

# SUPREME COURT LIVE

## III. COURTS IN ALASKA

### A. Federal Courts

The federal court structure is roughly similar to the Alaska structure, with trial courts, courts of appeals, and the Supreme Court. The federal courts are essentially concerned with administering the federal law, and they function independently of the state courts.

#### 1. U.S. District Court for the District of Alaska

The trial courts in the federal system are the United States district courts. These are courts of general jurisdiction, corresponding to Alaska's superior courts. The district courts handle all types of criminal cases, both felonies and misdemeanors, arising under federal statutes. Civil cases include some things governed by federal law alone, such as bankruptcies, cases under patent or copyright law, and admiralty cases (a branch of law dealing with shipping and navigation on the high seas or inland navigable waters). Other civil cases include lawsuits under the United States Constitution or federal statutes, such as civil rights or anti-trust suits, or suits involving interstate commerce regulations. Also lawsuits to which the federal government is a party, and suits by one state against another state are heard in district courts. Suits between citizens of different states, and involving more than \$10,000, may be tried in federal district courts. For example, a suit by an Alaska resident against a Kentucky resident for injuries sustained in an auto accident in Alaska could be heard in the federal district court. However, since the federal system has no common law of its own governing personal injury lawsuits, the law of Alaska would be applied in such a case.

The United States District Court for the District of Alaska has three judges based at the federal courthouse in Anchorage. District judges are appointed for a life term by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate. Two federal judges with more limited powers serve the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Alaska, which is also headquartered in Anchorage. Bankruptcy judges are appointed for fourteen-year terms by the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. See [U.S. District Court for the District of Alaska](#) and [United States Bankruptcy Court, District of Alaska](#).

#### 2. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals

The United States courts of appeals are intermediate courts of appeal between the district courts and the United States Supreme Court. They correspond to the Alaska

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Court of Appeals and function in much the same matter, except that they handle both civil and criminal appeals.

The entire United States (plus its territories) is divided into thirteen “circuits,” with a court of appeals for each circuit. Alaska is in the Ninth Circuit, along with Washington, Montana, Oregon, Idaho, California, Nevada and Arizona. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals is based in San Francisco and has 48 judges (including senior judges). All judges are appointed for a life term by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate. See [United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit](#).

### **3. The U.S. Supreme Court**

Just as the Alaska Supreme Court is the highest court in Alaska, the United States Supreme Court is the highest court in the nation, and the court of last resort. It consists of a Chief Justice and eight associate Justices, all of whom are appointed for life terms by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate. See [Supreme Court of the United States](#).