1998 RELIABILITY REPORT

After the final round of revisions to the database template, but before the commencement of regular coding, two coders from Michigan State University independently coded 60 state supreme court cases — 30 each from the states of Connecticut and Michigan. These cases consisted of the last 30 cases listed for each state in the regional reporters (the Atlantic Reporter and the North Western Reporter, respectively) for 1996. The following is a discussion of the reliability results.

The template consists of 16 different sections. The number of questions or items varies by template section, with similar or related information collected in the same section. Table 1 reports the number of questions or items appearing in each section. The total number of items is 423. Since 30 cases were coded from each state, the total number of possible matches between coder 1 and coder 2 was 12,690 per state, or a total of 25,380. Overall, a high degree of inter-coder reliability (matching responses from coder 1 and coder 2) was achieved. As Table 2 shows, out of 25380 possible matches, both coders agreed on 25152 classifications, for an overall reliability of 99.1%. (Tables 3 and 4 report the reliability by template section separately for each state.)

Figure 1 shows the inter-coder reliability by question. (Figures 2 and 3 show the same for Connecticut and Michigan individually.) For the vast majority of questions (391, or slightly more than 92%, of the 423 questions), inter-coder agreement was achieved more than 95% of the time. Equally important, across all 60 cases, in only 5 questions out of the 423 (less than 2%) was less than 90% reliability achieved. As shown in Figures 2 and 3, inter-coder agreement was slightly less consistent for Connecticut than for Michigan. While approximately 94% of the questions achieved reliability of at least 95% for the Michigan cases, the percentage of questions achieving 95% reliability for the Connecticut cases was just slightly over 90%.

The majority of this difference can be attributed to the lower level of inter-coder agreement in coding the section of the template entitled Basic Case Information, as can be seen in Figure 4. This section of the template includes 11 items, including a variable to indicate whether or not some agency action was reversed by the state supreme court ruling. For the Connecticut cases, the coders agreed as to the correct response in only 4 of the 30 cases. Subsequent discussion with the co-principal investigator revealed that coders were using inconsistent coding rules when determining whether or not there was

agency action prior to the state supreme court action. The text of the state supreme court decision was not always clear as to when a particular entity was considered an agency or a lower court. The coding rule devised is as follows: if an entity (such as a workers' compensation court or judge) is listed on the state court organizational chart, that entity is treated as a lower court; otherwise, that entity is treated as an agency. A review of the 26 Connecticut cases in which the coders did not agree as to the coding of the agency action reversal variable determined that the use of the coding rule reported above would resolve the discrepancies between coders.

The results of this reliability test are clear: there is high level of reliability between the two coders at Michigan State University. Further, the major source of unreliability has been identified and rectified. Thus, we are quite confident that the cases in the database are being coded in a reliable, consistent manner.

Table 1. Template Item Breakdown

Template Section	Number of Items
Identification Variables	15
Basic Case Information	11
Participants	38
General Category for Issue Classification	7
Criminal Appeals Issue Classification	38
Criminal Cases Legal Issues	27
Civil Government Issue Classification	51
Civil Private Issue Classification	34
Civil Cases Legal Issues	23
Criminal Appeals Outcome Variables	15
Civil Government Outcome Variables	14
Civil Private Outcome Variables	14
Juvenile Outcome Variables	24
Non-Adversarial Outcome Variables	14
Individual Justice Voting – Sitting Justices	65
Individual Justice Voting – Substitute Justices	33
Total	**423**

Note: The template consists of 16 different sections, with the number of questions per section varying by section. Similar or related information is grouped together by section.

Table 2. Reliability Summary By Template Section

Template Section	Total Number of Matches	Total Possible Number of Matches	Percent Correctly Matched
Identification Variables	888	900	98.67
Basic Case Information	583	660	88.33
Participants	2230	2280	97.81
General Category for Issue Classification	420	420	100.00
Criminal Appeals Issue Classification	2250	2280	98.25
Criminal Cases Legal Issues	1598	1620	98.64
Civil Government Issue Classification	3050	3060	99.67
Civil Private Issue Classification	2039	2040	99.95
Civil Cases Legal Issues	1366	1380	98.99
Criminal Appeals Outcome Variables	893	900	99.22
Civil Government Outcome Variables	840	840	100.00
Civil Private Outcome Variables	839	840	99.88
Juvenile Outcome Variables	1440	1440	100.00
Non-Adversarial Outcome Variables	840	840	100.00
Individual Justice Voting – Sitting Justices	3896	3900	99.90
Individual Justice Voting – Substitute Justices	1980	1980	100.00
Total	**25152**	**25380**	**99.10**

Note: Results reported above are based on the independent coding of the last 30 1996 cases listed in the Atlantic Reporter for Connecticut and the last 30 1996 cases listed in the North Western Reporter for Michigan, for a total of 60 cases, by 2 coders from Michigan State University.

