



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 District has 36 judges and more than 250 staff who handled more than 90,000 cases in 2020 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

VOLUME 12—ISSUE 4

FALL 2021

Minnesota Judicial Branch Requires Face Coverings in Courtrooms and Public Spaces in Court Facilities

The Minnesota Judicial Branch announced a modification to its guidance on face coverings in court facilities. Face coverings are required in courtrooms and public spaces in a court facility effective October 19, 2021, according to an [order](#) issued by Minnesota Supreme Court Chief Justice Lorie S. Gildea.

“The Minnesota Judicial Branch continues to prioritize health and safety as we respond to the changing dynamics of the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Chief Justice Lorie S. Gildea. “As we are seeing an increase in the positivity rates and hospitalizations across the state, our courts are taking prudent action to ensure access to justice while we safeguard the health of our judicial officers, staff, and all who enter a court facility.”

The Judicial Branch’s guidance that was issued on July 30, 2021, had authorized local decision-making by judges on whether to require the use of face coverings in their courtrooms or local court facilities. Under the [new order](#) from Chief Justice Gildea, face coverings must be worn in courtrooms and public spaces in court facilities. Individuals should talk to court staff immediately upon entry if they do not have access to a face covering or have a medical condition that prevents them from wearing one. Face coverings will be provided to individuals who do not have access to one. A presiding judge may direct people to remove face coverings as necessary to conduct court proceedings.

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Minnesota Judicial Branch Requires Face Coverings in Courtrooms and Public Spaces in Court Facilities

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Individuals are encouraged to stay home if ill and asked to [self-screen for symptoms or exposure](#) before entering a court facility. People exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19, or who have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 within 14 days of when they need to enter a court facility, are asked to [contact the court](#) or their attorneys rather than go to the courthouse.

The order does not make any changes to the type of court proceedings that may take place in person. It does require all state district courts, appellate courts, and other Judicial Branch facilities to meet conditions established by the [Judicial Branch COVID-19 Preparedness Plan \(October 18, 2021\)](#) to manage in-person activities in a manner that prioritizes health and safety. For more information, see the [Judicial Branch COVID-19 webpage](#).



Governor Walz Appoints Bryce Ehrman to Fill First Judicial District Vacancy



Bryce Ehrman

On October 28, 2021, Governor Tim Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan announced the appointment of Bryce Ehrman as District Court Judge in Minnesota's First Judicial District.

Mr. Ehrman will be replacing the Honorable Kathryn D. Messerich and will be chambered in Hastings in Dakota County.

"Mr. Ehrman will be a great addition to the First Judicial District," said Governor Walz. "Dakota County is gaining a dedicated public servant who will work hard every day to ensure fair outcomes for everyone in his courtroom. I am confident that his wisdom and passion for helping people will be invaluable in his new role."

"Mr. Ehrman is a proven leader who has a deep understanding of the justice system and will work to ensure justice is administered

equitably," said Lieutenant Governor Flanagan. "I am excited to see him excel in his new position."

Minnesota's First Judicial District consists of Carver, Dakota, Goodhue, Le Sueur, McLeod, Scott, and Sibley Counties.

About Bryce Ehrman

Mr. Ehrman is an Assistant Scott County Attorney, where he represents Human Services in child protection proceedings. He is also a member of the Scott County Treatment Court and the Scott County Veterans Treatment Court. Previously, he served as a Guardian ad Litem Coordinator in the First Judicial District, as an Assistant Sibley County Attorney, and as an associate at Schauer Law Office. Mr. Ehrman's legal experience includes prosecution of criminal offenses, juvenile delinquency, child protection, and civil private practice. His community involvement includes serving as a member of the Chaska Lions Club Board of Directors, as an investigator on the District Ethics Committee, and as an MSBA Mock Trial judge volunteer. Mr. Ehrman also serves as a mentor for students at Shakopee High School and Mitchell Hamline School of Law. Mr. Ehrman earned his B.A. from the University of Minnesota and J.D. from William Mitchell College of Law.

For more information about the judicial selection process, please visit: <https://mn.gov/governor/administration/judicialappointments/>



Minnesota Judicial Council Approves FY22-23 Strategic Plan

Recently, the Minnesota Judicial Council formally approved the [FY2022-2023 Judicial Branch Strategic Plan](#) as the Branch's blueprint for the future, with three overarching goals of maintaining and expanding access to justice, ensuring the effective administration of justice, and enhancing public trust and confidence. This Plan sets forth the shared vision, priorities, and purpose that will lead the Minnesota Judicial Branch in this biennium.

