



Iowa Courts Stat Pack

Data and analysis from the
Iowa Supreme Court & Iowa Court of Appeals (2024-2025)

*Compiled by Michael S. Boal
Belin McCormick, P.C.
Revised July 15, 2025*

Topline Notes

- “**Court watching**” is the practice of closely observing a particular court and noting trends, correlations, or behaviors of that court (or its judges). Data from court-watching is:
 - Powerful. The court’s own conduct establishes the basis for any trends, correlations, or behaviors.
 - Predictive. The more data is quantified, the better one can predict future behaviors.
 - Misleading. Data, numbers, and analytics *never* tell a complete story.
- Beginning in OT06, **SCOTUSblog.com** compiled and released statistics from the U.S. Supreme Court in the form of a “Stat Pack.” Similarly, as far back as 2011, Iowa attorney **Ryan Koopmans** maintained a scorecard of Iowa Supreme Court opinions, data, and metrics.
 - Any striking or uncanny resemblance with the SCOTUSblog Stat Packs—or the Koopmans Scorecards—is intentional and with sincere gratitude.

Court of Appeals

High-level Observations:

- Still a relatively **new court**: **eight** of **nine** judges were appointed in the last six years.
- Judge Mary Tabor was elected Chief Judge in 2024.
 - Judge Tabor assumed the role when Judge Thomas Bower retired.
- Judge John Sandy was appointed in June 2024, and his first opinions issued in August 2024.
 - Judge Sandy succeeded Judge Bower.

Term at a Glance: *How did this year compare?*

Common Themes: *What to expect at the Court.*

Judicial District Scorecard: *How'd the lower courts fare?*

Opinions, by Judge: *Who wrote what?*

Opinions Lengths & Reviews: *What did they write?*

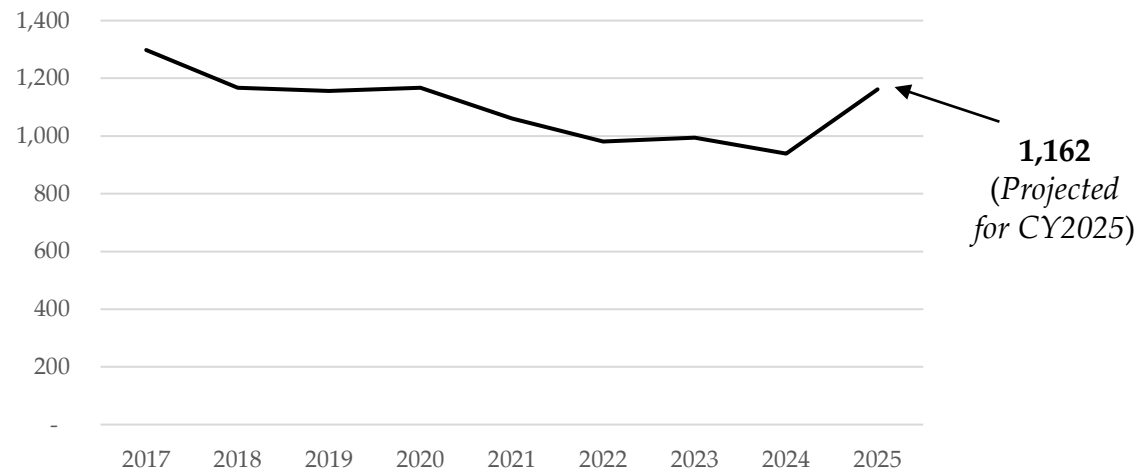
Divided Cases: *Spotting the battles.*

Voting Alignments: *Who agrees with whom?*

Court of Appeals: Term at a Glance

- Number of cases filed **increased** from the past several years.*
- Number of cases published stayed **relatively consistent** (and incredibly small).

Total Cases Filed, per year*

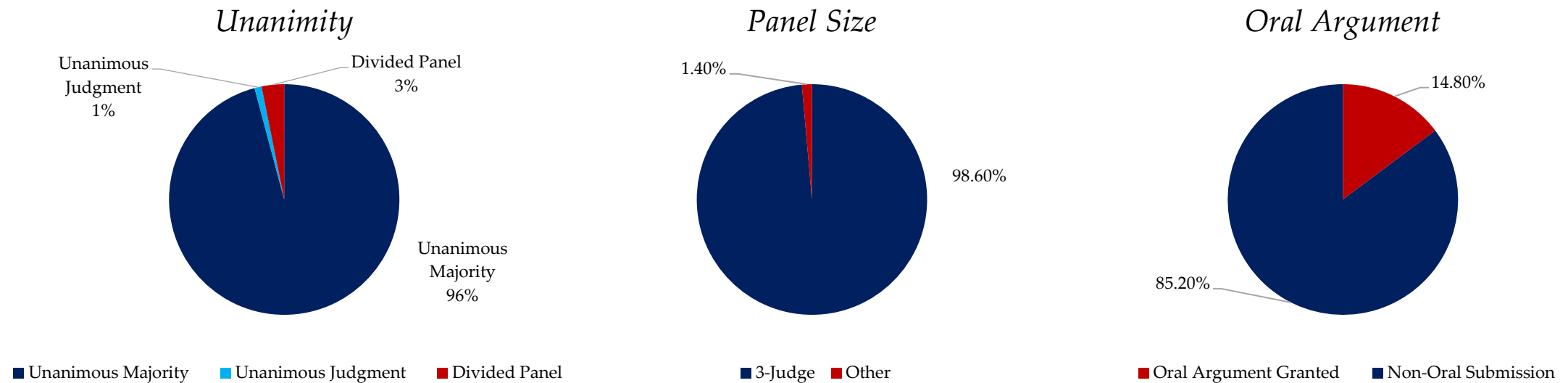


Year*	Published opinions	% of all cases
2017	18	1.4%
2018	8	0.7%
2019	5	0.4%
2020	13	1.1%
2021	20	1.9%
2022	14	1.4%
2023	7	1.7%
2024	17	1.8%
2025	0	--

* Based on calendar year. The remaining Court of Appeals statistics are compiled from July – June.

Common Themes

- The Court of Appeals decided cases unanimously **97%** of the time.
- The Court considered cases with three-judge panels in **98%** of its cases.
- The Court considered cases on brief (without oral argument) **85%** of the time.

