



How Long Does an MDL Take? Federal Multidistrict Litigation From Creation to Closing

Original analysis of 94 records from the Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation, January 2023–September 2026 (closing dates). Published October 16, 2026. <https://settlementinsight.com/research/how-long-mdls-last>

The 94 federal multidistrict litigations (MDLs) closed between January 2023 and September 2026 lasted a median of 5.9 years from the Panel's transfer order to the closing of the docket. The middle half of them took between 3.1 and 9.5 years, and 19 of the 94 (20.2%) stayed open for a decade or longer. Products liability MDLs, the mass torts, took a median of 8.4 years.

5.9

Median years from MDL creation to closing

20%

Closed MDLs that lasted a decade or longer

8.4

Median years, closed products liability MDLs



Closed federal MDLs by years from transfer order to closing, January 2023 to September 2026



Source: Settlement Insight analysis of data from the Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation
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What the Closed MDL Dockets Show

- Half lasted more than five years.** Of the 94 MDLs closed since January 2023, 53 (56.4%) closed five years or more after the Panel's transfer order. The average was 6.5 years, pulled up by the longest dockets, which ran as long as 17.7 years.
- Mass torts run longest.** The 27 products liability MDLs in the group lasted a median of 8.4 years, compared with 6.8 years for 24 antitrust MDLs and 2.7 years for 12 data breach and privacy MDLs.

3. **Patent and marketing MDLs close fastest.** The 12 patent, copyright and trade secret MDLs closed after a median of 2.4 years, about as fast as the 9 marketing and sales practices MDLs at 2.4 years. The shortest docket, the Prepared Food Photos, Inc., Copyright Litigation, closed 4.4 months after its transfer order.
4. **The longest-running recently closed MDL.** The National Security Agency Telecommunications Records Litigation (MDL No. 1791), created in 2006, closed after 17.7 years, followed by the Rail Freight Fuel Surcharge Antitrust Litigation at 17.7 years.
5. **Nearly one in five closed within two years.** 18 MDLs (19.1%) closed less than two years after the transfer order, most of them data breach, patent or marketing and sales practices MDLs.

How we measured

The data come from the Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation (JPML), which publishes a monthly MDL Statistics Report limited to closed litigations for each calendar year. We used the year-end reports for 2023, 2024 and 2025 and the report dated October 1, 2026 for 2026, retrieved on October 16, 2026. Each report lists the MDL number, caption, transferee district, the date the matter was filed with the Panel, the date of the transfer order and the date the MDL was closed.

The study covers every MDL with a closing date from January 1, 2023 through September 30, 2026, one row per MDL docket. Earlier closings are not part of the reports we hold. Where an MDL was closed, reopened and closed again, we use the last closing date for its duration; this applies to the Suboxone (Buprenorphine Hydrochloride and Naloxone) Antitrust Litigation, first closed in April 2024 and again in October 2025. The Acetaminophen - ASD/ADHD Products Liability Litigation was closed in August 2024 but reopened and was pending again on September 30, 2026; it does not appear in any of the four closed-litigation reports, and although an earlier retrieval in our data still carries its August 2024 closing date, it is not counted as a closed MDL. Together, 2 MDLs closed in the period were later reopened.

Duration is the number of days from the transfer order to the closing date, converted to years using the average calendar year including leap days. The median and mean are taken over all MDLs; the 25th and 75th percentiles use linear interpolation between ranked durations (the inclusive method), and thresholds such as five or ten years count durations of at least that many years. Litigation types are assigned from keywords in each MDL's caption, in a fixed order, the first match deciding: data breach and privacy (data security breach, privacy, wiretapping, telecommunications records, Telephone Consumer Protection Act, driving data), antitrust, patent, copyright and trade secret, products liability, marketing and sales practices (marketing, sales practices, pest infestation, tithing), banking and securities, insurance, wage and hour (Fair Labor Standards). Products liability covers captions naming products liability or personal injury, the disaster cases (the Gold King Mine release and the Java Sea air crash) and four product-defect MDLs whose captions name the product but not the legal theory: General Motors Ignition Switch, FCA Monostable Electronic Gearshift, Dicamba Herbicides and Syngenta Corn. A caption such as "Marketing, Sales Practices and Products Liability" therefore counts as products liability, and one ending in "Antitrust" as antitrust.

To check completeness, we counted closings by the Panel's fiscal year, counting every closing, including the first Suboxone closing and the August 2024 closing of the later reopened Acetaminophen MDL, as the Panel does. Without the Acetaminophen closing, which falls in fiscal 2024, the four closed-litigation

reports alone give one closing fewer for fiscal 2024. Our data give 32 closings for fiscal 2025 and 26 for fiscal 2024, matching the Panel's published statistical analyses exactly.

Checked against published figures

- Number of MDL dockets closed in fiscal year 2025 (October 1, 2024 to September 30, 2025): published 32, our count 32 (exact match). [Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation, Statistical Analysis of Multidistrict Litigation, Fiscal Year 2025](#)
- Number of MDL dockets closed in fiscal year 2024 (October 1, 2023 to September 30, 2024): published 26, our count 26 (exact match). [Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation, Statistical Analysis of Multidistrict Litigation, Fiscal Year 2024](#)

Limitations

- The study looks only at MDLs that have closed. MDLs still pending on September 30, 2026, including some of the largest mass torts, are not included, and many of them have already run longer than the median here. The result answers how long the MDLs that closed recently lasted, not how long an MDL opened today will last.
- Closing the MDL docket is not the same as resolving every case or paying every claimant. Individual cases can settle, be dismissed or be sent back to their original courts long before the docket closes, and settlement payments can continue after it closes.
- The data cover closings from January 2023 on. MDLs that closed earlier, and changes over a longer period, are not measured.
- A closed MDL can be reopened. The 2026 figures reflect the Panel's report of October 1, 2026; a docket listed as closed there could be reopened later and show a later closing date in a future report.
- The litigation types are our grouping by caption keywords, not an official JPML classification, and several types contain only a few MDLs.

Data files

- [Federal MDLs closed January 2023 to September 2026, with years from transfer order to closing](#) (CSV, 94 rows)
- [MDLs closed per calendar year and their duration, 2023 to September 2026](#) (CSV, 4 rows)
- [MDL duration by type of litigation, MDLs closed January 2023 to September 2026](#) (CSV, 8 rows)
- [How long closed MDLs lasted, January 2023 to September 2026](#) (CSV, 6 rows)

How to cite

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