A Strategic Planning Committee, formed by the Minnesota Judicial Council and overseen by Chief Justice Lorie S. Gildea, developed the Plan. The Committee reviewed lessons

learned from the pandemic, national and state trends in state courts, and the Judicial Branch's FY20-21 strategic initiatives and projects underway, including those expected to continue into the next biennium.

The Committee identified three focus areas for the FY22-23 Strategic Plan: (1) Identify practices from the pandemic that should be made permanent and prioritize the work that is needed to implement these practices; (2) Complete the strategic initiatives currently underway, such as improving remote hearings, investing in projects with long-term customer benefits, and supporting quality work environments; and (3)

Explore enhanced judicial officer and employee specialization to align and develop more expertise in complex matters currently facing the courts.

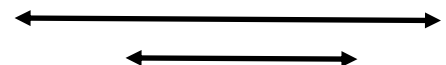
"The court system in Minnesota is nationally recognized for its professionalism, efficiency, and innovation," said Chief Justice Lorie S. Gildea in her opening letter to the citizens of Minnesota. "The FY22-23 Strategic Plan is our most recent reflection of what Minnesotans can expect to see from their court system as we continue to innovate, develop, and modernize."

Scott County New Law Enforcement Center Courtroom

The new Scott County Law Enforcement Center (LEC) courtroom opened for business on May 17, 2021. The new courtroom on the third floor of the LEC replaces the antiquated first floor courtroom that Scott County had long ago outgrown both in size and technological capability.

The courtroom is a vast improvement in both appearance and function. The holding area allows lawyers to easily meet with clients in custody and for the court to hear cases efficiently. There is a video rights advisory in multiple languages for defendants

that can be played prior to their hearing obviating the need for the court to continually repeat the advisories. In addition, the court has the ability to use Zoom for interpreters and other parties who might need to appear remotely.



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Scott County New Law Enforcement Center Courtroom
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This in-custody courtroom upgrade was the result of the Scott County Board seeing and appreciating the need for an upgraded courtroom with secure public seating to handle the growing population of Scott County. "I commend my colleagues on the Board of Commissioners for appreciating the need for this investment into the long-term efficiencies that will become even more crucial as the County continues to grow," said Commissioner Jon Ulrich, Chair of the County Board. "Leveraging technology as well as a better use of existing space will help serve this community for years to come."

The committee of Scott County Justice partners, including court administration, judges, public defenders, county attorneys, and community corrections, worked together to accommodate the needs of everyone involved. In the end, we have a facility that meets the Scott County Justice partner needs and the people we serve.



First District Amicus Curiae Awards

Katie Moras, James Kretsch Jr., Steven Pattee, Markus Yira, and Lisa Vandelist Receive First Judicial District Amicus Curiae Awards

On August 13, 2021, the First Judicial District awarded its 11th annual Amicus Curiae Awards to Katie Moras, James Kretsch Jr., Steven Pattee, Markus Yira, and Lisa Vandelist on August 13, 2021. The Amicus Curiae Award (Friend of the Court) is an annual recognition of persons who have provided exceptional service, leadership, or other contributions to assist the First Judicial District in the administration of justice.

Ms. Moras volunteers as a mentor for several participants in the Scott County Treatment Court. They reach out to her to seek advice and guidance in their quest for sobriety. Ms. Moras spends time with each of them whether by listening to their challenges, helping them with a variety of forms, or acting as a tutor to help someone pass their GED. She has been very successful in gathering resources for the treatment court participants. In addition, Ms. Moras was instrumental in starting Moms on a Mission for Success (MOMS) which consists of young moms who are fighting for their sobriety. The moms and their children meet bi-monthly where they work on vari-

ous topics and service projects. These young women form a much needed and powerful sobriety support group.

Scott County District Judge Christian S. Wilton noted, "Ms. Moras is deserving of this award based on her service, leadership, and contributions to the administration of justice. She helps those that are in need the most, empowering others to gain control of their diseases and therefore control of their lives. As a result of her selfless and tireless efforts, many young lives have been altered in a positive fashion."

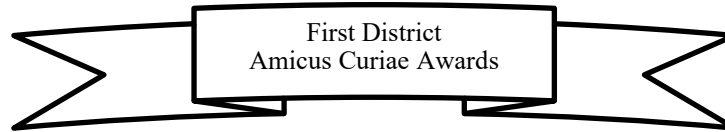
Ms. Moras is the owner of El Bosque Encantado (EBE), Spanish immersion preschool in Prior Lake. After living in Guatemala as a teenager, her passion for Latin culture and language was ignited. She holds a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Minnesota in Spanish, a Master of Arts in Teaching from Hamline University, and a K-12 Minnesota Teaching License. She will begin a PhD at Hamline University in Cross-Sectional Leadership in the Fall of 2021.