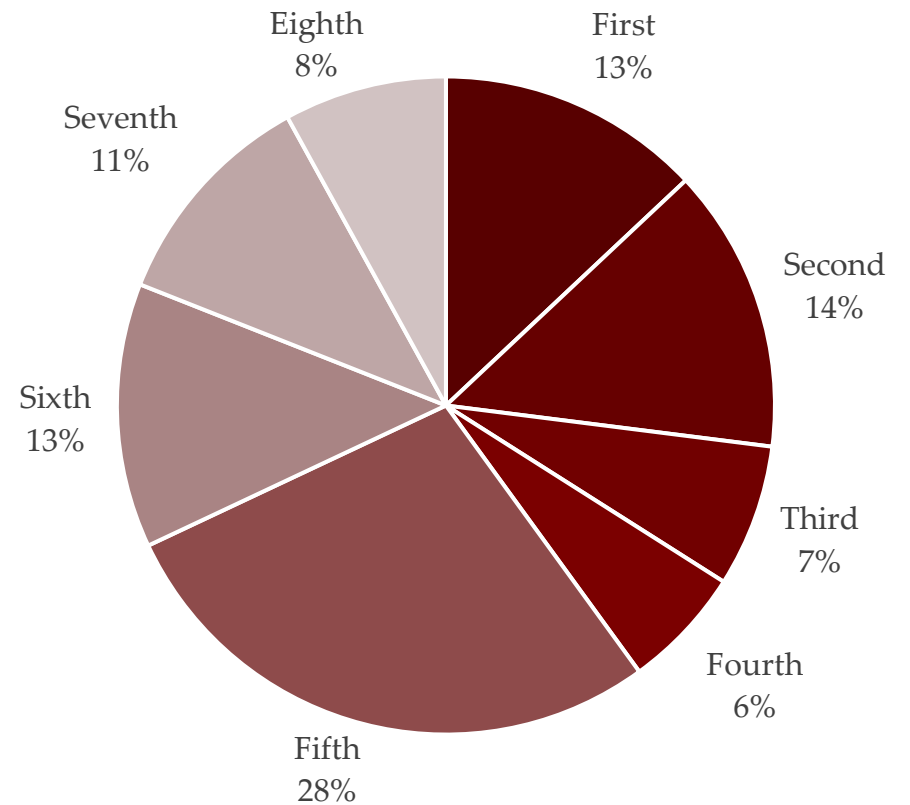


Judicial District Scorecard

➤ **21%** of the Court's docket originated from District 5C (Polk County).

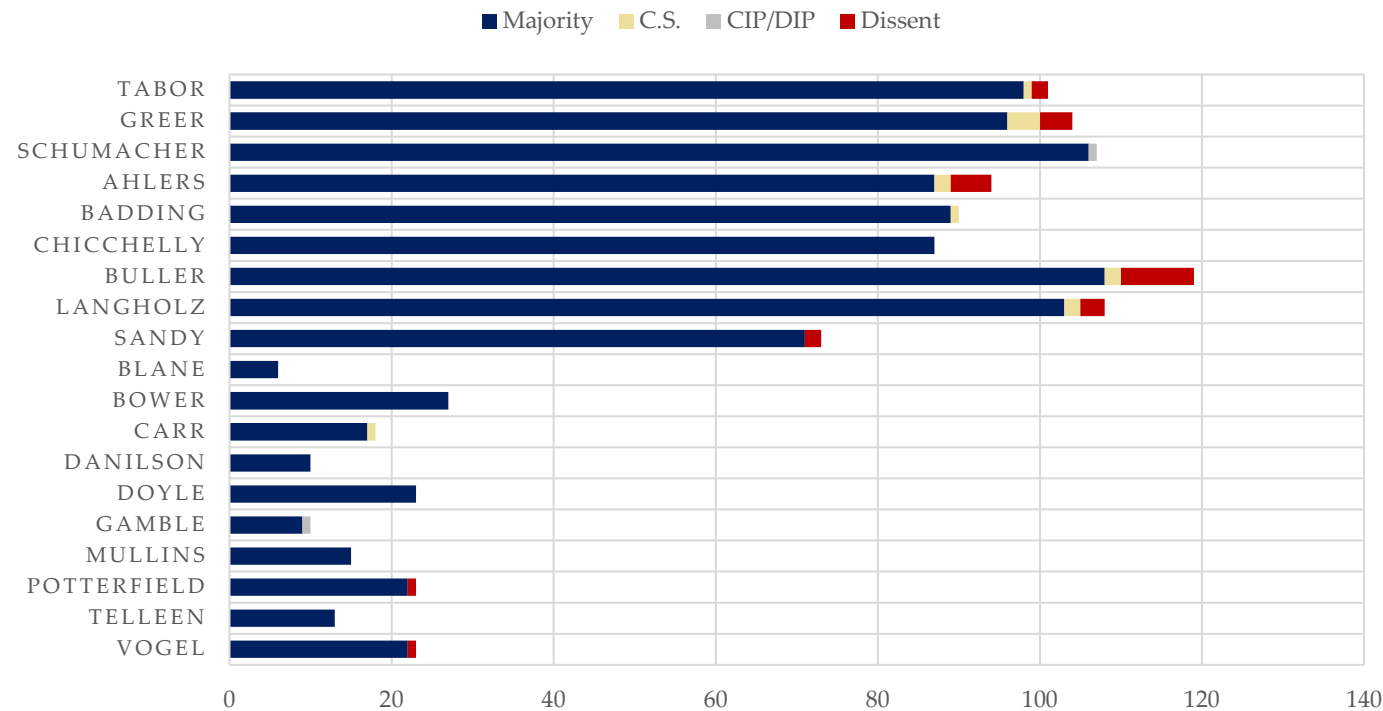
➤ **District 8B** had the highest affirmance rate (92%), **District 1A** the lowest (78%).

District	All Cases	Affirmed	Reversed	Mixed
District 1A	51	78%	10%	12%
District 1B	86	87%	5%	8%
District 2A	47	87%	2%	11%
District 2B	92	88%	2%	10%
District 3A	20	85%	10%	5%
District 3B	48	88%	6%	6%
District 4	60	85%	7%	8%
District 5A	55	89%	2%	9%
District 5B	19	89%	0%	11%
District 5C	213	86%	5%	8%
District 6	129	91%	3%	5%
District 7	114	85%	4%	11%
District 8A	53	85%	6%	9%
District 8B	26	92%	4%	4%
Total	1,013	87%	5%	8%



Number of Opinions, by Judge*

- Full-time judges averaged **94** majority opinions this year (senior judges just **16**).
- Full-time judges averaged **4.2** separate opinions (concurring or dissenting).



