



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 with a district average of 95,000 case filings annually in Carver, Dakota, Goodhue, Le Sueur, McLeod, Scott, and Sibley counties.

The First Edition

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

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Judicial Branch Launches Hearing Participant Survey

The Minnesota Judicial Branch is seeking input from District Court participants, including litigants, victims, attorneys, justice partners, media, and observers, as part of the ongoing [oneCourtMN Hearings Initiative \(OHI\)](#). Beginning December 29, 2022, all District Court hearing participants are invited to participate in a statewide survey to provide feedback about their most recent hearing experience whether in-person or remote.

Take the hearing participant survey

The survey should take no more than 5-10 minutes to complete and is available in English, Spanish, Somali, and Hmong languages.

The online survey will be available to District Court participants in a variety of ways, including a link at the conclusion of a remote hearing for computer users, via some hearing notices, on printed materials available in courthouses, by email invitations, and on hearing-related help topics on the Judicial Branch website.

The survey results will assist the oneCourtMN Hearings Initiative Steering Committee in making remote and in-person hearings across the state as accessible, effective, and timely as possible. The online survey will be administered from December 2022 to June 2023.

Since 2021, OHI has been gathering feedback from court participants, including justice partners, to help guide the framework supporting remote and in-person hearings. Through these engagement

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Judicial Branch Launches Hearing Participant Survey

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efforts and guided by the feedback provided in this survey, the Branch will establish a long-term strategy for remote and in-person hearings that best meets the needs of stakeholders and court customers.

Any questions about the survey can be sent to:

mjbsurvey@courts.state.mn.us.

Governor Walz Appoints Tori Stewart to Fill First Judicial District Vacancy



Tori Stewart

On March 28, 2023, Governor Tim Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy

Flanagan announced the appointment of Tori Stewart as District Court Judge in Minnesota's First Judicial District. Stewart will replace the Honorable Kevin F. Mark and will be chambered in Red Wing in Goodhue County.

"I am proud to appoint Tori Stewart to the First Judicial District," said Governor Walz. "Her significant courtroom experience and extensive criminal law background will make her an asset to the bench for years to come."

"As the first woman to sit on the Goodhue County bench, Tori Stewart will bring a valued perspective to this important role," said Lieutenant Governor Flanagan. "I am confident that her impressive legal background and deep commitment to justice will serve the community well."

Tori Stewart is an assistant county attorney in Dakota County, where she prosecutes felony-level crimes including murder, assault, criminal sexual conduct, child physical abuse, criminal vehicular operation, and domestic-related offenses. She was previously an assistant county attorney in Rice County, where she prosecuted all levels of criminal offenses, and an associate attorney at Hughes & Costello.

Her community involvement has included serving on the Minnesota DWI Task Force; the Dakota County Attorney's Office Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Alliance; the Minnesota County Attorney's Association Impaired Driving Educational Alliance; and the Minnesota State Bar Association Public Law Section's Executive Council. She has also volunteered as a mock trial judge with the Minnesota High School Mock Trial Program. Stewart earned her B.A. from the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities and her J.D. from William Mitchell College of Law.

For more information about the judicial selection process, please visit the [Governor's Judicial Appointments webpage](#).



Chief Justice Gildea Urges Awareness of Jury Duty Scams

Minnesota Supreme Court Chief Justice Lorie S. Gildea urges Minnesotans to be vigilant of jury duty scams. The Minnesota Judicial Branch has posted information about jury duty scams on its website at www.mncourts.gov/jury. A copy of an informational poster, previously distributed by the Judicial Branch, can be found [here](#).

"Counties and district courts are hearing, again, that scammers are preying on Minnesotans with fake jury duty phone calls," said Chief Justice Gildea. "Jury duty is an important civic duty. I commend citizens who report for jury service, and urge Minnesotans to learn about and protect themselves from the potentially devastating consequences of these scams."

Jury duty scams can take many forms. Recently, scammers are calling people and pretending to be from Minnesota courts. In some cases, they "spoof" the court telephone number so it looks like the call is originating from the court or from a law enforcement agency.

In these calls, the scammer says you

must pay a fine for missing jury service. The scammer might ask for your credit card number or suggest some other way to pay the fine and avoid jail time. The scammers may demand a citizen to provide payment or to divulge private information that the scammer can use for identity theft purposes.

