



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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[First Judicial District Public Website](#)

The First Judicial District has 36 judges and more than 250 staff that handle over 120,000 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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Minnesota Lawyer Recognizes First Judicial District Judge Richelle Wahi for Diversity and Inclusion

First Judicial District Judge Richelle Wahi is one of the recipients of the fourth annual Minnesota Lawyer Diversity & Inclusion Awards for 2020, which will be presented virtually on November 5, 2020, from 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

The Minnesota Lawyer Diversity & Inclusion Awards honor those in the legal profession who go above and beyond in their efforts to create a more diverse and inclusionary community.

Specific criteria include:

- Significant impact on diversity and inclusion in the legal community
- Leadership in diversity initiatives within the firm or community
- Participating in newsworthy events in the legal community
- Legal professionals implementing new and innovative techniques to solve the issues of today's society and workplace
- In-house counsel implementing significant diversity and inclusion initiatives within their organization
- Commendable cases in which diversity and inclusion have played a major role are also considered

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*Minnesota Lawyer Recognizes First Judicial District Judge Richelle Wahi
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"I am honored and humbled to receive this award," Judge Wahi said. "Incised above the entrance to the United States Supreme Court Building in Washington, D.C., is the phrase, 'Equal Justice Under Law.' But far too many of our diverse populations believe this fundamental legal tenet is more elusive today than ever. Disparities continue to exist that must be addressed through honest conversation, careful listening, increased education, self-reflection, and, most importantly, action. I am grateful to have helped advance efforts to eliminate bias from

court operations and to promote equal access and justice in the courts. We can and must always do better. I will work diligently to ensure that we do."

Judge Wahi was appointed to the bench in Dakota County on Feb. 26, 2016, by Governor Mark Dayton. She was formerly a partner at Lindquist & Vennum LLP, and a conciliation court referee in Dakota County. She also worked as an attorney at Moss & Barnett and Henson & Efron. She is active in many judicial committees, including the

statewide Judicial Branch Committee for Equality and Justice and the statewide Early Case Management Committee. Judge Wahi is also a frequent speaker in the justice community, and has written for several law-related publications. She has been recognized as a Minnesota Rising Star, and she also received a North Star Lawyer recognition for pro bono service. Judge Wahi received her Bachelor of Arts, Magna Cum Laude, from the College of St. Catherine, and her Juris Doctorate, Cum Laude, from William Mitchell College of Law.

Annual Report to the Community is Now Available

The Minnesota Judicial Branch has published its [2019 Annual Report to the Community](#). The report highlights the significant effort of the Minnesota Judicial Branch to improve and enhance the delivery of justice in Minnesota. It details the important initiatives undertaken in 2019 in support of the Judicial Branch Strategic Plan and includes updates from each of the state's judicial districts and the appellate courts, as well as case filing statistics statewide and by each judicial district.

"Minnesota's Constitution promises every person in the state the right to 'obtain justice freely...promptly and without delay.' I am proud to say the state of the judiciary in our state is strong. The innovation that has been the hallmark of our strategic plan through the years has enabled our courts to quickly adapt, evolve and respond to meet the needs of those we serve," said Minnesota Supreme Court Chief Justice Lorie S. Gildea. "I am proud of the accomplishments our judges and staff achieved in 2019 and their ongoing

commitment to deliver on our Constitutional mission."

The work of the Minnesota Judicial Branch in 2019 focused on ensuring access to justice, increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of court operations, and enhancing public trust and confidence. Key highlights include conducting the first-ever Access and Fairness Survey of the Minnesota Judicial Branch website, expanding nation-leading efforts to provide support to people who choose to represent

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*Annual Report to the Community is Now Available
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themselves in court proceedings,
advancing restorative justice through four

new treatment courts, and streamlining
processes and procedures to better
serve those who come before the court

and efficiently resolve cases, among
other achievements.

Late Penalties, Drivers' Licenses Suspensions, and Collections Referrals Resuming

Late penalties and drivers' license
suspensions for unresolved
citations and collections referrals
for past-due payment resuming
under an [administrative order](#)



issued by the State Court Administrator. The
automated processes were [temporarily
suspended](#) in March because of COVID-19.