* Judge Sandy issued his first opinions in August.

Opinion Lengths & Reviews

- The average majority opinion was **8.2 pages** (senior judges averaged 7.5 pages).
- Each full-time judge was subject to further review this term, except J. Sandy.

Judge	Avg. Majority (pages)
Tabor	8.1
Greer	9.5
Schumacher	8.7
Ahlers	7.0
Badding	8.8
Chicchelly	6.5
Buller	7.2
Langholz	8.8
Sandy	9.5
Total	8.2

Judge	Cases Reviewed*
Tabor	3
Greer	3
Schumacher	4
Ahlers	5
Badding	4
Chicchelly	3
Buller	5
Langholz	4
Sandy	0
Total	31

** During the 2024-2025 Supreme Court term.*

Divided Cases

- The Court issued multiple opinions in just **42 cases** (4.1% of its total caseload).
- **J. Buller** led with 11 non-majority opinions, followed by Greer (8), then Ahlers (7).
- **J. Langholz** and **J. Buller** “faced off” most frequently, in six cases.

Involved in Split Decisions	Number of Cases
Greer	15
Buller	14
Ahlers	10
Langholz	10
Badding	4
Sandy	4
Schumacher	4
Tabor	4
Chicchelly	1

Dueling Judges	Number of Cases
Langholz / Buller	6
Greer / Ahlers	5
Greer / Sandy	3
Badding / Buller	2
Greer / Badding	2
Schumacher / Buller	2
Greer / Buller	2

Voting Alignments

- **J. Greer** authored the most majority opinions in non-unanimous cases (8).
- **J. Langholz** and **J. Badding** were the most frequent “joiners” of majority opinions in those same cases.

Judge	Authored Majority	Authored Separate	Joined Majority	Joined Separate	Total*
Tabor	2	3	3	--	8
Greer	8	8	5	--	21
Schumacher	3	1	8	1	13
Ahlers	4	7	5	--	16
Badding	6	1	10	--	17
Chicchelly	1	0	5	--	6
Buller	5	11	6	1	23
Langholz	6	5	11	--	22
Sandy	2	2	4	1	9

* Totals exclude per curiam opinions and senior judge participation.

Supreme Court

High-level Observations:

- **Five** of the Court's **seven** justices were appointed within the past six years.
 - Ideological differences are coming into focus but are still developing.
- Justice Christensen was reselected as Chief, a post she has held since 2020.
 - Justice McDermott serves as the Court's acting chief when needed.
- NEW: HF956, effective July 1, raised the mandatory retirement age for all judges from 72 to 78.

Term at a Glance: *How did this year compare?*

Oral Argument & Advocates: *Who is arguing at the Court?*

Amicus Participation: *Who's chiming in?*

Docket Makeup: *What type of cases is the Court hearing?*

Judicial District Scorecard: *How'd the lower courts fare?*

Turnaround Times: *How quickly is the Court moving?*

Majority Opinions: *How much are they writing?*

Number of Opinions (This Term): *Who wrote the most?*

Number of Opinions (Over Time): *Are the justices agreeable?*

Unanimous Cases (Over Time): *How agreeable?*

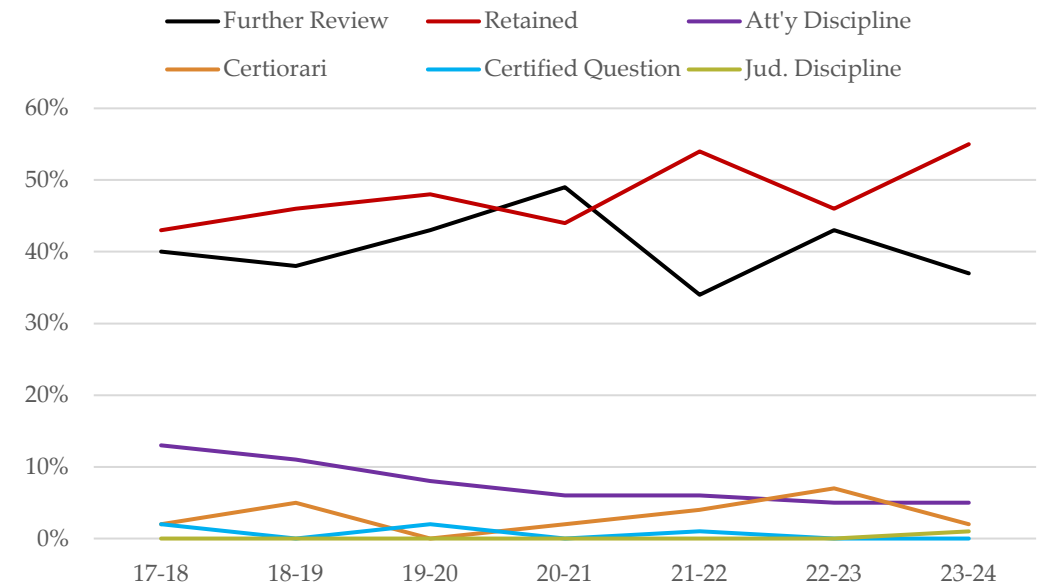
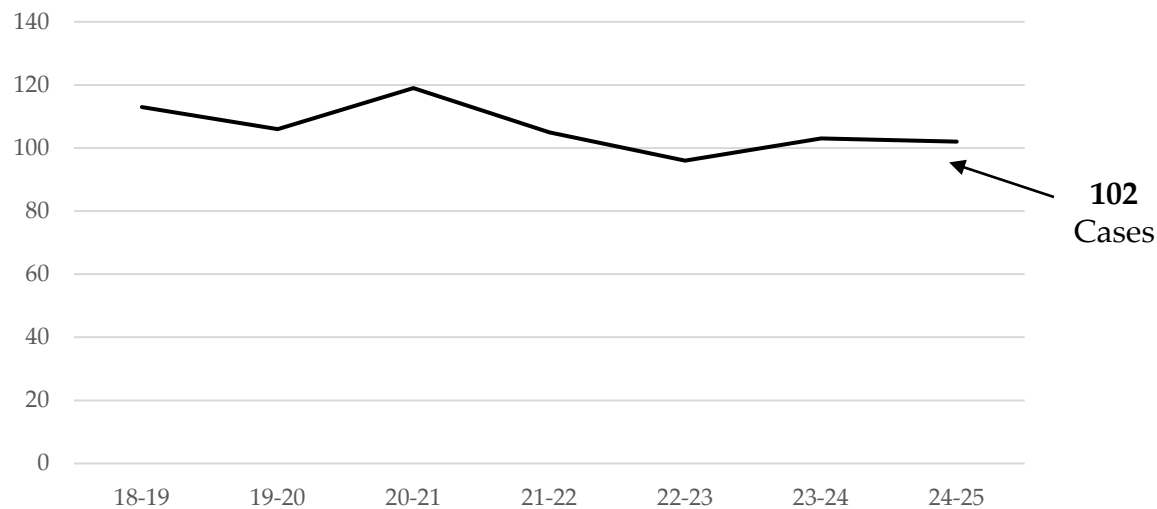
Opinions Breakdown: *What happened this year?*