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Katie Moras, James Kretsch Jr., Steven Pattee, Markus Yira, and Lisa Vandelist Receive First District Amicus Curiae Award

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Attorneys James Kretsch, Jr., Steven Pattee, Markus Yira, and Lisa Vandelist were recognized for volunteering as conciliation court referees in the First District. While Ms. Vandelist focuses on cases in Le Sueur County, the other three hear cases in McLeod and Le Sueur Counties. Collectively, these attorneys cover approximately 3-5 conciliation court calendars every month. This assists with the caseload by freeing appointed judges to hear more criminal, juvenile, and family calendar days, and thus reduce the backlog of cases resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

McLeod County District Judges Jessica J.W. Maher and Jody L. Winters, and Le Sueur County District Judge Patrick H. Goggins expressed their appreciation for these attorneys who have given their time and legal talents to ensure that justice is provided in a timely manner to the public.

James Kretsch, Jr. is the owner of Kretsch Law Office, PLLC, a general practice firm located in Lakeville, MN. He represents and counsels businesses of all sizes, as well as business

owners, in corporate governance, management oversight, control agreements, generational transactions, mergers, acquisitions, and related transactional activities. Mr. Kretsch is a graduate of the University of Minnesota – Morris and Hamline University School of Law.

Steven Pattee is a lawyer with Donna Law Firm, P.C. in Minneapolis, MN. He received his law degree with distinction from the University of Iowa College of Law in 1996 and is admitted to multiple state and federal courts. His practice focuses upon the defense of civil lawsuits, including automobile, transportation, premises liability, liquor liability, and agribusiness disputes, as well as providing alternative dispute resolution services as an arbitrator and mediator.

Markus Yira is a Hutchinson, MN trial lawyer specializing in personal injury, wrongful death, and other civil litigation. He also practices business, probate, estate planning, real property, criminal defense, and family law. He is a Phi Beta Kappa and honors graduate of Hamline University, and graduate of William Mitchell

College of Law.

Lisa Vandelist focuses her Lakeville, MN law practice on plaintiff's personal injury claims. She serves as an arbitrator with the American Arbitration Association. She graduated in 1983 from the Hamline University 3-3 Law School Early Admission Program.

Past recipients of the Amicus Curiae Award include: 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, Dakota County Bar Association, Tanya Derby, and State Guardian Ad Litem Program.



Minnesota Judicial Branch Publishes 2020 Annual Report

The Minnesota Judicial Branch has published its [2020 Annual Report to the Community](#).

The report, along with previous versions, is available on the [Publications and Reports](#) page of the Judicial Branch website. The report details the significant efforts of the Minnesota Judicial Branch throughout the past year to improve and enhance the delivery of justice in

Minnesota. It also provides annual updates from judicial districts and appellate courts, including case filing statistics.

“The Minnesota Judicial Branch had to overcome many challenges during a global public health crisis to carry out our mission to ensure access to justice. Through the commitment, innovative spirit, and tremendous work of our

judicial officers, staff, and justice partners, we kept the doors to justice open during the pandemic and built a stronger, more resilient, and customer-focused court system,” Chief Justice Lorie S. Gildea writes in the report. “Our achievements are a credit to every single member of the Judicial Branch, and we could not be more grateful for their remarkable service over the past year.”

Six Minnesota Judicial Branch Employees Receive 2021 Minnesota Association for Court Management (MACM) Awards

Six distinguished Minnesota Judicial Branch employees were honored for their professional expertise and contributions to the teams and workplaces they serve at the recent [Minnesota Association for Court Management](#) (MACM) conference.

- Cheri Woehler of Mille Lacs & Benton County District Courts – Coach/Mentor of the Year Award
- Hilary Huntley of the Sixth Judicial District – Early Career Excellent Award
- Cheryl Wallat of the Fourth Judicial District – Pandemic Hero Award
- Sonja Kruger of the Fifth Judicial District – Champion of Change Award
- Heather Kendall of the Second Judicial District – Distinguished Service Award
- Karen Mareck of the State Court Administrator's Office – Lifetime Achievement

Award

Cheri Woehler, Multi-County Court Administrator for Mille Lacs and Benton County District Courts in the Seventh Judicial District, was awarded the Coach/Mentor of the Year award.

The award recognizes an individual who fosters trust while encouraging others to achieve their goals without thought of reciprocation. The recipient of the award shares their skills and knowledge with others and provides excellent coaching in the ongoing development and enrichment of others.

