Introduction to the Levels and the Functions of Criminal Courts

Principles of LPSCS
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City Level Courts

- Municipal court
  - 1,414 judges
  - 917 cities
  - Exclusive original jurisdiction over the municipal ordinance criminal cases
  - Limited civil jurisdiction in the cases concerning dangerous dogs
  - Has magistrate functions
  - Includes the local trial court with limited jurisdiction
City Level Courts (continued)

• Justice of the Peace court
  – 821 judges
  – 821 courts
  – Handles civil actions of not more than $10,000
  – Handles small claims
  – Handles misdemeanors punishable by fine only
  – Has magistrate functions
  – Conducts death inquiries when a prisoner dies in custody
County Level Courts

• Constitutional County Court
  – One court for each county (254 counties)
  – Established by the U.S. Constitution
  – Has concurrent jurisdiction with the Justice of the Peace courts and the district courts in civil cases
  – Has a county judge who serves as the head of the county government which includes administrative duties
  – Original jurisdiction in civil actions from $200 – $10,000
  – Handles probate matters
  – Exclusive jurisdiction over misdemeanors with fines greater than $500 or jail sentences
  – Handles juvenile matters
  – Appeals for new trials from lower courts or on the record from municipal courts of record
• County court at law (statutory)
  – 222 courts
  – 84 counties
  – Created by legislature to alleviate the judicial role from the Constitutional County Courts
  – Jurisdiction includes all civil, criminal, original, and appellate actions prescribed by law for constitutional county courts
  – Jurisdiction over civil matters up to $100,000
County Level Courts (continued)

- Statutory probate courts
  - 18 courts
  - 10 counties
  - Jurisdiction limited to probate matters
State Level Courts

- District court (trial court)
  - 444 courts
  - 444 judges
  - 347 districts containing one county and 97 districts containing more than one court
  - Original jurisdiction in civil actions
    - $200 to $500
    - Divorce
    - Title to land
    - Contested elections
  - Original jurisdiction in felony criminal matters
  - Handles juvenile matters
  - 13 district courts are designated criminal district courts; some others are directed to give preference to certain specialized areas
    - Civil
    - Juvenile
    - Family
State Level Courts (continued)

- Court of Appeals (intermediate appellate court)
  - 14 courts
  - 80 justices
  - Handles intermediate appeals from trial (district) courts in their respective Courts of Appeals districts
• Court of Criminal Appeals (highest criminal appellate court)
  – One court
  – 9 judges (one presiding judge and eight other judges)
    • Elected by statewide election
    • Six-year terms
  – Final appellate jurisdiction in criminal cases
  – Located in Austin, TX
State Level Courts (continued)

• Supreme Court (highest civil appellate court)
  – One court
  – 9 judges (a Chief Justice and eight other justices)
    • Elected positions
    • Six-year terms
    • Must be at least 35 years of age
    • Must be a Texas citizen
    • Must be licensed to practice law or
    • Must have been a judge in a court of record and practiced law together for at least ten years
  – Final appellate jurisdiction in civil and juvenile cases
  – Located in Austin, TX
Resources

• Texas County at Law Courts  
  http://www.courts.state.tx.us/courts/pdf/MapOfCountyCourtsAtLaw.pdf
• Texas Courts  http://www.courts.state.tx.us/pubs/court-overview.pdf
• Texas Court of Criminal Appeals  http://www.cca.courts.state.tx.us/
• Texas District Courts  http://www.courts.state.tx.us/courts/district.asp
• Texas Judicial Information Directory  
• Texas Supreme Court  http://www.supreme.courts.state.tx.us/
• Do an Internet search for the following:  
  – Hank Skinner Given Stay of Execution video  
  – Legal encyclopedia probate