"Restarting these processes is an important
step forward in our ongoing effort to restore
normal court operations after limiting in-
person courthouse operations earlier this
year due to the COVID-19 pandemic," said
Jeff Shorba, State Court Administrator.

Automated processes that refer court-
ordered fines, fees and other financial
obligations to the Minnesota Department of
Revenue for collections resumed October 1,
2020.

Automated processes for unresolved
citations will resume December 1, 2020.
When a person fails to appear or pay a fine
instead of appearing in court, the automated

processes send late notices,
assess late penalties, add guilty
pleas and convictions in petty
misdemeanors cases, request
the Department of Vehicle

Services and the Department of Natural
Resources to suspend licenses, and send
cases with past-due amounts to the
Department of Revenue for collections.

Individuals will have the opportunity to
resolve their citations before additional
consequences are imposed. In October,
people with unresolved citations will receive
a notice via U.S. Mail stating that within 30
days of the date of the notice, they must pay
the related fine, set up a payment plan, or
schedule a hearing or hearing officer
appointment to contest their citation.
Beginning December 1, 2020, people who
fail to pay the fine or schedule an
appearance will receive a late penalty and
face additional consequences depending on
their individual circumstances.

To pay a fine for unresolved citations:

- **Online:** www.mncourts.gov/fines.
- **By Phone:** Call (651) 281-3219 in the
metro area or (800) 657-3611 outside
of the metro area.
- **By Mail:** Make check or money order
payable to Court Administration. Send
to: Minnesota Court Payment Center,
PO Box 898, Willmar, MN 56201.
Include a copy of your citation or
indicate the citation number on the
check or money order.
- **In Person:** Pay your fine in person in
the county listed at the top of your
citation. Access [www.mncourts.gov/
fines](http://www.mncourts.gov/fines) and go to "Find Courts" to find the
location of the courthouse in that
county.

To schedule a hearing for unresolved citations:

Call (651) 281-3219 in the metro or
(800) 657-3611 outside of the metro area.



Tanya Derby and State Guardian ad Litem Program Receive First Judicial District Amicus Curiae Award

On August 14, 2020, the First Judicial District awarded its tenth annual Amicus Curiae Award to Tanya Derby and the State Guardian ad Litem Program on August 14, 2020. The Amicus Curiae Award, meaning Friend of the Court, is an annual recognition of persons who have provided exceptional service, leadership or other contributions to assist the courts in the First Judicial District discharge their constitutional responsibility for the administration of justice.

Ms. Derby has worked on behalf of clients in juvenile, child protection and criminal court with the First Judicial District Public Defender's Office. She advocated for clients' rights first as a paralegal from 1995 to 2005, and then as an attorney from 2005 to 2020. Additionally, she volunteered on the Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative - Eliminating Racial Disparities Committee



from 2006 - 2020, and also as the children's attorney with the Family Dependency Treatment Court from 2010 to 2020.

First District Chief Judge Kathryn Messerich noted, "Ms. Derby generously volunteered her time,

legal skills and compassion while representing children in Family Dependency Treatment Court and other juvenile matters. Her advocacy insured that children's voices were always heard."

The State Guardian ad Litem Board was established by legislation in 2010 to administer a statewide, independent guardian ad litem program to advocate for the best interest of children in juvenile and family courts. The Program Administrator, who reports to the board, supervises the program managers from the ten judicial districts. Each judicial district program is configured to service

the needs of the judicial district.

When the court is making decisions that will affect a child's future, the child needs an objective adult to provide independent information about the best interests of the child. While other parties in the case are concerned about the child, the guardian ad litem is the only person in the case whose sole concern is the best interests of the child.

Guardians ad Litem conduct interviews and observe children and significant people in their lives. They review social service, medical, school, psychological and criminal records and reports. They attend meetings with the other professionals involved with the children and their families. They outline options and make written and oral recommendations in court regarding the short and long term best interests of the children. It is important to remember that it is not the guardians ad litem responsibility to make decisions about a child's future, but rather to make

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*First Judicial District Amicus Curiae Award
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recommendations to the court that enable the court to make the best possible decisions.

“The First Judicial District is grateful for the guardians’ dedication to the safety and well-being of children, said Chief Judge Messerich. “All of the First District Judges know how valuable the

guardian’s input is and appreciate how they serve as the child’s advocate in child protection and family law cases.”

