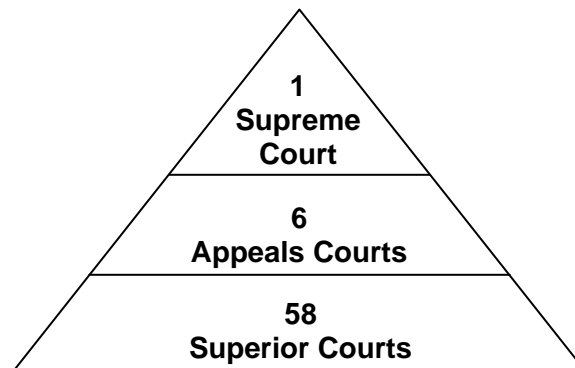


Superior Court of California, County of Contra Costa

Jurisdiction

There are limits to the legal authority of each court to hear and decide a case.



Most cases in California begin in one of the Superior, or trial, courts. There are 58 subdivisions of the California Superior Court, one for each county. For example, “the Superior Court of California, County of Contra Costa.” These courts hear cases involving state law: both civil and criminal cases, as well as family, probate, and juvenile cases.

The next level of authority in the state's judicial branch lies with the Courts of Appeal. The legislature has divided the state geographically into six appellate districts, each containing one Court of Appeal. Most of the cases that come before the Courts of Appeal involve the review of a Superior Court decision that is being contested by a party to the case.

The Supreme Court is the top of authority in the state's judicial system, and as such it may review decisions of the Courts of Appeal in order to settle important questions of law and ensure that the law is applied uniformly. There is only one California Supreme Court.

There are other kinds of courts. For example, US Federal Courts have jurisdiction over cases that involve federal law, or events that took place on federal property such as in a national park. Tribal courts (part of the Native American Reservation system) have jurisdictional power over everything occurring within their territory. There are military courts, the International Court of Justice, and more. Each court has the legal authority to hear and decide certain types of cases depending on the subject matter, territory, and personal jurisdiction.