



MINNESOTA
JUDICIAL
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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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FALL 2023

Governor Walz Appoints Justice Natalie Hudson to Serve as Chief Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court

Governor Walz appoints Karl Procaccini to serve as Associate Justice

On August 23, 2023, Governor Tim Walz announced the appointment of Justice Natalie Hudson to serve as chief justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court. Justice Hudson will fill the vacancy upon the retirement of Chief Justice Lorie Gildea in October. Governor Walz also announced the appointment of Karl Procaccini to serve as associate justice. Procaccini will fill the vacancy that will occur upon Justice Hudson's elevation to chief justice.



Justice Natalie Hudson

"Justice Hudson is one of our state's most experienced jurists. She has a strong rep-

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The First Edition

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utation as a leader and consensus builder,” said Governor Walz. “I know that she will use her decades of judicial experience and deep understanding of our justice system to lead the Judicial Branch with a steady hand and strong conviction. I am confident that she will advance a vision that promotes fairness and upholds the dignity of all Minnesotans.”

“Justice Hudson’s historic appointment is another important first in our state’s history that will continue the work of opening doors and moving towards justice for all Minnesotans,” said Lieutenant Governor Flanagan. “She is a distinguished and principled leader who has dedicated her career to serving the people of Minnesota and has never wavered in that commitment.”

“I am greatly honored to be selected as the next chief justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court, and I thank Governor Walz and his team for their consideration,” said Justice Natalie Hudson of the Minnesota Supreme Court. “This is a tremendous responsibility that I approach with humility and resolve, seeking to continue the work of my predecessors in administering one

of the best state court systems in the nation, and always seeking to deliver the most accessible, highest-quality court services for the citizens of Minnesota.”

“Justice Hudson is an outstanding choice to serve as Minnesota’s next chief justice,” said Chief Justice Lorie Gildea of the Minnesota Supreme Court. “I have had the privilege of working closely with Justice Hudson on the Supreme Court for nearly eight years, and I have been impressed by her deep knowledge of the law, her collegial spirit, and her unparalleled work ethic. With more than 20 years of service as an appellate court judge, Justice Hudson is among the most talented and respected jurists in the state, and she is the perfect person to lead the Judicial Branch in the years ahead. I look forward to working closely with Justice Hudson to make this leadership transition as smooth as possible for our court and the Judicial Branch.”

“I am delighted to learn that Governor Walz has appointed Justice Natalie Hudson to serve as chief justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court,” said Judge Wilhelmina Wright of the United

States District Court for the District of Minnesota and former Minnesota Supreme Court justice. “As a former colleague, I know she brings to this leadership role her keen intellect, her broad legal experience, and her respect for the rule of law. Importantly, she understands that the decisions of the Minnesota Supreme Court affect the lives of everyday people.”

“What good news that Natalie Hudson will be our next chief justice! During the five years we served together, I learned that she is principled, thoughtful, accessible, and enjoys a good laugh,” said Justice David Lillehaug, retired Minnesota Supreme Court justice. “Few people have more experience in the halls of appellate law, but her grounding is in community, listening to people from all walks of life. Under her leadership, the court will continue to be a place of frequent unanimity with occasional, respectful dissent.”

About Natalie E. Hudson

Justice Natalie Hudson is an associate justice on the Minnesota Supreme Court, having been appointed to this



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position in October 2015 by Governor Mark Dayton. Hudson previously served as a judge on the Minnesota Court of Appeals for thirteen years. She also practiced criminal appellate law with the Office of the Minnesota Attorney General for eight years and served as the St. Paul city attorney. Early in her career, she represented indigent clients as a staff attorney with Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services.

Hudson served as a member of the original Minnesota Supreme Court Racial Bias Task Force from 1991-1993 and later served on the task force's implementation committee. Her other community involvement includes serving on the advisory board for Minnesota Women Lawyers and the advisory board for the University of Minnesota Law School. She also participated on the Warren E. Burger Inn of Court for many years. She is a member of the Judicial Division of the American Bar Association, the Minnesota State Bar Association, and the Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers. Hudson earned her B.A. from Arizona State

University and her J.D. from the University of Minnesota Law School.

"With steadiness, humility, and an exceptional legal mind, Karl Procaccini navigated Minnesota through one of the most difficult periods in our history," said Governor Walz. "Karl understands how legal decisions impact the lives of Minnesotans. There is no one more prepared for the rigors and challenges that come with this important position. I know that Karl will continue to improve the lives of Minnesotans in this important role."

"Karl Procaccini is a deeply kind person who brilliantly and tenaciously tackled every challenge thrown his way, these past four-plus years," said Lieutenant Governor Flanagan. "Time and time again, he has proven to be courageous, honest, fair, compassionate, and dedicated to the rule of law. Lives across the state of Minnesota have been changed for the better through his work, and I look forward to watching him continue to serve Minnesotans and uphold justice in this role."



Karl Procaccini

"I am humbled by the Governor's decision and grateful for this opportunity to serve Minnesotans as an associate justice," said Karl Procaccini. "I will strive to maintain the Supreme Court's high standards, protect equal justice for all, and uphold the rule of law."

