



MINNESOTA JUDICIAL BRANCH

First Judicial District

Mission: To provide justice through a system that assures equal access for the fair and timely resolution of cases and controversies.

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The First Judicial District has 36 judges and more than 250 staff that handle nearly 200,000 cases annually in the counties of Carver, Dakota, Goodhue, Le Sueur, McLeod, Scott and Sibley.

The First Edition

A Newsletter about the First Judicial District of the State of Minnesota

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Welcome

By Edward Lynch, First Judicial District Chief Judge

Welcome to *The First Edition*, the quarterly newsletter of the First Judicial District. Each year nearly two million cases are filed in the trial courts of Minnesota. These cases represent some of the most important matters in the lives of the people involved and include criminal matters where a person's freedom is at stake, domestic matters where a person's family is at stake and civil matters where a person's property is at stake. The trial courts throughout the state and in the seven counties of the First Judicial District provide a forum where the people of our community can obtain resolutions to these important matters; a place where those who have been abused obtain protection, where neglected children obtain services, where criminal offenders are held accountable, where contracts are enforced, where estranged families obtain relief and where those who have been wrongfully injured obtain compensation.

Because of the important role and responsibility the court has in this community, it is appropriate for the court to periodically report to the community regarding its activities, accomplishments and challenges. This newsletter will allow the people of our community to get to know their court better. The court has been an effective public institution providing timely, constitutionally mandated services for over 150 years. This

newsletter will inform the public about the important work the court does every day and the ongoing effort to ensure that the impartial administration of justice continues to be accessible, available and affordable for those in need.

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Meet the Newest First District Judge

On November 24, 2009, Governor Tim Pawlenty announced the appointment of Erica H. MacDonald to a First Judicial District trial court bench vacancy in the city of Hastings in Dakota County. The vacancy occurred with the retirement of the Honorable Leslie M. Metzzen on May 20, 2009.

MacDonald, of Mendota Heights, had

been an assistant United States Attorney for the District of Minnesota in Minneapolis since 2001, and previously was a judicial law clerk to Minnesota Court of Appeals Judge Harriet Lansing from 2000 to 2001, an assistant U.S. Attorney in Chicago, Illinois in 2000, an associate attorney with the Kirkland and Ellis law firm in Chicago in 1999, and a judicial law clerk to U.S. District Court Judge James H. Alesia in Chicago from 1997 to 1999. She was also a buyer and a sales manager with May De-

partment Stores in St. Louis, Missouri from 1989 to 1994.

MacDonald earned her juris doctorate degree from DePaul University College of Law in Chicago in 1997, and her bachelor of arts degree from the University of Notre Dame in Notre Dame, Indiana in 1989.

“Erica’s combination of intellect, trial

skills, management experience and compassion will serve her well as a judge,” Governor Pawlenty said. “In addition, her background in business prior to becoming a lawyer gives Erica an added perspective.”

MacDonald has been an instructor and a presenter for numerous law enforcement and legal conferences, and is known for her expertise in human trafficking. She has received numerous professional awards, including the St. Paul Police Chief’s Award of Merit, the

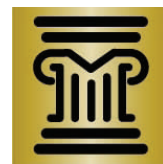
Department of Justice Certificate of Appreciation, and many performance awards for her work in the U.S. Attorney’s office. MacDonald is a member of Minnesota Women Lawyers, a parent volunteer and a member of St. Joseph’s School of West St. Paul School Board, and has been a volunteer coach with the Mendota Heights Athletic Association.

MacDonald, 42, was born in Greenwich, Connecticut, grew up in Dallas, Texas and lives in Mendota Heights with her husband, Jim, and two sons, Kenny 10, and Mitchell, 7.

Erica H. MacDonald took the oath of office on January 15, 2010 and began her work on the bench January 19th.



