



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 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

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Enhancements to Minnesota Court Records Online (MCRO) Increase Access and Transparency

The Minnesota Judicial Branch has made several new enhancements to Minnesota Court Records Online (MCRO), including a new Register of Actions that will improve how people view court case information and search for public court documents online.

“Access to justice is not just defined by a physical location, but also by how services are provided, the means by which resources are accessed, and how information is shared,” said Minnesota Supreme Court Chief Justice Lorie S. Gildea. “The ability to access public documents online is important to the people we serve and helps build trust in our justice system.”

MCRO provides the public with the ability to search for and retrieve public court documents without having to go to a court facility or the State Law Library. Since its launch in March 2021, more than 2 million district court case documents have been downloaded through the application.

When it first launched, MCRO users could only find documents when searching by case number. The new enhancements to the application include the ability to search for cases using a person's name, a business name, or an attorney name or bar number, as well as by case number or citation number. Users also now have access to redesigned Registers of Actions with details about each case, including case events, document index numbers, hearings, parties, and financial information, in addition to appropriate public documents. These enhancements are moving the

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Enhancements to Minnesota Court Records Online (MCRO) Increase Access and Transparency

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Minnesota Judicial Branch one step closer to providing a fully functional remote access product per Court Rules and statutes.

The final phase of MCRO implementation, which is anticipated to take place in 2022, will provide improved search functionality for judgments and hearings. Once the final phase of implementation is complete, the Judicial Branch will also implement a fee for documents accessed via MCRO. Users will be able to view the first page of documents as a preview, and then have the option of paying an access fee to view subsequent pages and download or print entire documents longer than one page. The access fee will be the same amount as purchasing a document at a courthouse. That fee is currently \$8, and is set by Minn. Statute § 357.021, subd. 2(2). As with paper copies, the revenue from those fees will go to the state General Fund.

Once fully implemented, MCRO will replace Minnesota Public Access Remote (MPA) as the online platform for public access to state district court records and documents. The [Rules of Public Access to the Records of the Minnesota Judicial Branch](#) determine which case types and documents in those case types are public information, as well as whether that information can be accessed and retrieved remotely. Visit [Minnesota Court Records Online \(MCRO\)](#) for more information.



Scott and Carver Counties Offering New Hearing Officer Program

Beginning February 1, 2022, individuals who choose to contest their petty misdemeanor and payable misdemeanor citation in Scott and Carver Counties can resolve their ticket without a court hearing. A hearing officer program is being added to Scott and Carver Counties, giving people an opportunity to meet with someone without going to court.

Violations related to driver's license suspensions, vehicle registration, and proof of insurance, as well as payable violations involving parking and minor traffic offenses may be conveniently resolved with a hearing officer. Those who wish to speak with a hearing officer about their citation may call the court

and request an appointment. The service will be offered online via Zoom.

The Violations Bureau will not handle any offenses that require a court appearance such as DWI, theft, and disorderly conduct.

Those unable to reach a settlement agreement with the hearing officer have the right to request a hearing before a judge.

For more information, please visit the Scott and Carver County pages of the Minnesota Judicial Branch web site at

www.mncourts.gov.



Timothy Droske Named Supreme Court Commissioner

The Minnesota Supreme Court has appointed Timothy J. Droske to succeed Supreme Court Commissioner Rita Coyle DeMeules, who retired on January 4, 2022. Droske joined the Court on December 6, 2021 and assumed his role as Commissioner on January 5, 2022.

The Supreme Court Commissioner serves as chief counsel to the Minnesota Supreme Court. The Commissioner provides legal research, advice, and recommended dispositions in a wide variety of civil and criminal legal cases that come before the court, and supervises a staff of senior level attorneys.

Droske has served as Co-Chair of the Appellate Practice Group at the law firm of Dorsey & Whitney, LLP in Minneapolis since 2016, where he has represented clients on appeals and collaborated with attorneys on all aspects of appellate strategy, litigation, and procedure in the Minnesota Supreme Court, Minnesota Court of Appeals, U.S. Supreme Court, and federal courts of appeal throughout the country. Droske's appellate experience extends to broad areas of law, including constitutional law, jurisdictional issues, contracts, torts, agency actions, criminal law,

Native American law, class actions, and housing law. Droske has worked at Dorsey & Whitney since 2008.

Droske served as law clerk to the Hon. Joel M. Flaum, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, from 2007 to 2008. He has also taught appellate advocacy as an Adjunct Professor at the University of Minnesota Law School since 2018 and has recently served on the Board of Directors for the Eighth Circuit Bar Association. He served as the chair of the Minnesota State Bar Association Appellate Practice Section from 2019-2020 after serving as a council member of that section since 2012, and served as the course chair and faculty member for the Minnesota CLE Appellate Practice Institute. Droske served on the Minnesota Supreme Court Advisory Committee on the Rules of Civil Appellate Procedure from 2014-2019.

Droske received his law degree from Northwestern School of Law in Chicago, Ill, and his undergraduate degree from the University of Minnesota, Morris.

Coyle DeMeules has served as the Supreme Court Commissioner since January 2012.

During her tenure, she has been essential in managing and innovating the work of the Court, guiding efforts to leverage technology to ensure the effective administration of justice and support openness and accessibility of its public proceedings. Coyle DeMeules' inclusive leadership and commitment to fairness, impartiality, and equal treatment has made a lasting and significant contribution to the Supreme Court and helped ensure public confidence in the appellate process.