"Karl Procaccini is an outstanding choice for associate justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court," said Judge Michael Davis of the United States District Court for the District of Minnesota. "He has impeccable credentials as a lawyer, and he will be a splendid addition to the court. As a justice, Karl will continue the legacy



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of Judge Diana Murphy, who he and Justice Margaret Chutich both clerked for. I am ecstatic about his selection.”

“That Karl Procaccini was destined for great things has been clear for a while,” said Justice David Lillehaug, retired Minnesota Supreme Court justice. “He’s a brilliant lawyer who clerked for giants in the federal judiciary, practiced in one of Minnesota’s best firms, and then served as the Governor’s counselor during challenging times. He’ll bring to the court strong intelligence, great integrity, and a calm temperament.”

“I applaud the historic appointment of Justice Natalie Hudson to chief justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court and the appointment of Karl Procaccini as the next associate justice,” said Erin Sindberg Porter, chair of the Commission on Judicial Selection. “It has been an honor and privilege to participate in this appointments process with the Governor, and I am confident that each appointee will serve with distinction.”

About Karl Procaccini

Karl Procaccini teaches law at the University of St. Thomas School of Law. Procaccini previously served as general counsel in the Office of Governor Tim Walz and Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan, leading the office’s legal and appointments team. In his role as general counsel, Procaccini navigated complex legal issues and managed litigation across state government. Prior to his state service, he was a partner at Greene Espel PLLP, where his practice focused on litigation, investigations, and global compliance counseling. Procaccini has also taught at William Mitchell College of Law, and he has been published on topics including clemency and attorney-client privilege. At the start of his legal career, Procaccini clerked for Judge Diana E. Murphy on the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals and Chief Judge Michael J. Davis on the United States District Court for the District of Minnesota.

In recognition of his work on the state’s response to COVID-19, Procaccini was named a 2020 Attorney

of the Year by Minnesota Lawyer, and he received the 2021 Public Attorney Award of Excellence from the Public Law Section of the Minnesota State Bar Association. Procaccini is a fellow of the American Bar Foundation and has been recognized as a North Star Lawyer for his pro bono work. He is also a past chair of the Minnesota State Bar Association’s International Business Law Section, and he has served as the executive board president and advisory board co-chair of the Minneapolis-St. Paul Lawyer Chapter of the American Constitution Society. Since 2019, he has volunteered as a writing coach for Minneapolis middle school students through the Reader/Writer Program. Procaccini earned his A.B. from Harvard College, LL.M. in International and Comparative Law from the American University in Cairo, and J.D. from Harvard Law School.



First Judicial District Judges and Staff Receive 2023 State Court Administrator Team Award

State Court Administrator Jeff Shorba recently presented the 2023 State Court Administrator Awards. As the only Minnesota Judicial Branch-sponsored award for excellence, the State Court Administrator Awards were created to honor those who have made significant contributions toward court administration excellence. These awards have been presented annually since 2020.

2023 Team Award Winner: Judges and Staff of the First Judicial District

The judges and the staff of the First Judicial District were chosen for their efforts to become the first district to eliminate the entirety of their Major Criminal case pandemic backlog, as well as their ongoing work to help the Judicial Branch meet its statewide backlog reduction goals.

During the pandemic, Minnesota's courts were forced to take unprecedented steps to limit in-person courthouse activity. While remote hearings allowed the Judicial Branch to address much of the incoming caseload during the pandemic, limited in-person courthouse activity resulted in a significant increase in pending felo-

ny and gross misdemeanor cases in Minnesota's district courts.

Shorba highlighted in his remarks the comprehensive strategy the First District employed to tackle their backlog, including setting aggressive Major Criminal calendars, leveraging their central assignment system to move judges around to avoid canceling or rescheduling hearings, and collaborating extensively with their local justice partners. District Administration would send weekly emails to judges and court administrators containing a status report on their backlog progress, and court administration would manually email judges on a regular basis highlighting cases that were beyond their timing objectives.



"This is a such a great example of how collaboration and teamwork can help us achieve even the toughest of

goals," Shorba said during his remarks.

At the time the Minnesota Judicial Council set the backlog reduction goal to begin in November 2021, the First District had a backlog of more than 1,300 cases. Just one year later, that backlog was completely eliminated, and the First Judicial District became the first district in the state to reach its backlog goal. Even after achieving the goal, the judges and staff of the First District and their justice partners have continued to drive down their pending Major Criminal caseload, helping to reduce the statewide backlog. Today, the First District's Major Criminal caseload is 450 cases smaller than it was before the pandemic.

"I know there has been incredible work happening across the state over the past year to bring down our pandemic backlog," said Shorba.

"However, the First District has taken on a unique role to advise, share ideas, and be a resource for the rest of the Branch, and I think it is important to recognize that leadership and collaborative spirit."



Minnesota Judicial Branch Publishes 2022 Annual Report

The Minnesota Judicial Branch has published its [2022 Annual Report to the Community](#).

The Annual 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.