Erica H. MacDonald



**WELCOME
JUDGE
MACDONALD**

Carver County Court Addition

By Vicky Carlson, Carver County Court Administrator

As Carver County continues to grow, so do the number of court hearings scheduled. In recent years, courtroom space was becoming scarcer. Judges were holding court in the jury assembly room, chambers, conference rooms and the county board room. Trials were being continued because there was no space in Carver County. That all changed with the remodel and addition of the Carver County Justice Center. In July 2009, construction was completed on two courtrooms, a jury assembly room, interview rooms, and expanded Court Administration office space.

One of the courtrooms is a high-volume courtroom meant to handle high volume criminal and bail calendars. There are three conference rooms instead of the standard two to provide more meeting space for attorneys and their clients. These rooms overlook the courtrooms and participants can see and hear what is happening in the courtroom. There is no jury box in this courtroom which allowed for an increase in public seating. There are monitors in the courtroom that display the calendar during arraignments. Attorneys and participants can see if their case is coming up and can start preparing for their

case to be called, which speeds up the arraignment process. One of the complaints received often by judicial and court partners prior to the remodel and addition was that it was often difficult to hear and be heard by someone participating in a hearing by phone conference. This changed with the addition. Phone conferencing is now built into the audio system.

A jury assembly room was added to the lower level. This room provides a more relaxed environment for jurors who are waiting for their case to be called. In addition, this room serves a dual purpose by doubling as a much needed large conference room for the county

and courts.

Court Administration office space was remodeled and expanded. New counter windows were installed which allows Court Administration to better serve the public. Interview rooms were added. These rooms give the courts space for confidential screening of income requirements and a private place for victims of domestic violence to complete paperwork.

The Carver County Justice Center has five courtrooms, four chambered judges and eighteen Court Administration employees. In 2008, there were over 14,000 new cases filed in Carver County Court Administration.



High Density Courtroom

Judicial Branch Automating and Centralizing the Processing of Payable Citations

As an essential step in meeting the budget challenges facing our criminal justice system, the Judicial Branch has embarked on an effort to centralize and streamline the processing of more than one million payable citations processed by district courts each year.

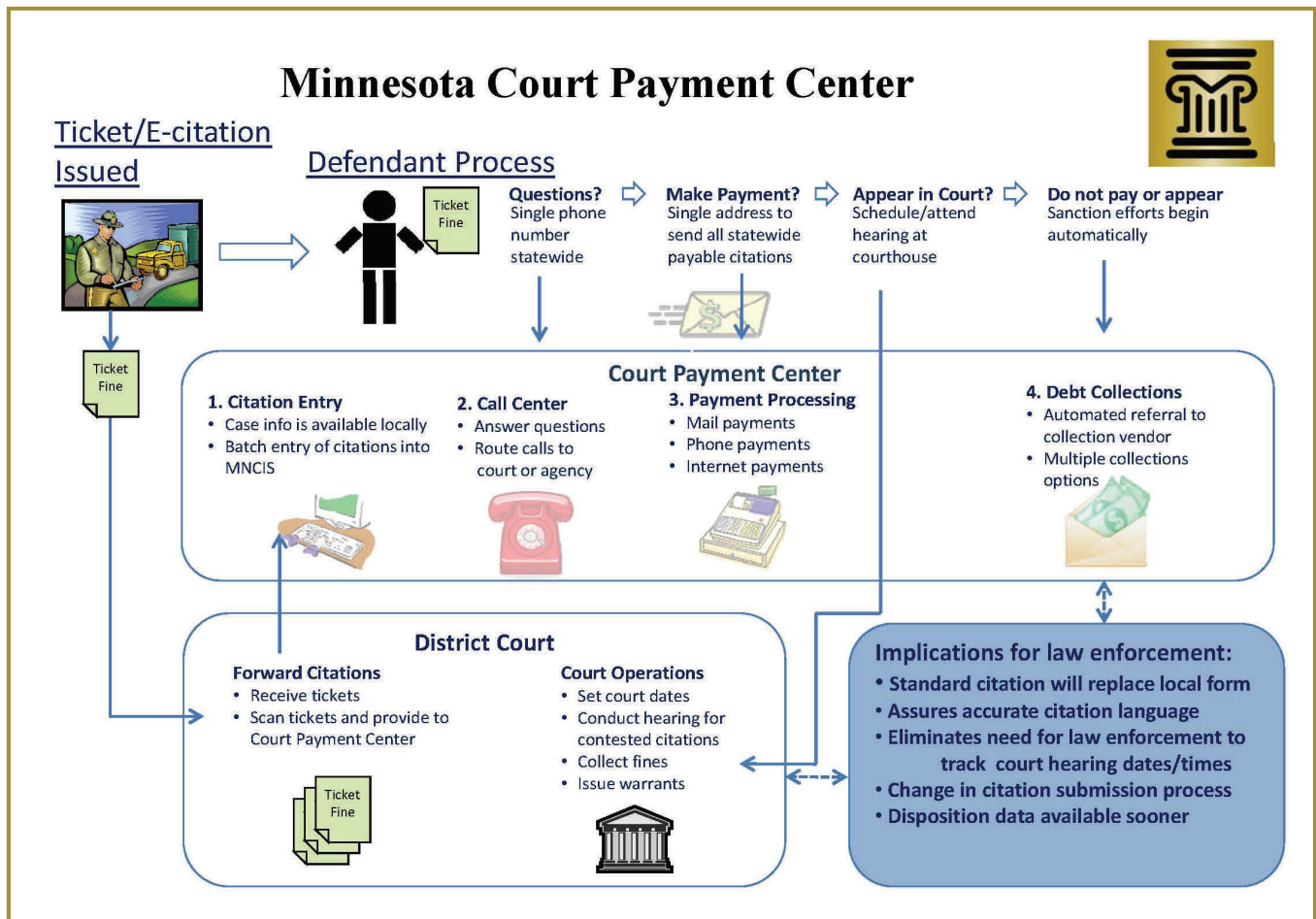
The Judicial Council has set an ambitious goal of transferring the process-