Voting Alignments: *Who agrees with whom?*

Supreme Court: Term at a Glance

- The Court's caseload has stayed **relatively consistent** over the past several years.
- Cases *retained* (rather than further reviewed) increased from last term.

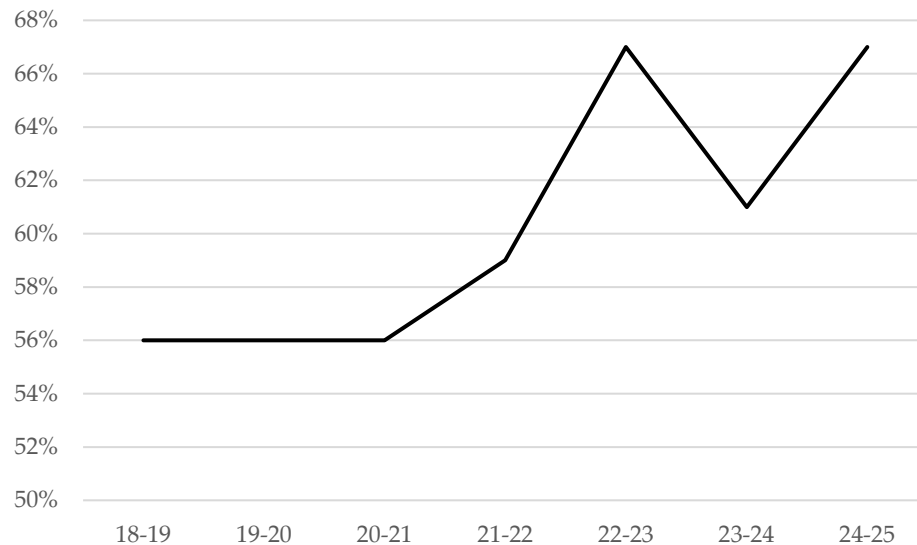
Cases Filed (By Term)*



* The Court's term generally runs from July through June.

Oral Argument & Advocates

- The Court granted oral argument in **two-thirds** (68) of its cases this term.
- **Patrick Valencia & Louis Sloven** each argued 5 cases this term.



Top Advocates

Patrick Valencia (AGO)

In re N.F.
Halbur v. Larson
Wagner v. State
In re N.S.
LS Power Midcontinent v. State

Louis Sloven (AGO)

Ruiz v. State
State v. Young
State v. Sievers
State v. Flynn
State v. Dorsey

Others with 3 cases

Timothy Hau (AGO)
Josh Irwin (App. Def.)
Melinda Nye (App. Def.)
Breanne Stoltze (AGO)
Eric Wessan (AGO)

Amicus Participation

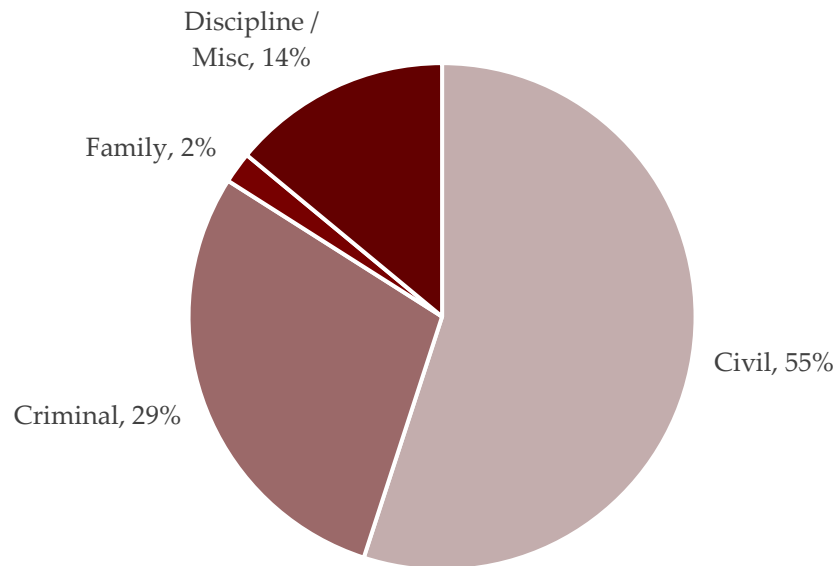
- **29 Iowa attorneys filed 24 amicus briefs in 17 cases** this term.
- This is a **decrease** in briefs from last term, but an **increase** in cases with amicus participation.

Case	Briefs
<i>Christensen v. Iowa District Court</i>	3
<i>Burton v. West Bend Mut. Ins. Co.</i>	2
<i>MIMG CLXXII Retreat v. Miller</i>	2
<i>MIMG CLXXII Retreat v. Williams</i>	2
<i>Summit Carbon Sols. v. Kasischke</i>	2
<i>LS Power Midcontinent v. State</i>	2
11 Others	1

Leading Advocates	No. of Briefs	On behalf of
W. Charles Smithson	2	<i>Members of the Iowa Senate</i>
Alexander Kornya & Melanie Huetteman	2	<i>Iowa Legal Aid</i>
Jodie McDougal & Jackson O'Brien	2	<i>Greater Iowa Apartment Association, et al.</i>

Docket Makeup

- The Court shifted ~10% of its docket from **criminal** to **civil** this year, while considering around the same number of family law and disciplinary cases.