Woehler is an advocate for judges and employees, empowering her employees and taking an interest in each of their goals and aspirations. She provides a wealth of knowledge, sharing resources, training, and her personal experiences to help others grow and learn.

Woehler is the representative of the Seventh and Eight Judicial Districts on the Legislative and Outreach committee for MACM. She has worked for the Judicial Branch for 31 years.

Hilary Huntley, Deputy District Administrator in the Sixth Judicial District, received the 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. The recipient is dependable and consistent while working to achieve success in their local court, district, or for the Judicial Branch and demonstrates outstanding leadership by considering stakeholders when making decisions.

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*Six Minnesota Judicial Branch
Employees Receive 2021 Minnesota Association for Courts Management (MACM) Awards*

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Huntley has had extensive involvement with countless projects over the last year and played a critical role in the Sixth Judicial District's ability to resume operations during the pandemic. She led her district through challenges and changes by leading by example, being patient, and ensuring others had the resources and training needed to be successful. Huntley is a member of the Court Operations Advisory Workgroup, Exhibit Program, Remote Hearing Improvement Workgroup, Remote Interpreter Workgroup, State Fair Workgroup, Equal Justice Committee, and Change Agent Network. She has worked for the Judicial Branch since 2013.

Cheryl Wallat, Fourth Judicial District Facilities Manager, was awarded the Pandemic Hero Award. The award recognizes a person who has excelled and shown vigilant dedication to the court during the pandemic. The recipient has demonstrated exceptional service by leading through operational transitions and being supportive and patient with the teams they lead, while recognizing the importance of the health and safety of everyone.

Wallat led the Fourth Judicial District through COVID-19 safety protocols and preparedness plans. She worked extensively on courtroom set-up, signage, social distancing markings, preparing public court areas, and many personal protective equipment distributions. She

was proactive, diligent, and creative in finding sources to fulfill disinfectants, dividers, and cleaning supplies for the district's 90 courtrooms and six buildings. Wallat's hard work allowed judicial officers, staff, customers, and partners to safely navigate court spaces during the pandemic and helped ensure access to justice in a manner that prioritized health and safety.

Sonja Kruger, Deputy District Administrator in the Fifth Judicial District, was honored as the Champion of Change. The recipient of this award fosters collaboration to promote innovation by embracing opportunities to utilize technology and other resources to increase efficiencies and productivity in the workplace.

Kruger continually pushes her colleagues in the Fifth Judicial District and across the Judicial Branch to look at different ways of doing business to ensure access to justice and the effective administration of justice. Her enthusiasm and positive attitude led to several reengineering efforts across all areas of court operations, which include the creation of specialized teams, several district-wide teams, new ways to manage case processing across the district, and permanent remote work opportunities. Kruger has worked for the Judicial Branch for 28 years.

Heather Kendall, District Administrator in the Second Judicial District, received the Distinguished Service Award. The award recognizes individuals who have a record of outstanding service to the community and the courts and demonstrates leadership by improving the administration of justice and delivery of public service through the application of modern management techniques.

Kendall has effectively led through a time of challenge and uncertainty, providing consistent and detailed information and assistance to the Second Judicial District and across the state. She is one of two members of the Judicial Branch Other Side Workgroup. Kendall has worked closely with District Administrators to develop recommendations and plans that impact judges, employees, justice partners, and the public. She consistently leads with a focus on the future, allowing the courts to be ahead of the curve and mindful of current and pending challenges. Kendall has worked for the Judicial Branch for 21 years.

Karen Mareck, Deputy Director of the Court Services Division in the State Court Administrator's Office, received the 2021 Lifetime Achievement Award. The award honors a recipient's many contributions to the court management profession and their years of service to the Judicial Branch.

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*Six Minnesota Judicial Branch
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Mareck was recognized for her dedication to the Judicial Branch and the citizens of Minnesota. Her deep knowledge, understanding, and commitment to the Judicial Branch's mission of ensuring fair and equal access to justice has benefitted all who work with her and those who utilize the services and support she has helped create. Mareck has led efforts to create workable and innovative solutions that have transitioned court operations in a meaningful and impactful way. She has led and co-led several integral efforts and projects, including the

eCourtMN initiative, formalization of the Self-Represented Litigant Program, Court Administration Processes (CAPS) and the CAPs unit, and the Pandemic Response Team. Mareck has worked for the Judicial Branch for 34 years.

About the Minnesota Association for Court Management

The Minnesota Association for Court Management (MACM) has more than 400 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.



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