ing of payable citations from 85 counties to a new Court Payment Center by July 1, 2011. (The final two counties, Hennepin and Ramsey, will follow thereafter.) The Payment Center will consist of staff housed at the Kandiyohi County Courthouse in Willmar and in home based offices.

The new process will accommodate the

electronic filing of citations by law enforcement, which is already occurring in several jurisdictions, as well as paper citations. It will offer defendants the option of paying at the courthouse, by mail, on-line through the Judicial Branch website, or through a voice-activated telephone service. A statewide call center is being created to answer questions and

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Centralized Payables (continued)

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otherwise assist defendants.

The new process will automate the assessment of fines, which we expect will improve the efficient handling and accuracy of payments to municipalities, counties, the state general fund, and other designated recipients. In addition, the automated referral of delinquent debt to the Judicial Branch collections vendor is being implemented

statewide. The automated referral process is expected to increase revenue collections to the state general fund and other governmental agencies, improve efficiency by abandoning manual processes, and standardize collection efforts statewide. Beginning in July 2010, the branch will transition to a new collections contract with the Minnesota Department of Revenue.

As part of the effort, the Judicial Branch

has partnered with the Department of Public Safety and the State Patrol to develop a mutually beneficial standardized paper citation that should improve accuracy as well as speed processing. It is currently anticipated that the new standard citation will be available in mid-2010.

Maintaining the vitality of Minnesota's criminal justice system in a time of constrained public resources will be a challenge for all involved. Centralizing payable citation processing is one way the Judicial Branch is working to reduce the cost of operations while improving public service.

Benefits of Centralized Payables Processing

- Cost savings
- Faster citation processing
- Increased collections
- Provides public choice of payment options
- Standardized process statewide



Key Attributes

- Specialized Call Center handles phone inquiries statewide
- Entry of paper citations completed by specialized staff – increased efficiency/accuracy
- Supports paper and electronic citation entry
 - Paper citations are scanned, manually entered by Payment Center staff
 - Electronic citation entry reduces human intervention
- Automated assessment of fees assures accuracy of fee disposition to municipalities
- Automated referral to collection vendor for unpaid fines
- Multiple payment options:
 - Website (www.mncourts.gov)
 - Voice response telephone service
 - Mail



Dakota Criminal Jury Trial Backlog Solution

By Brenda Koenig, Court Operations Manager—Dakota County—Criminal

In tough economic times the volume of cases handled by the courts typically rises. In spite of an increase in workload, staffing level reductions, and budget cuts, the court system continues to provide services to the public as efficiently and effectively as possible.