Civil Case Breakdown	
Statutory	15
General / Multiple Areas	13
Employment	6
Constitutional	5
Procedure	4
Insurance	3
Sex Offender Registry	3
Arbitration / Corporate	2
Workers' Compensation	2
Evidence	1
Probate/Guardianship/Trusts	1
Postconviction Relief	1
	56

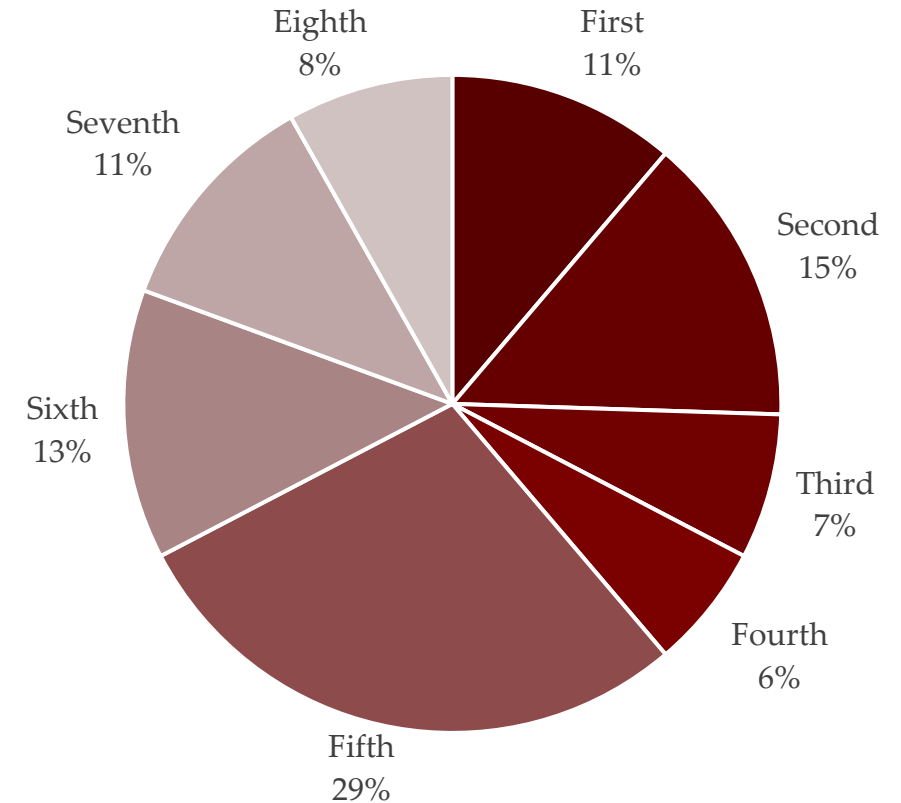
Criminal Case Breakdown	
Constitutional	8
Procedure	7
General / Multiple Areas	6
Statutory	4
Sentencing	4
Probation/Parole/Expungement	1
	30

Judicial District Scorecard

➤ **35.1%** of the Court's opinions reviewed decisions from District 5C (Polk County).*

➤ District-level affirmance rates varied greatly.

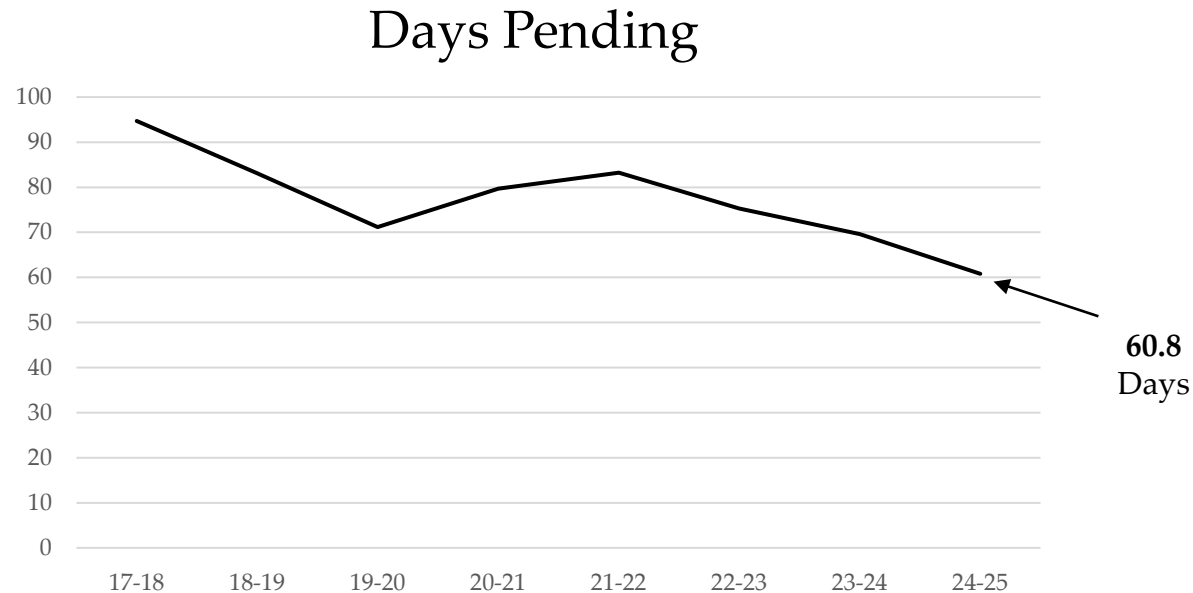
District	All Cases	Affirmed	Reversed	Mixed/Other
District 1A	3	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%
District 1B	8	62.5%	12.5%	25.0%
District 2A	3	33.3%	66.7%	--
District 2B	8	62.5%	37.5%	--
District 3A	1	100.0%	--	--
District 3B	3	33.3%	66.7%	--
District 4	6	33.3%	66.7%	--
District 5A	1	100.0%	--	--
District 5B	1	100.0%	--	--
District 5C	33	48.5%	36.4%	15.2%
District 6	16	43.8%	56.3%	--
District 7	4	50.0%	25.0%	25.0%
District 8A	5	80.0%	20.0%	--
District 8B	2	100.0%	--	--
Total	94	62.9%	30.1%	7%



* Excludes attorney disciplinary, writ of certiorari cases.