Past recipients of the Amicus Curiae Award are: Liz Reppe, Dana McKenzie, Merlyn Meinerts, Mary Freyberg, the law firm of Lindquist & Vennum, Sharon Freiling, Karissa Richardson, Dan

Beeson, Wayne Jagow, Lloyd Moosbrugger, Bob Morris, Jerome Wickert, Mary Stapleton, Chuck Brill, Manual Roman, Molly Trieschman, Fredrikson & Byron Law Firm, Bridget McCauley Nason, and Dakota County Bar Association.

Supreme Court Authorizes Two-Year Pilot to Expand Role of Legal Paraprofessionals



The Minnesota Supreme Court has [adopted Court Rule amendments](#) authorizing the Legal

Paraprofessional Pilot Project, effective March 1, 2021.

Legal paraprofessionals, under the supervision of a Minnesota attorney, will be permitted to provide legal advice and, in some cases, represent a client in court in two legal areas: landlord-tenant disputes and

certain family law disputes. The two-year Pilot is intended to increase access to civil legal representation in case types where one or both parties typically appear without legal representation.

“The Judicial Branch mission calls for equal access for fair and timely resolution of cases,” said Minnesota Supreme Court [Justice Paul C. Thissen](#). “The Legal Paraprofessional Pilot Project provides an opportunity for quality legal representation to Minnesotans who might not otherwise have access to it in important legal matters.”

In 2019, the Supreme Court established the Implementation Committee for the Proposed Legal Paraprofessional Pilot Project, which was co-chaired by Justice Thissen and Minnesota Court of Appeals Judge John R. Rodenberg, and included lawyers and paralegals from throughout Minnesota. The Committee was charged with evaluating areas of unmet civil legal needs and to define the structure and rules to establish the Pilot. The committee actively sought input from licensed attorneys, district court judges, paralegal association members and the

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Expanding Role of Legal Paraprofessionals
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Minnesota State Bar Association. Recommendations for implementing and evaluating the Pilot were included as part of a report filed with the Supreme Court in March 2020. In April, the Court [issued an order](#) that included the report from the Committee and invited public comment.

"I am grateful to the members of the Committee for their commitment and dedication to developing a Pilot that best serves those who need legal assistance, and the paralegals and supervising attorneys who will provide those services," said Judge Rodenberg.

Legal paraprofessionals who wish to participate in the pilot must meet strict education, experience, and ethical requirements, including written agreements with licensed attorneys who will supervise their work. Eligible legal paraprofessionals will be able to provide advice and appear in court on behalf of tenants in housing disputes and eviction management proceedings in district courts in certain counties that have established a housing court or a dedicated calendar for landlord-tenant actions. They may also provide legal advice and appear in court in family law cases dealing with child

support, parenting-time disputes, paternity matters, and informal family court proceedings.

A standing committee will oversee implementation of the Pilot and provide a report near its completion with recommendations on continuing, altering or stopping the pilot or permanently codifying the rules.

See [Minnesota Supreme Court Order ADM19-8002](#) for additional details about the Pilot.

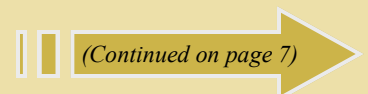
Five Minnesota Judicial Branch Employees Earn Awards for Workplace Excellence



Five distinguished Minnesota Judicial Branch employees from across Minnesota were honored for their professional talents and contributions to the teams and workplaces they serve at the recent virtual Minnesota Association for Court Management (MACM) conference:

- **Dr. Katheryn Cranbrook** of Hennepin County
Distinguished Service Award
- **Sheldon Clark** of the Tenth Judicial District
Champion of Change Award
- **Jason Drabek** of Hennepin County
Early Career Excellence Award

- **Marianne Setala** of Anoka County
Pandemic Hero Award
- **Kristine Maiers** of Freeborn County
Lifetime Achievement Award



