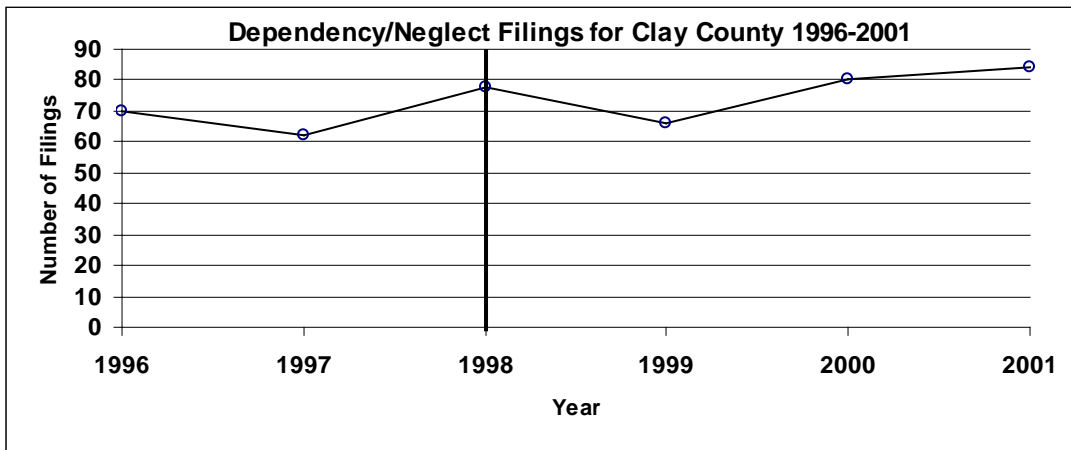


Figure K

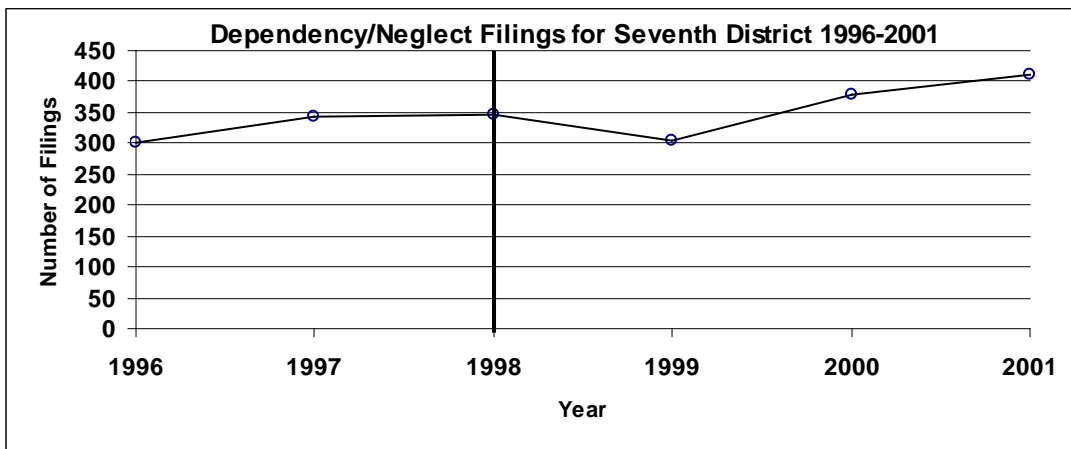


Figure L

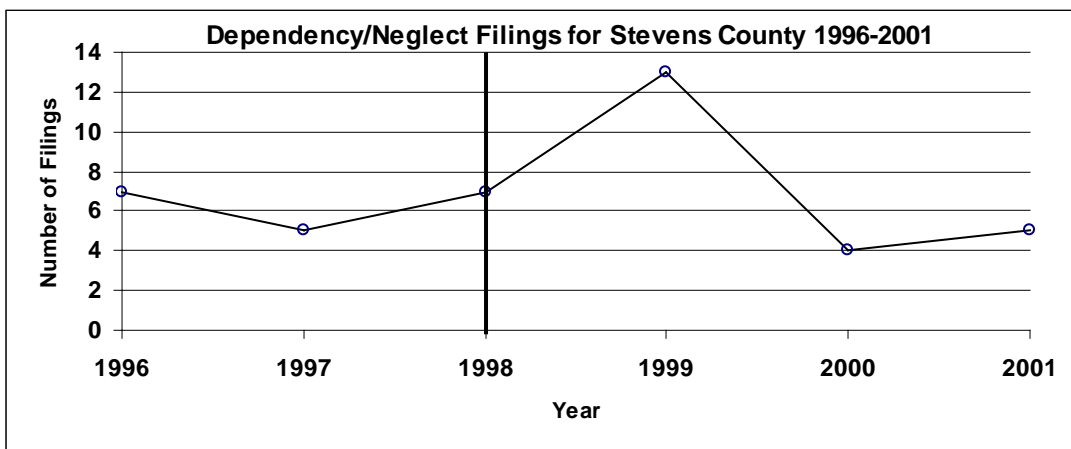


Figure M

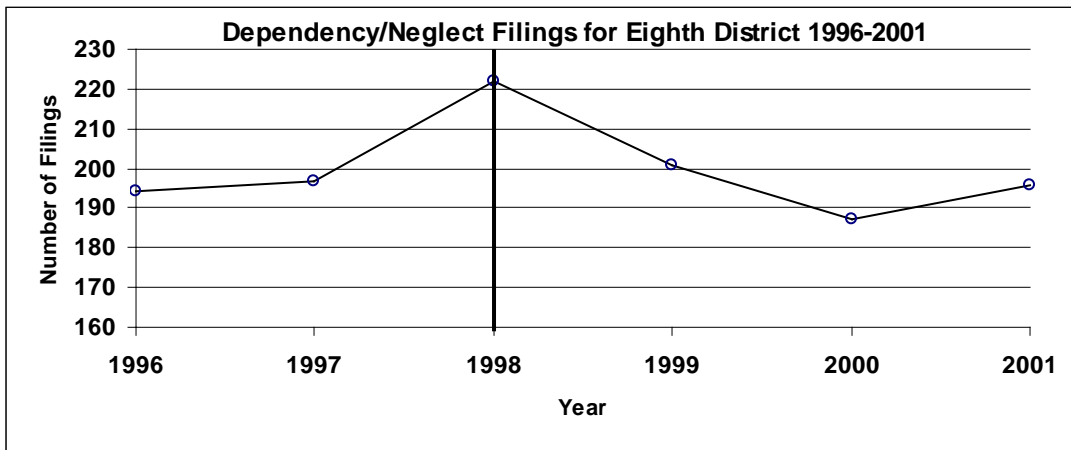


Figure N

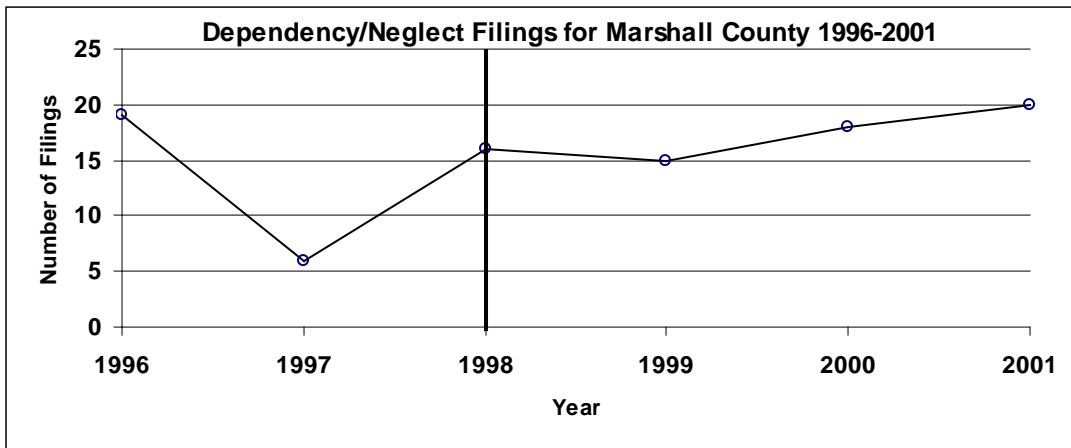


Figure O

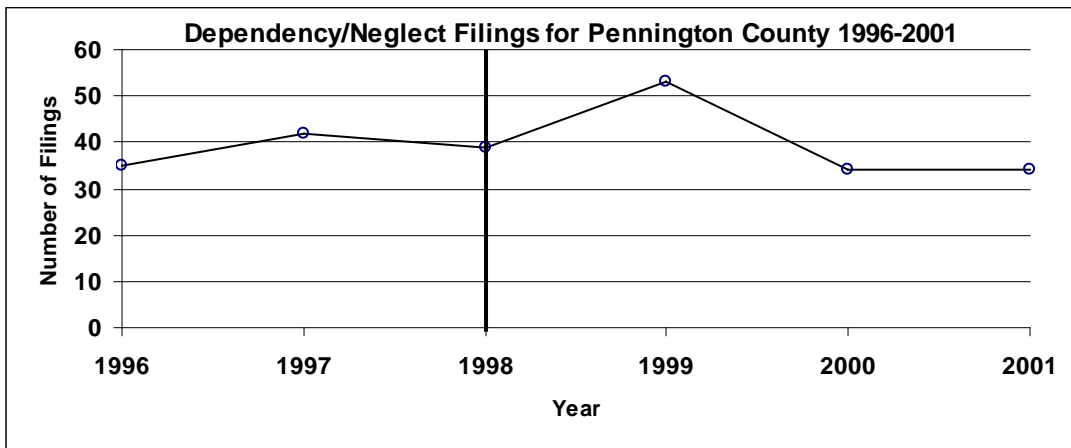


Figure P

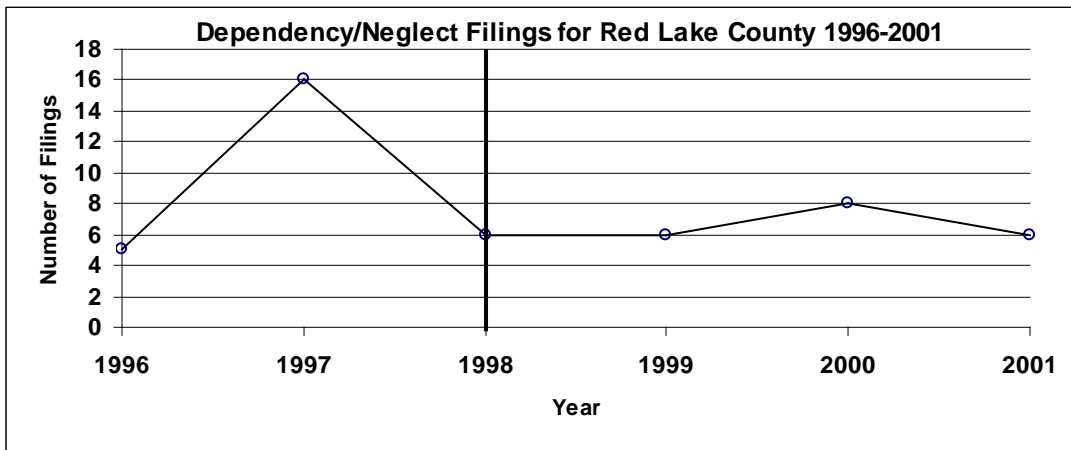


Figure Q

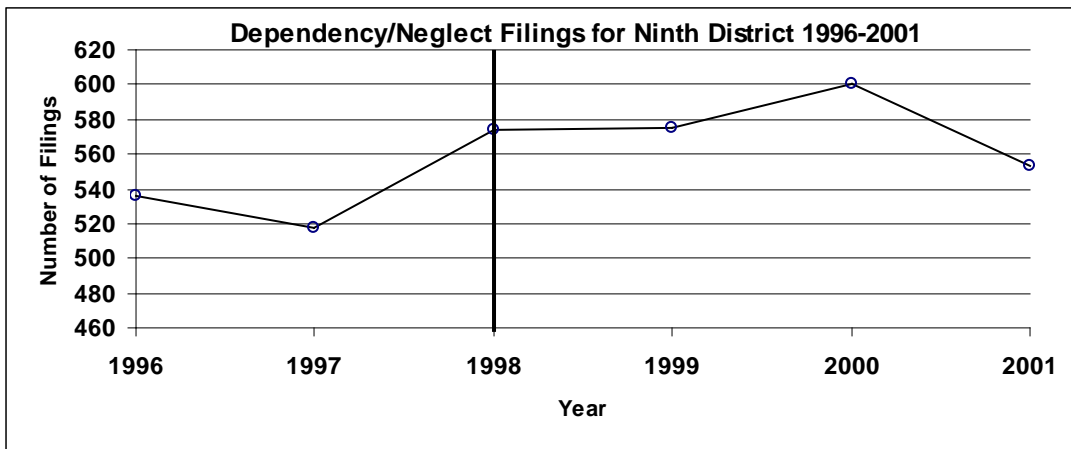


Figure R

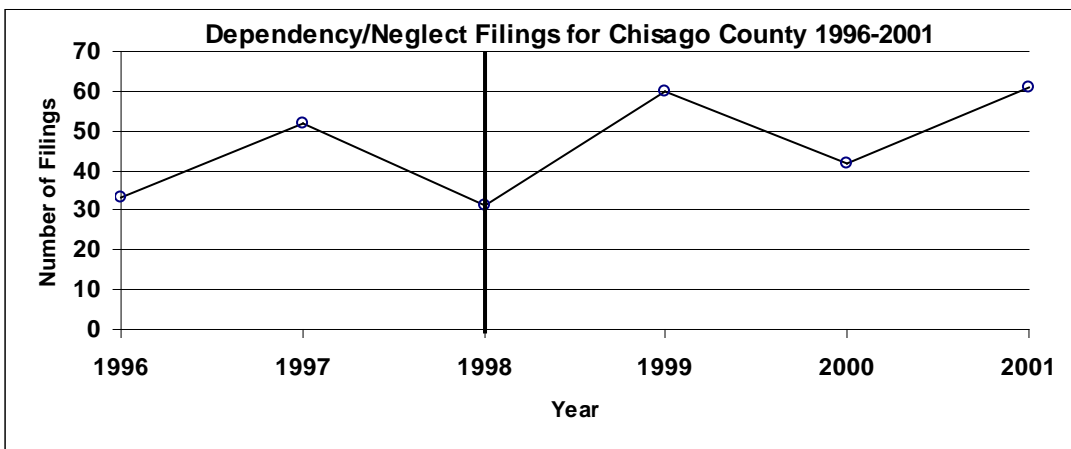


Figure S

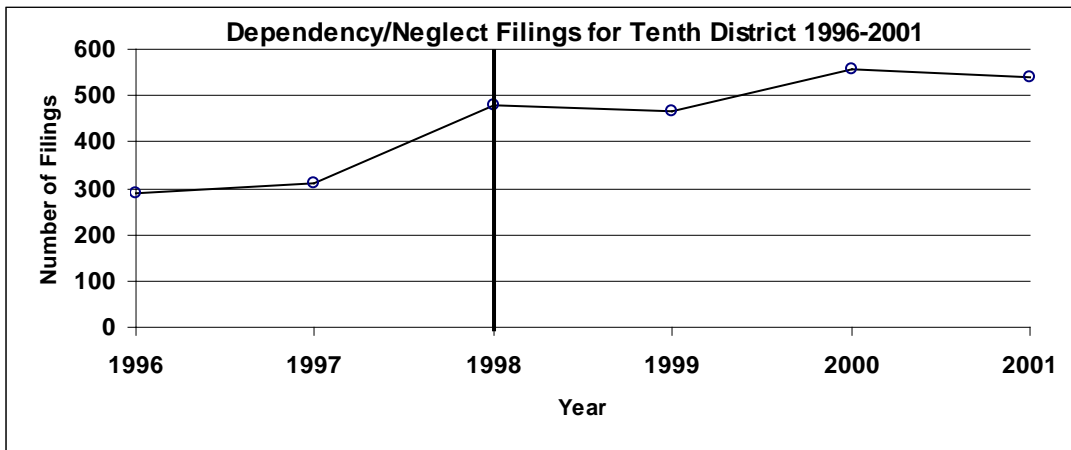