Turnaround Times

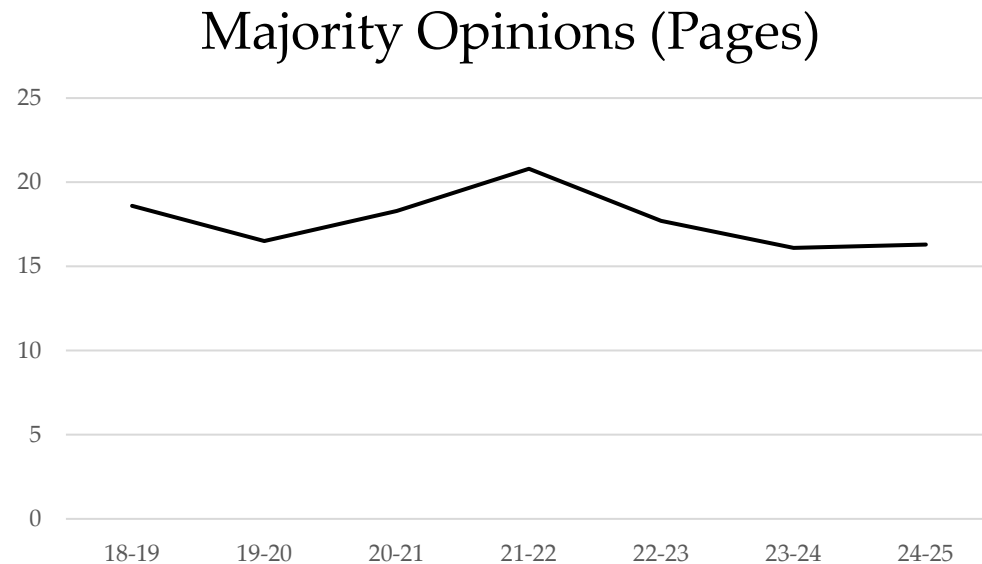
- The Court continued its **downward trend** of the time between submission and filing.
- As is common, individual justice turnaround times varied.



Days Pending (submission to filing)	
Christensen	39.5
Waterman	55.1
Mansfield	37.1
McDonald	71.6
Oxley	48.5
McDermott	116.3
May	73.6

Majority Opinions

- Majority opinions were consistently around **16 pages** (and shorter than past averages).
- **C.J. Christensen** wrote the “briefest” majorities, **J. Waterman** the most thorough.

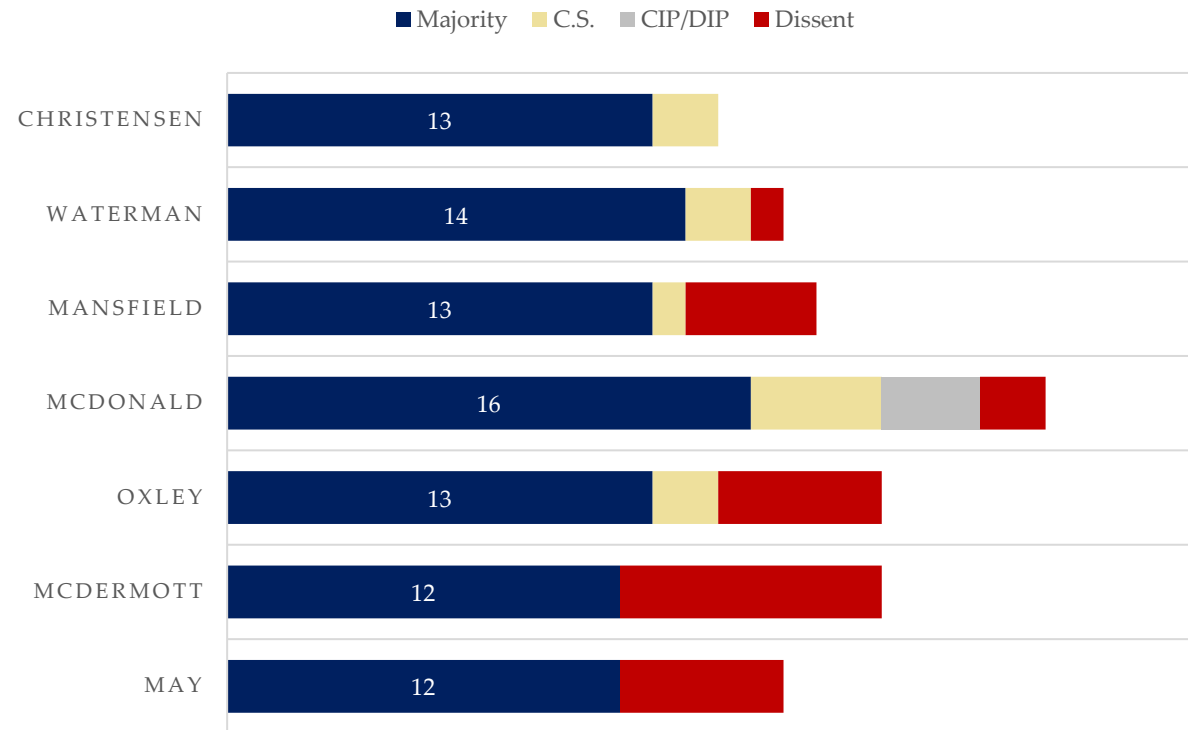


Justice	Average Majority Op.	Longest Majority Op.	Shortest Majority Op.
Christensen	13.1	30	5
Waterman	18.7	36	8
Mansfield	17.9	28	10
McDonald	15.9	28	7
Oxley	17.4	27	10
McDermott	14.6	23	8
May	16.8	26	8

* Excludes per curiam opinions.