Prior to her service as Supreme Court Commissioner, Coyle DeMeules served as an Assistant Attorney General. Before joining the Office of the Minnesota Attorney General, she was a partner and associate at the law firm of Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi, LLP, and served as an Adjunct Professor at William Mitchell College of Law in St. Paul.



Dakota County Announces Collaboration for Veterans Treatment Court with Carver County

Dakota County Attorney Kathy Keena recently announced the formation of the Carver Dakota Veterans Treatment Court.

This treatment court is a collaboration between Carver and Dakota Counties, a collaboration that was initiated by Keena in August 2021 with the support of the Dakota County Veterans Service Office and the Dakota County Community Corrections Department. Carver County has operated a veterans treatment court since 2014, which is currently led by First District Judge Janet Cain.

Keena stated, "Dakota County had explored establishing its own veterans treatment court; however, it was determined doing so wasn't feasible given the limited number of qualifying participants coupled with the limited judicial resources currently available in Dakota County. Collaborating with Carver County is an efficient and effective use of resources that makes a valuable program available to current and prior service members residing in Dakota County who are involved in the criminal justice system."

The Carver Dakota Veterans Treatment Court received approval from the State Treatment Court Initiative Advisory Committee on October 13, 2021 and was approved to begin accepting qualifying Dakota County veterans on Novem-

ber 1, 2021. Since its inception, three veterans from Dakota County have been admitted into the program.

Keena added, "Treatment courts are an innovative and effective solution to leading people living with substance use and/or mental health disorders out of the criminal justice system and into lives of recovery and stability. They are built upon a partnership between the criminal justice system and treatment providers who work together toward a common goal of breaking the cycle of substance use and/or mental health disorders and criminal behavior."

A key component to the veterans treatment court program is the Veteran Mentor Program which pairs a veteran mentor with a veteran treatment court participant. The role of the veteran mentor is to act as a coach, guide, role model, advocate, and a source of support for the veteran participant with whom the mentor is working.

If you are a current or prior service member with an honorable discharge and are interested in volunteering as a veteran mentor, [click here](#) for more information or to complete the volunteer application.

Keena would like to thank Judge Cain, Carver County Attorney Mark Metz, Chief Public De-

fender Steve Holmgren and all the other members of the veterans treatment court for their willingness to collaborate on the creation of this treatment court. Keena would also like to thank the Dakota County Community Corrections Department and Veterans Service Office for their assistance in making it happen.

In addition to veterans treatment court, Dakota County offers a drug treatment court for adults and a separate drug treatment court for juveniles. Dakota County is the only county in Minnesota that has a drug treatment court for juveniles.

Dakota County also offers the Family Dependency Treatment Court which has been operational since 2006 and is only one of three in Minnesota. This treatment court is utilized in child in need of protection cases and emphasizes treatment for parents with a substance use disorder to aid in the reunification and stabilization of families affected by parental drug use. In 2021, Dakota County was the recipient of an achievement award from the National Association of Counties for this program.



Minnesota Supreme Court Committee Issues Interim Report on the Legal Paraprofessional Pilot Project

At the end of December 2021, the Standing Committee for the Legal Paraprofessional Pilot Project issued the [Interim Report and Recommendations to the Minnesota Supreme Court](#) required by the [Order Implementing the Legal Paraprofessional Pilot Project](#). The Supreme Court directed the Standing Committee to provide an Interim Report that includes recommendations and possible refinements.

The Supreme Court authorized the Pilot Project to assess whether allowing qualified and supervised paraprofessionals to provide legal advice and appear in court on a limited number of matters will increase access of justice for Minnesotans. In order to evaluate the progress of the Pilot Project, an Evaluation Subcommittee was created. The Subcommittee established outcome measures and data sources for the three pilot goals: to increase litigant representation, improve court efficiency, and promote sustainability.

The Interim Report includes results of a survey of paraprofessionals and supervising attorneys. Among other things, the interim survey found:

- Around half of the clients served would

have been unrepresented without the assistance of a legal paraprofessional and a little over half of the paraprofessionals charged the client for their services.

- The legal paraprofessionals who responded to the survey believe that the Pilot Project provides individuals who cannot afford an attorney with quality alternative legal services, providing access to justice for more Minnesotans. They also requested more education on effective courtroom representation and practices.
- Supervising attorneys found the legal paraprofessionals to be “careful, serious, and excellent.” They did not have complaints about the legal paraprofessional’s performance in court nor with how they managed cases. Overall, the supervising attorneys reported satisfaction with the Pilot Project.

In the Report, the Committee recommended expanding the area of family law cases to include those where domestic or child abuse has been alleged, clarification of the Supervised Practice Rules, and adding eligibility for rostered legal paraprofessionals to provide advice and representation in Order for Protection and

Harassment Restraining Order cases. The Supreme Court will consider the proposed rule changes in the next several weeks.

The Committee concluded that, at the interim, the Pilot Project has had a positive impact and shows that legal paraprofessionals can successfully provide quality services to parties in family and housing cases. The full Report can be found on the Legal Paraprofessional Pilot Project [webpage](#).

About the Legal Paraprofessional Pilot Project

The [Legal Paraprofessional Pilot Project](#) permits approved legal paraprofessionals, under the supervision of a Minnesota attorney, 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, which began in March 2021, is intended to increase access to civil legal representation in case types where one or both parties typically appear without legal representation.



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