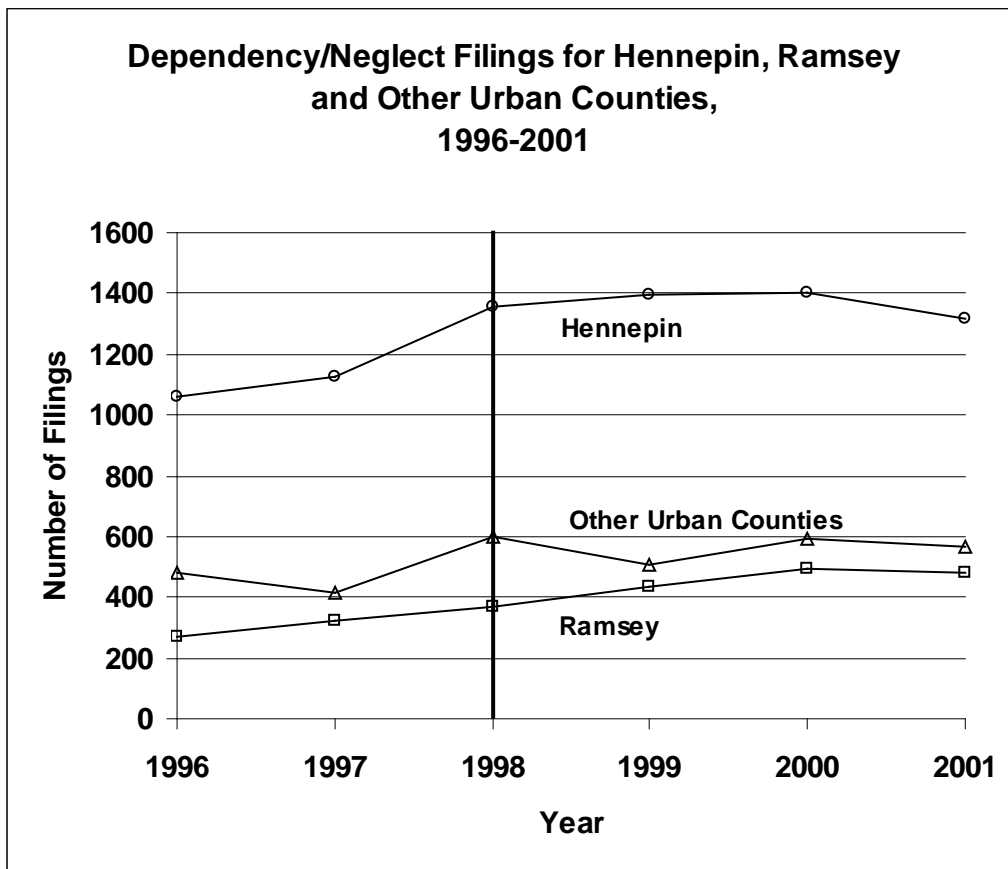


Figure T



In the First District, after 1998, Goodhue County registered a slight decrease in dependency/neglect filings and filings in LeSueur County increased substantially, while the trend in filings for the rest of the counties in the district was relatively flat. In the Third District,

dependency/neglect filings for Houston County increased after 1998 while the other counties in the district displayed a decreasing trend. Watonwan County in the Fifth District displayed a decreasing trend in filings after 1998, as did the rest of the counties in that district. Filings in Virginia County and in the rest of the counties in the Sixth District displayed a decreasing trend since 1998. In the Seventh District, Clay County and the rest of the counties in the district displayed a slightly increasing trend in filings since 1998. Filings after 1998 in Stevens County and the rest of the counties in the Eighth District showed similar trends except for 1999 when filings in Stevens increased while decreasing in the rest of the counties. Filings after 1998 in Marshall and Pennington counties showed a similar, increasing trend as did the rest of the counties in the Ninth District, excepting Red Lake County which showed a relatively flat trend (the number of filings in Red Lake County was small). Finally, Hennepin County displayed increasing trends of dependency/neglect case filings, similar to Ramsey County and the other urban counties in Minnesota (Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Scott, and Washington). There is little in the trends of dependency/neglect cases in the pilot counties that would suggest an impact resulting from open hearings/records.

The number of appeals of family cases in the Court of Appeals was also examined. An increase in the number of appeals might be the result of problems originating with open hearings/records. The number of appeals from most counties was small which makes trends more difficult to discern. There does not appear to be a strong and consistent trend for appeals to have increased since open hearings/records has been implemented.