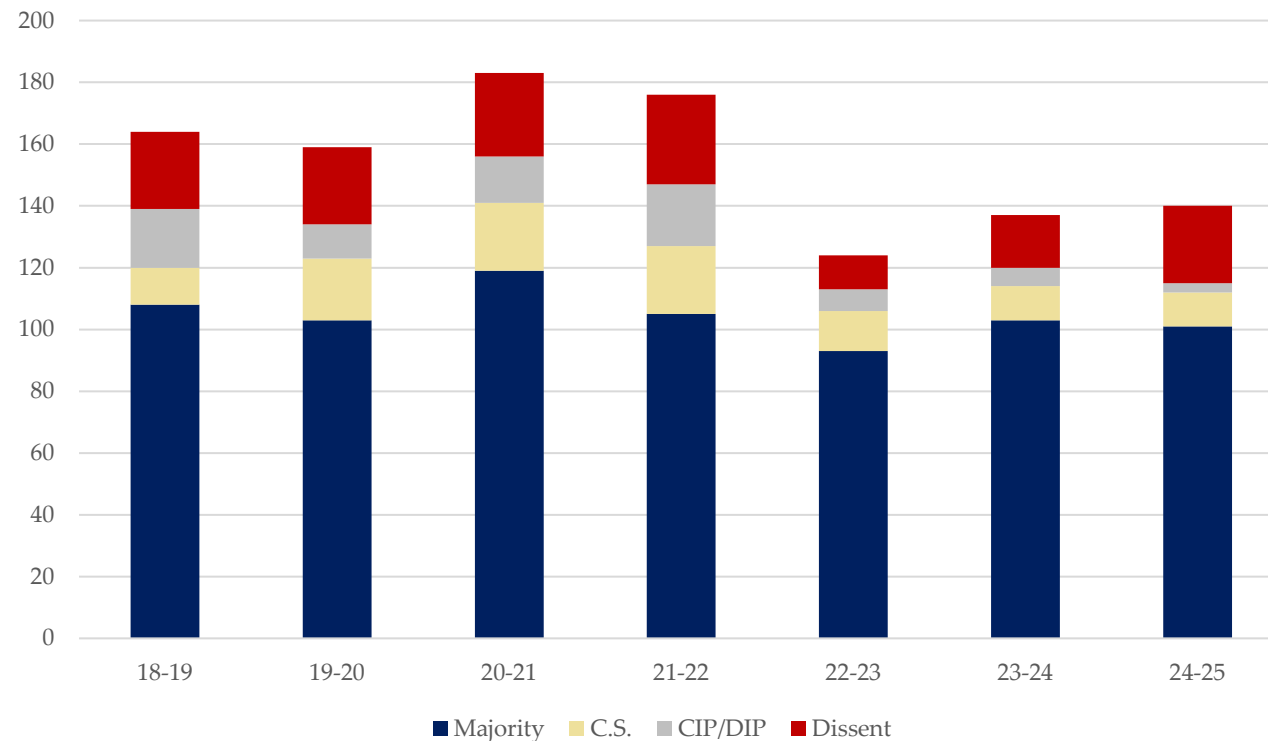
Number of Opinions (This Term)

- Justice **McDonald** wrote the most total opinions, with **16** majorities and **9** separates.
- Chief Justice **Christensen** wrote the fewest, with **13** majorities and **2** separates.



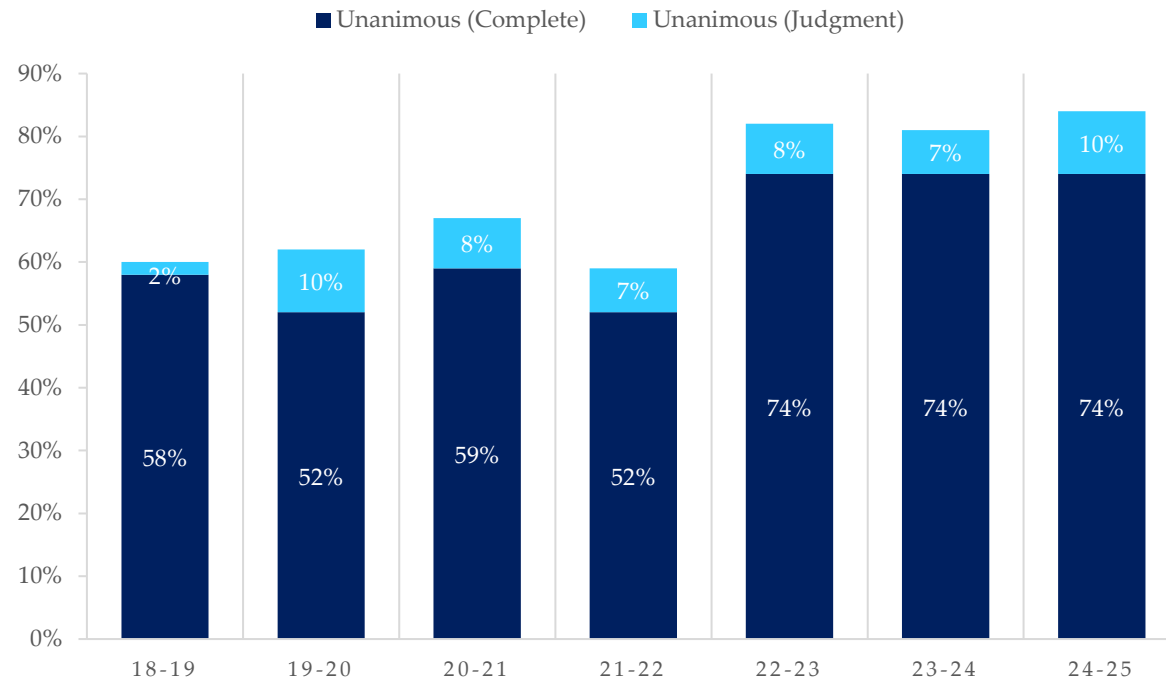
Number of Opinions (Over Time)

- The Court is issuing **around the same** number of opinions in recent years.
- The Court issued **slightly** more total opinions than last year.



