



MAY 2026

# JUSTICE DELAYED

A report on case delays in Orleans Parish Criminal District Court.



# WHAT IS A CONTINUANCE?

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A continuance is just a delay in a case moving forward as scheduled. They happen for lots of different reasons, some more frustrating than others. It is important to note that while we want an efficient system that delivers justice in a timely manner, we do not want a system that cuts corners to operate as fast as possible. Some continuances are necessary to preserve a defendant's constitutional rights or to make sure that crime survivors are included in the process.



## 01 — Judges

Judges most often need to reset cases because one or more trials on a docket take priority over cases that are at earlier stages. Most cases end in plea deals, so it may not be certain the trial will actually take place. If it does, judges may need to continue or reset the other cases on that day's docket.



## 02 — Prosecutors

Prosecutors may need to continue cases because they haven't completed exchanging evidence, because law enforcement or civilian witnesses were unavailable, because the defendant wasn't transported to court, or because the prosecutor for a case has changed due to turnover at the District Attorney's office.

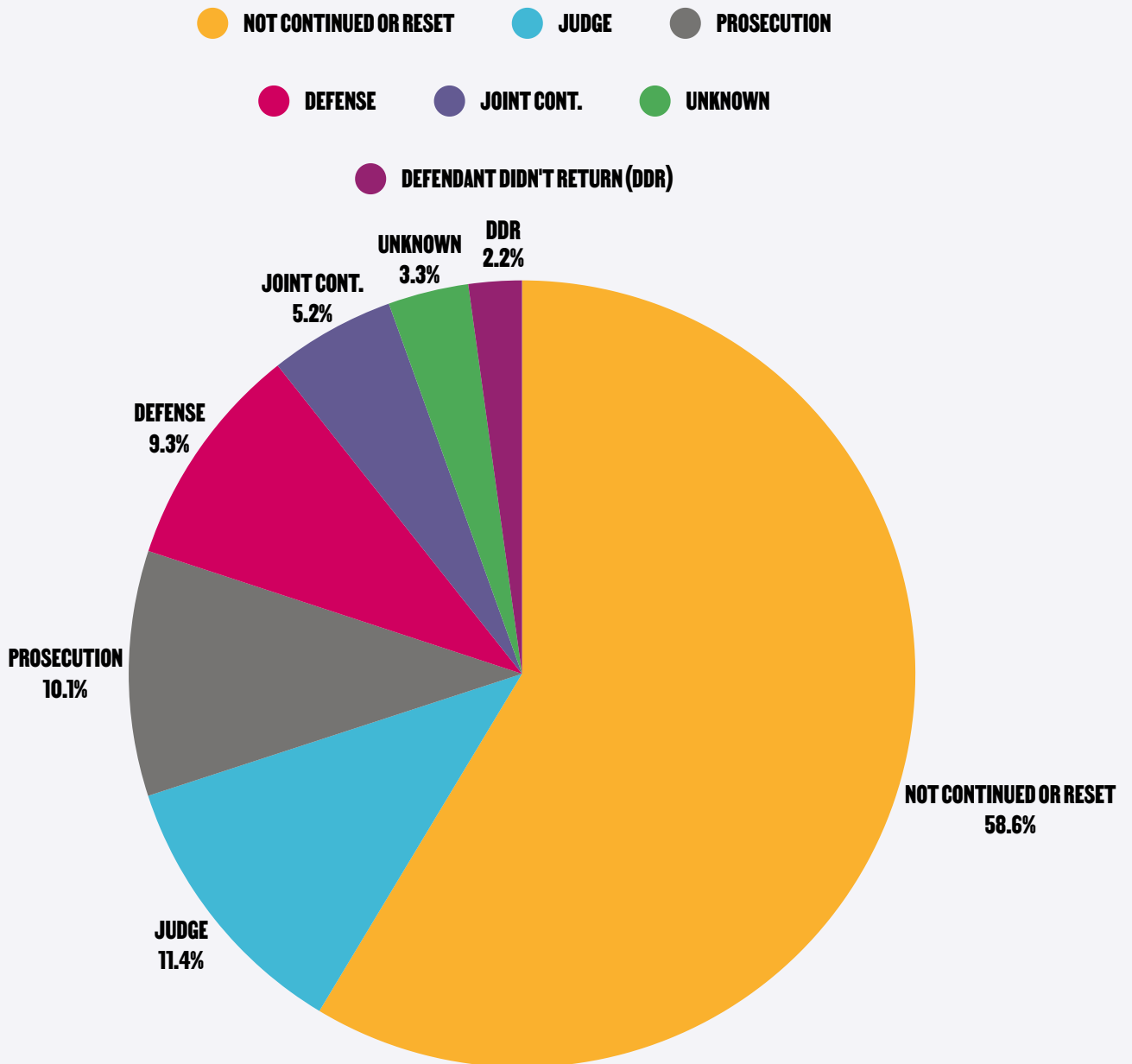


## 03 — Defense Attorneys

Defense attorneys may need continuances because witnesses were not available, because the defense attorney is in another section of court, because the defendant did not appear in court, or because the defense attorney has changed. This is sometimes due to a defendant running out of money to continue paying a private defense attorney and needing to be assigned a public defender.