Chief Justice Gildea reminds all Minnesotans that if they are summoned for state jury duty, initial contact will always be made by U.S. Mail in the form of a juror summons from a Minnesota district court. Minnesota courts will never contact a person by phone or e-mail and seek payment of fines, Social Security numbers, credit card information, or any other sensitive information in response to missed jury duty.

Any person receiving a suspicious call seeking payment or private data related to missed jury duty is urged to contact their local county sheriff's office. Any person with questions about their jury duty should contact their local district court. Contact information can be found at www.mncourts.gov/jury by clicking on the "County Jury Info" tab.

More information about jury duty in Minnesota

The right to a trial by jury is one of the core protections of individual freedom in American society. The Constitutions of the United States and the State of Minnesota guarantee defendants in criminal cases and litigants in civil cases the right to a trial by jury.

Each year, the Minnesota Judicial Branch obtains names from driver's license, state ID card, and voter registration lists and compiles that information into a composite source list. From that list, individuals are randomly selected by computer and mailed a summons to appear for jury duty. From an eligible population of 3.7 million people, approximately 180,000 Minnesota citizens are summoned to serve as jurors in the state courts every year.

A prospective juror must be a United States citizen, a resident of the county in which they are summoned, at least 18 years old, able to communicate in English, physically and mentally capable of serving, a person who has had their civil rights restored if they have been convicted of a felony, and a



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person who has not served as a state or federal juror in the past four years.

Persons summoned for jury duty can complete the required qualification questionnaire through the Judicial

Branch website (www.mncourts.gov). The online form gives citizens the option of delivering their summons response to the court at any time of day, and it saves the cost of mailing the response.

More details about jury service, including frequently asked questions and an orientation video, "[All Rise: Jury Service in Minnesota](#)," can be found at www.mncourts.gov/jury

Collaborative Meeting Between Scott County District Court Judges and Mdewakanton Sioux Community Tribal Court Judges

On January 25, 2023, the Scott County District Court Judges and the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community Tribal Court Judges met to gain an understanding of the processes and procedures of each court jurisdiction.

The judges discussed ways to collaborate and be available for questions. After introductions, there was discussion on the various initiatives of each jurisdiction, including Scott County Treatment Court and Juvenile Court where Scott County now has two judges (Judge Mark Vandelist and Judge Paula Vraa) who will preside over all juvenile cases. Following that exchange, the judges covered several other topics, including questions and comments.

The day wrapped up with the Scott County Judges receiving a tour of the security and surveillance areas at Mystic Lake Casino. It was a great meeting building awareness and partnerships among the judges.



Scott County Judges (L-R): Paula Vraa, Colleen King, Charles Webber, First District Chief Judge Caroline Lennon, Mark Vandelist, and Christian Wilton



Tribal Court Judges (L-R): Judge Leah Sixkiller, Chief Judge Henry Buffalo and Judge Vanya Hogen



Children's Justice Initiative Releases Updated Video on Child Protection Proceedings

"In the Best Interests of Your Child" is available in five languages

The [Children's Justice Initiative](#), a collaboration between the Minnesota Judicial Branch and the Minnesota Department of Human Services, has released an updated video that provides a comprehensive overview of child protection proceedings. The video is offered in five languages: English, Hmong, Karen, Somali, and Spanish.

"In the Best Interests of Your Child," is designed to help parents with a child involved in a child protection proceeding better understand and be prepared for what will happen in the case – before, during, and after the initial hearing.

First released in 2003, "In the Best Interests of Your Child," is occasionally updated to reflect changes in statutes, rules, and best practices in juvenile court and child protection proceedings. The updated 18-minute video:

- Emphasizes that the child's best interests are at stake, and timely resolution of the problems causing risk of harm to the child is essential to healthy development.
- Explains a parent's legal rights and responsibilities.

- Explains how the juvenile court process may affect the parent and the child.
- Identifies the people who are involved in a child protection case and their roles in the courtroom.
- Describes the juvenile court process, including the types of hearings a parent may be required to attend, and what happens at a typical hearing, and what happens after a hearing.

"In the Best Interests of Your Child," is available on the [Children's Justice Initiative webpage](#).



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