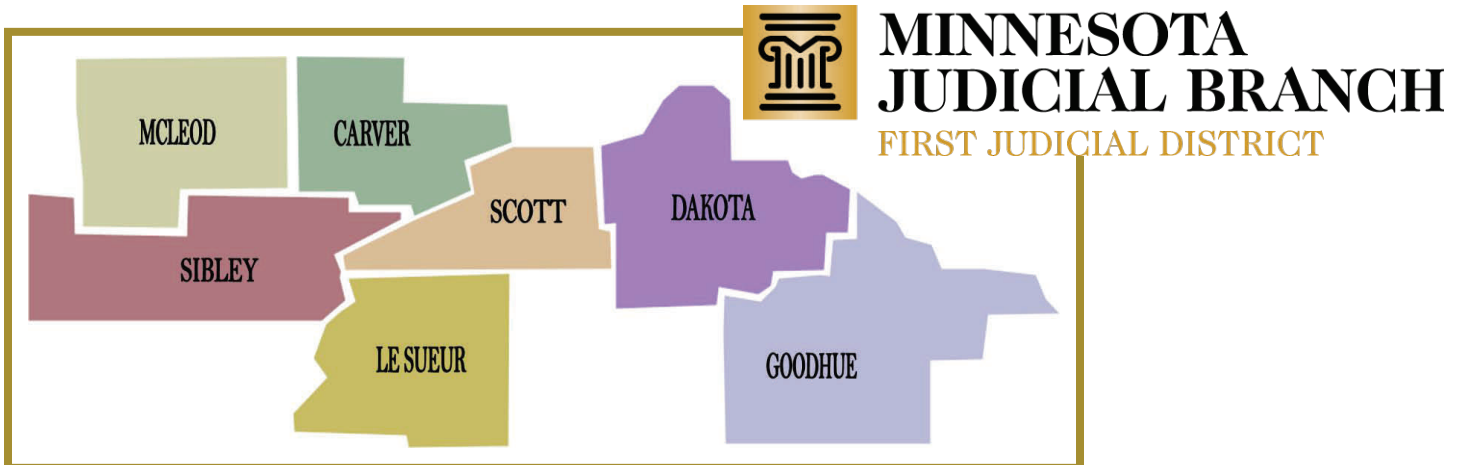
Scheduling cases in a timely manner has been difficult with the increase in the number of cases combined with staffing shortages and lack of judges. This had resulted in a backlog of criminal cases scheduled for jury trials in Dakota County. In response, Dakota County judges and administrators attempted a rather unique

project of setting up mass jury trial calendars during the weeks of September 8 and November 30, 2009. The goal was to address increasing delays in scheduling of criminal trials in gross misdemeanor and felony cases by limiting other nonessential calendars and scheduling additional jury trial calendars during those two weeks.

Typically, the average number of criminal jury trials scheduled per calendar in Dakota County is 25 cases. During the clean up period, 112 cases were set for trial, 87 cases were settled, 16 cases were continued to a later date, and in 9 cases the defendant failed to appear. Ultimately, none of the cases went to

trial. As a result of this project, Dakota County is now scheduling felony jury trials 2 months from the omnibus hearing and gross misdemeanor jury trials are scheduled 4 months from the omnibus hearing. Prior to this clean up period, both case types had a 6 month time period between the omnibus hearing and jury trial.

Dakota County continues to search for innovative ways to provide the same quality of service in an effort to keep pace with increased case loads and staffing shortages. A mass jury trial calendar is merely one example of a creative approach to caseload management.



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