Table 3. Reliability Summary By Template Section - Connecticut

Template Section	Total Number of Matches	Total Possible Number of Matches	Percent Correctly Matched
Identification Variables	446	450	99.11
Basic Case Information	280	330	84.85
Participants	1112	1140	97.54
General Category for Issue Classification	210	210	100.00
Criminal Appeals Issue Classification	1122	1140	98.42
Criminal Cases Legal Issues	794	810	98.02
Civil Government Issue Classification	1521	1530	99.41
Civil Private Issue Classification	1019	1020	99.90
Civil Cases Legal Issues	678	690	98.26
Criminal Appeals Outcome Variables	443	450	98.44
Civil Government Outcome Variables	420	420	100.00
Civil Private Outcome Variables	420	420	100.00
Juvenile Outcome Variables	720	720	100.00
Non-Adversarial Outcome Variables	420	420	100.00
Individual Justice Voting – Sitting Justices	1946	1950	99.79
Individual Justice Voting – Substitute Justices	990	990	100.00
Total	**12541**	**12690**	**98.83**

Note: Results reported above are based on the independent coding of the last 30 1996 cases listed in the Atlantic Reporter for Connecticut by 2 coders from Michigan State University.

Table 4. Reliability Summary By Template Section - Michigan

Template Section	Total Number of Matches	Total Possible Number of Matches	Percent Correctly Matched
Identification Variables	442	450	98.22
Basic Case Information	303	330	91.82
Participants	1118	1140	98.07
General Category for Issue Classification	210	210	100.00
Criminal Appeals Issue Classification	1128	1140	98.95
Criminal Cases Legal Issues	804	810	99.26
Civil Government Issue Classification	1529	1530	99.93
Civil Private Issue Classification	1020	1020	100.00
Civil Cases Legal Issues	688	690	99.71
Criminal Appeals Outcome Variables	450	450	100.00
Civil Government Outcome Variables	420	420	100.00
Civil Private Outcome Variables	419	420	99.76
Juvenile Outcome Variables	720	720	100.00
Non-Adversarial Outcome Variables	420	420	100.00
Individual Justice Voting – Sitting Justices	1950	1950	100.00
Individual Justice Voting – Substitute Justices	990	990	100.00
Total	**12611**	**12690**	**99.38**

Inter-Coder Reliability by Question - Total		% of Questions
Less Than 90% Reliability	(5 questions, 1.18%)	1.18
91 To 95 % Reliability	(27 questions, 6.38%)	6.38
Greater Than 95% Reliability	(391 questions, 92.43%)	92.43

Inter-Coder Reliability by Question - Connecticut		% of Questions
Less Than 90% Reliability	(16 questions, 3.78%)	3.78
91 To 95 % Reliability	(25 questions, 5.91%)	5.91
Greater Than 95% Reliability	(382 questions, 90.31%)	90.31

Inter-Coder Reliability by Question - Michigan		% of Questions
Less Than 90% Reliability	(11 questions, 2.60%)	2.60
91 To 95 % Reliability	(14 questions, 3.31%)	3.31
Greater Than 95% Reliability	(398 questions, 94.09%)	94.09

Template Section	% CT Matches	% MI Matches	% Total Matches
Identification Variables	99.11	98.22	98.67
Basic Case Information	84.85	91.82	88.33
Participants	97.54	98.07	97.81
General Category for Issue Classification	100	100	100
Criminal Appeals Issue Classification	98.42	98.95	98.25
Criminal Cases Legal Issues	98.02	99.26	98.64
Civil Government Issue Classification	99.41	99.93	99.67
Civil Private Issue Classification	99.9	100	99.95
Civil Cases Legal Issues	98.26	99.71	98.99
Criminal Appeals Outcome Variables	98.44	100	99.22
Civil Government Outcome Variables	100	100	100
Civil Private Outcome Variables	100	99.76	99.88
Juvenile Outcome Variables	100	100	100
Non-Adversarial Outcome Variables	100	100	100
Individual Justice Voting - Sitting Justices	99.79	100	99.9
Individual Justice Voting - Substitute Justices	100	100	100

Note: Results reported above are based on the independent coding of the last 30 1996 cases listed in the North Western Reporter for Michigan by 2 coders from Michigan State University.