*Five Minnesota Judicial Branch Employees Earn Awards for Workplace Excellence
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Dr. Katheryn Cranbrook, Hennepin County Chief Forensic Psychologist in the Fourth Judicial District, received the 2020 Distinguished Service Award. The Award is given to individuals who have a record of outstanding service to the community and courts, and demonstrate leadership by improving the administration of justice and delivery of public service through the application of modern management techniques. Dr. Cranbrook is a highly effective leader and a catalyst for change. She is a member of various committees and workgroups, and collaborates with partner agencies, to ensure that the justice system understands the importance of mental health awareness. Dr. Cranbrook's collaborative approach to developing and implementing on call, rapid turnaround evaluations of in-custody and out-of-custody misdemeanor defendants undergoing Rule 20/competence evaluations has improved the efficiency and volume of court-ordered assessments. She is regularly called upon to train counties and district courts regarding the use of Rule 20s, has coordinated trainings with

the St. Peter Security Hospital, and started a successful, nationally-recognized post-doctoral fellowship program.

Sheldon Clark, Deputy District Administrator in the Tenth Judicial District, was honored as the 2020 Champion of Change. The Champion of Change fosters collaboration to promote innovation by embracing opportunities to utilize technology and other resources to increase efficiencies and productivity in the workplace. Clark immediately stepped into a new role at the start of the pandemic to lead the change that was required to ensure access to justice during an uncertain time. His talent and leadership in process development and change management, with a focus on technology, training, and communication, has been beneficial to all judges and staff in the District. He has served in an integral role as the Tenth Judicial District transitioned to remote technologies to ensure access to court services and virtual courtroom settings during the pandemic. Clark has served on the statewide Pandemic Response Team,

and is tireless in his efforts to consistently seek new opportunities to ensure the courts are able to provide access to justice.

Jason Drabek, a Hennepin County Judicial IT Supervisor II in the Fourth Judicial District, was recognized with the 2020 Early Career Excellence Award. The Award recognizes a person who demonstrates achievement in the courts through obtaining a high level of knowledge in a short amount of time, is a quick learner and a valuable resource to others, is dependable and consistent while working to achieve success in a local court or for the Minnesota Judicial Branch, and demonstrates outstanding leadership by considering stakeholders when making decisions. Drabek has demonstrated the very best qualities of early career excellence in the court with his willingness to promote collaboration and transparency in the process. He has been a leader in a number of technology initiatives that include eCheck-In and the use of remote video conferencing solutions for court hearings. Drabek also served on the statewide remote hearing

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*Five Minnesota Judicial Branch Employees Earn Awards for Workplace Excellence
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technology committee, where he recommended technology solutions that add business and resource efficiencies and navigate the COVID-19 environment.

Marianne Setala, Anoka County Court Operations Manager in the Tenth Judicial District, was recognized with the 2020 Pandemic Hero Award for her excellence and vigilant dedication to the court and her team during the pandemic. Setala has patiently guided her team during this challenging time of a global pandemic, and provided them with tools and resources needed to navigate uncertainty, ensure access to court services by stakeholders and customers, and keep staff safe and healthy. Her refined understanding of the Anoka County calendar plan played a critical role in rearranging the current calendar plan to best utilize resources to efficiently and safely hear backlogged cases. Her commitment to her staff has created an

office atmosphere that allowed them to feel safe during these trying times.

Kristine Maiers, Freeborn County Court Operations Manager with the Third Judicial District, received the 2020 Lifetime Achievement Award. The Award recognizes an individual for his or her many contributions to the court management profession, and for years of service to the court. Maiers is a passionate, dedicated leader whose knowledge and experience is valued and sought after. She makes collaboration a core part of her role and always keeps what is best for the entire Third Judicial District at the forefront of her work. In addition to her role as Court Operations Manager, Maiers has served on various state and district teams focused on improving the customer experience, enhancing the court's operations and financial oversight, improving the quality of data, protecting the security of court

documents and records, and supporting staff training and skills development. In the words of her colleagues, Maiers sees the importance of every role someone plays within the Minnesota Judicial Branch and does all that she can to empower others to succeed.

About the Minnesota Association for Court Management The Minnesota Association for Court Management (MACM) has more than 350 members who are court leaders throughout Minnesota. MACM is committed to the enrichment of its members through professional growth and development opportunities, promoting advancements and innovation in court administration, and partnering with other professionals working to improve the justice system in Minnesota.

[Minnesota Association for Court Management \(MACM\)](https://www.mnmacm.org/)

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