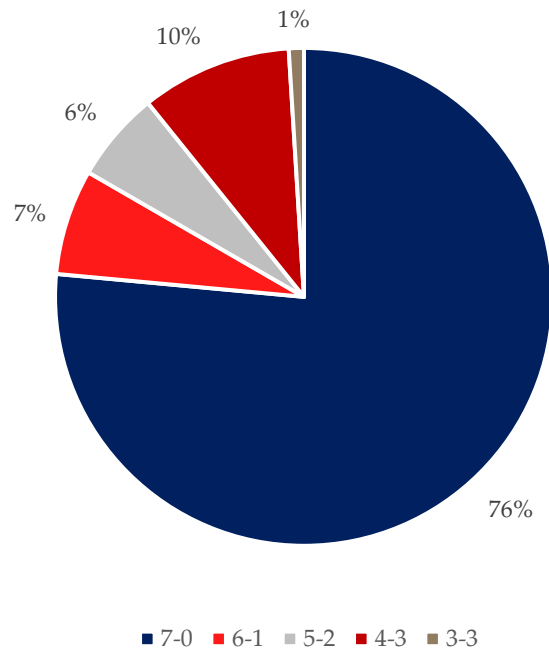
Unanimous Cases (Over Time)

- The Court has maintained a **consistent** (and increased) rate of unanimous decisions over the past several years.



Opinions Breakdown

- **83%** (85 of 102 cases) were resolved with a unanimous judgment—a slight increase.
- **J. Oxley** was this year’s “strongest” majority opinion author, garnering the most votes.



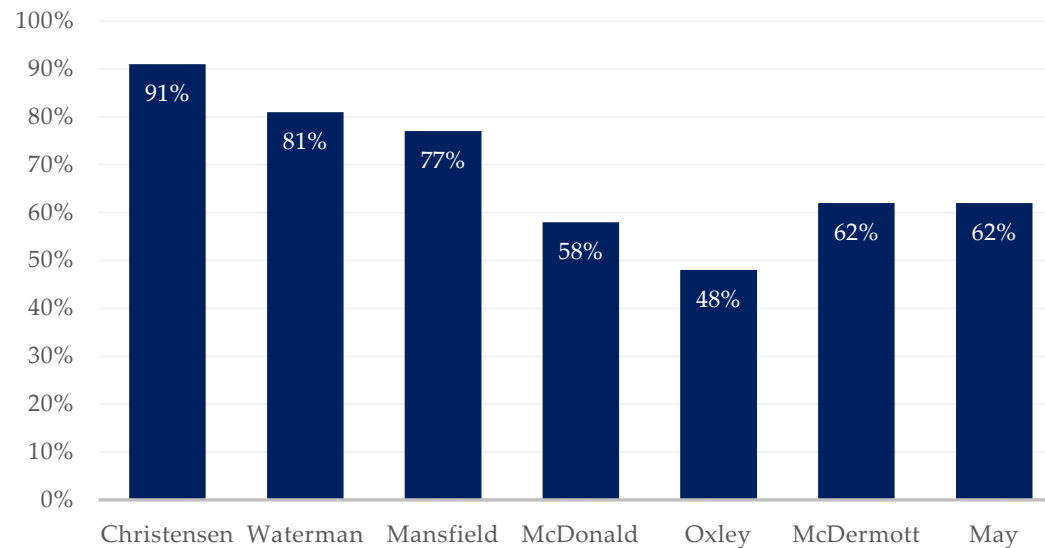
	Majorities	7-0	6-1	5-2	4-3	Majority Strength
Christensen	13	10	1	0	2	6.46
Waterman	14	8	1	2	3	6.00
Mansfield	13	10	1	1	1	6.54
McDonald	16	13	1	1	1	6.63
Oxley	13	11	1	1	0	6.77
McDermott	12	9	1	1	1	6.50
May	12	10	0	0	2	6.50
Total	93	71	6	6	10	6.48

- A vote to concur in the judgment counts as a vote for the majority.
- A decision with less than seven participating justices is grouped by the number of justices not in the majority.
- Breakout chart excludes per curiam and evenly divided opinions.

Opinions Breakdown, cont'd.

- **C.J. Christensen** was the most likely to be in the majority in non-unanimous cases.*
- **J. Waterman** was the only justice to *not* author a solo separate opinion.

Frequency in the Majority
(26 Non-Unanimous Cases)



Solo Opinions	
Christensen	1
Waterman	0
Mansfield	2
McDonald	2
Oxley	1
McDermott	3
May	2

* "Non-unanimous" as to the judgment.

Voting Alignments (All Cases)

➤ Agreement in *Full*—

- “Full agreement” means the justices joined the same opinion(s), in all parts.

	Waterman	Mansfield	McDonald	Oxley	McDermott	May
Christensen	93.5%	92.8%	85.7%	84.5%	85.3%	85.4%
	Waterman	90.7%	82.5%	81.3%	84.0%	85.2%
		Mansfield	83.2%	79.0%	82.7%	83.7%
			McDonald	87.1%	78.8%	88.2%
				Oxley	88.8%	85.9%
					McDermott	83.5%
						May

➤ Agreement in *Part*—

- “Partial agreement” means the justices joined at least one of the same opinion(s).

	Waterman	Mansfield	McDonald	Oxley	McDermott	May
Christensen	94.6%	95.9%	90.8%	86.6%	88.4%	87.6%
	Waterman	92.8%	86.6%	84.4%	88.3%	87.5%
		Mansfield	85.1%	80.0%	84.7%	84.8%
			McDonald	86.1%	77.8%	90.3%
				Oxley	87.8%	85.9%
					McDermott	84.6%
						May

Voting Alignments (26 Contested Cases)*

➤ Agreement in *Full*—

- “Full agreement” means the justices joined the same opinion(s), in all parts.

	Waterman	Mansfield	McDonald	Oxley	McDermott	May
Christensen	78.3%	73.9%	43.5%	31.8%	39.1%	43.5%
	Waterman	65.4%	34.6%	32.0%	46.2%	50.0%
		Mansfield	34.6%	20.0%	38.5%	42.3%
			McDonald	52.0%	23.1%	57.7%
				Oxley	56.0%	48.0%
					McDermott	42.3%
						May

➤ Agreement in *Part*—

- “Partial agreement” means the justices joined at least one of the same opinion(s).

	Waterman	Mansfield	McDonald	Oxley	McDermott	May
Christensen	82.6%	87.0%	65.2%	40.9%	52.2%	52.2%
	Waterman	73.1%	50.0%	44.0%	61.5%	57.7%
		Mansfield	42.3%	24.0%	46.2%	46.2%
			McDonald	48.0%	19.2%	65.4%
				Oxley	52.0%	48.0%
					McDermott	46.2%
						May

* A “contested case” is one that includes more than one opinion (i.e., at least one special concurrence, CIP/DIP, or dissent).