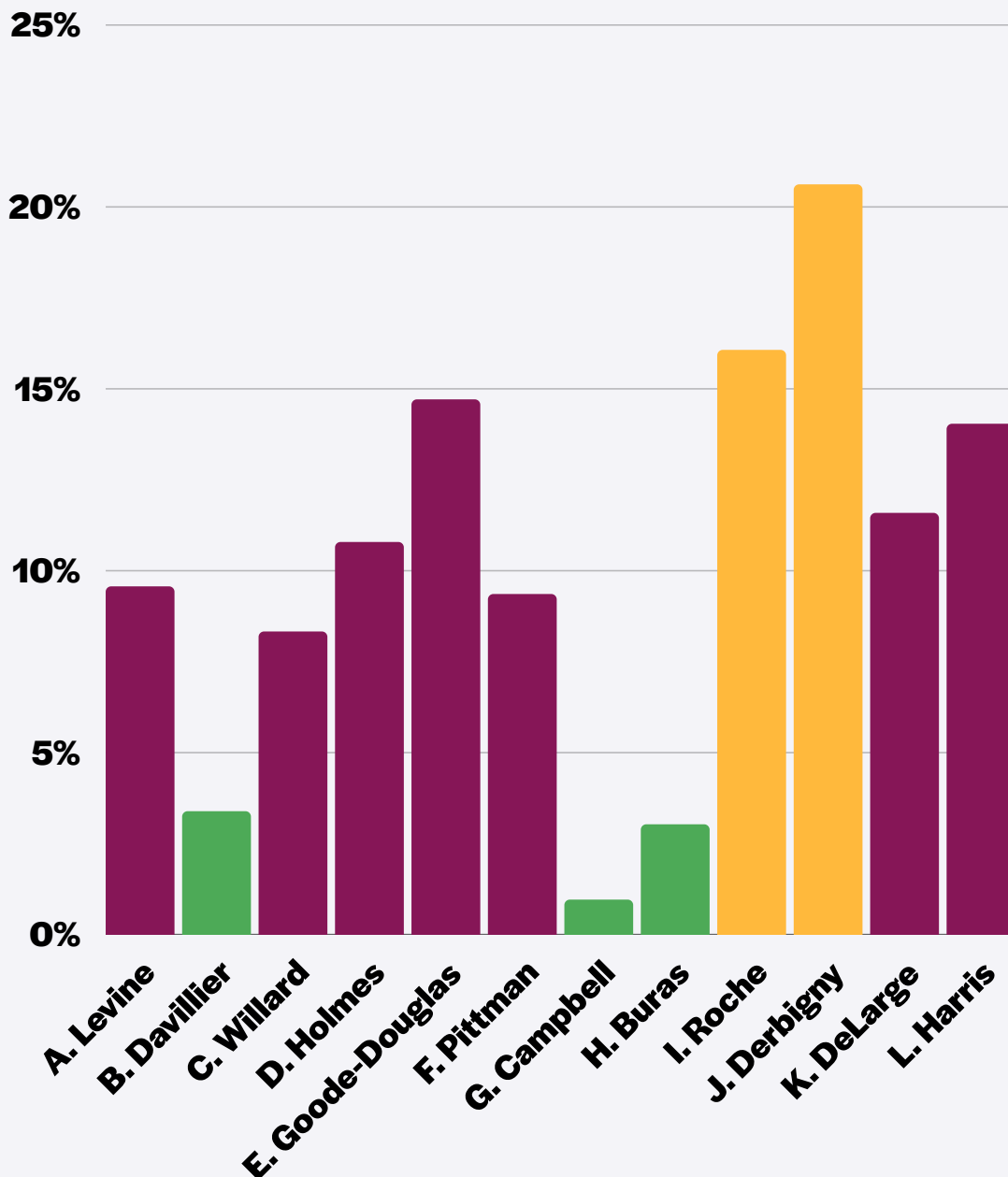
# WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

The chart below shows the percentage of continuances in the 3014 cases that Court Watch NOLA court watchers observed in Criminal District Court in 2024. Judges were the largest single contributor to continuances, with most of those being cases reset due to a trial on the docket. However, the other sources of continuances outnumbered judicial continuances by almost three times. Judges certainly contribute to the continuances, but are not the sole or even main reason for the high volume of case delays, and their numbers are similar to those from the prosecution and defense attorneys.



# CONTINUANCES BY SECTION

While judges are not creating the majority of continuances, all of the judges have to deal with similar challenges. Some sections stand out as dealing with them better than their peers. Judges Davillier, Campbell, and Buras are outliers for the low rates of continuances. Judges Roche and Derbigny stand out as having higher rates of continuances compared to other judges. We find it notable that the length of time a judge has been on the bench does not seem to correlate to continuance rates, as both the highest and lowest rate outliers include some of the most veteran judges (Derbigny and Buras) as well as some of the newest judges (Roche and Campbell).



# CONCLUSION

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Continuances are an unfortunate byproduct of a system that is not—and cannot ever be—100% efficient. While judges often are solely blamed for continuances, multiple parties contribute to the large number of case delays, including the DA's Office, private defense attorneys, the public defender's office, the police department, the sheriff's office, and the department of corrections. The system is heavily dependent on resolving cases by plea deals that often come down to the last minute, which makes it difficult for everyone involved to assure that cases proceed as scheduled.

As a community, we can and should advocate for cases to move forward promptly, as neither defendants nor crime victims are served justice by cases that drag on for years and years. Likewise, no one is served justice by a system that prioritizes speed over accuracy and fairness. The court system is a group project, and many people have pieces to contribute to the final product. We must hold everyone equally accountable for making sure that it runs efficiently and fairly.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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A large orange square graphic containing the text 'COURT WATCH' in large, bold, black, sans-serif capital letters. Below this, the word 'NOLA' is written in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters inside a black rectangular box, flanked by two small white dots on either side.

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