“As our state emerged from a time of crisis related to the pandemic, the Minnesota Judicial Branch focused our efforts on the invaluable lessons we have learned over the past three years to expand access to justice and improve how we serve the people of Minnesota,” Chief Justice Lorie S. Gildea writes in the report. “Together with our judicial officers, court staff, and justice partners, the Minnesota Judicial Branch moved forward – charting a new course that will transform how we operate and deliver justice today and into the future.”

Key projects and initiatives highlighted in the report include:

- Implementation of the oneCourtMN Hearings Initiative policy and efforts to improve the remote and in-person hearing experience,
- Ongoing work to tackle the pandemic case backlog,
- New resources to support self-represented litigants,
- The launch of the Minnesota Digital Exhibit System (MNDES),
- The successful Summit on Improving the Court and Community Response to Individuals with Mental Illness in Minnesota,
- The new Conservatorship and Guardianship Complaint Process, and
- Work to eliminate bias from court operations, promote diversity and inclusion in the Judicial Branch, and promote equal access to the courts.

The Annual Report provides a few First District highlights:

- Carver and Scott counties offer new hearing officer program,
- Dakota County Juvenile Courts Area renovated,
- First District Equal Justice Committee studies revocation rates, educates on jury service, and
- New facilities, centralization of staff results in more efficient services for Scott County.

The 2022 Annual Report, along with previous versions, is available on the [Publications and Reports](#) page of the Judicial Branch website.



Governor Walz Appoints Adam Johnson and Lauren Johnson to Fill First Judicial District Vacancies

On October 11, 2023, Governor Tim Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan announced the appointment of Adam Johnson and Lauren Johnson as district court judges in Minnesota's First Judicial District. The seats will be chambered in Hastings in Dakota County and Shakopee in Scott County.



Adam Johnson will be replacing the Honorable Tim D. Wermager for the seat chambered in Dakota County.

"I am delighted to appoint Adam Johnson to the First Judicial District," said Governor Walz. "His career in public service is a testament to his commitment to ensuring equity and fairness in our justice system."

"Adam Johnson is an exceptional legal mind and leader who will be a

great addition to the Dakota County bench," said Lieutenant Governor Flanagan. "He approaches the practice of law with compassion and humility, even in the most challenging of moments."

Lauren Johnson will be replacing the Honorable Mark C. Vandelist for the seat chambered in Scott County.

"I am proud to appoint Lauren Johnson to the Scott County bench," said Governor Walz. "Her lived experience and diverse practice background will allow her to tackle the variety of cases and challenges faced by our judiciary."

"Lauren Johnson's integrity and commitment to justice is indisputable," said Lieutenant Governor Flanagan. "I am confident that her connection to community, dedication, and mindfulness in the courtroom will make her a judge of the highest quality."

Minnesota's First Judicial District consists of Carver, Dakota, Good-



Adam Johnson

hue, Le Sueur, McLeod, Scott, and Sibley counties.

About Adam Johnson

Adam Johnson is the deputy county administrator for Rice County, where he serves as a legal advisor to the county administrator and the county board on a wide variety of civil and operational matters. He was previously chief assistant for the Rice County Attorney's Office, where he was primarily responsible for criminal prosecution of felonies including domestic assault, criminal sexual con-



Governor Walz Appoints Adam Johnson and Lauren Johnson to Fill First Judicial District Vacancies

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duct, and murder. Johnson's community involvement includes serving as an American Mock Trial Association judge, volunteering at legal aid clinics provided by Legal Assistance of Dakota County, and serving as the Fifth District Bar Association representative to the Minnesota State Bar Association. Additionally, Johnson has previously volunteered at Worthington Dollars for Scholars, Feed My Starving Children, and Volunteers Enlisted to Aid People. He earned his B.A. from the University of Minnesota and his J.D. from the University of North Dakota School of Law.



Lauren Johnson

About Lauren Johnson

Lauren Johnson is an associate attorney with Melchert Hubert Sjodin,

PLLP, where she specializes in family law, orders for protection, and child protection matters. She previously served as an assistant county attorney for the McLeod County Attorney's Office, where she focused on criminal prosecution and child support. Johnson also worked as a staff attorney with the Autism Advocacy & Law Center, where she represented families with special needs. Her community involvement includes serving as a board member of the ISD 110 Foundation and as president of the Eighth District Bar Association. Johnson has also volunteered with Lutheran Social Services. She earned her B.S. from Minnesota State University, Mankato 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](#).



Scott County District Court Hosts Judge from Country of Georgia



Judges Meskhishvili and Lennon

Tbilisi Appeal Court Judge Ketevan Meskhishvili visited Scott County District Court in October as part of the United States Agency for International Development's Rule of Law Program. The Program promotes the rule of law worldwide as a foundation for democracy and sustainable, inclusive, and equitable development. This was Judge Meskhishvili's fourth visit to the U.S. to learn about its judiciary.



Scott County District Court Hosts Judge from Country of Georgia

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Judge Meskhishvili is a civil and family law judge of the Tbilisi Appeal Court in Tbilisi, Georgia. She has been with the Court for 13 years. She is also a national trainer for judges, attorneys, and lawyers, and her writings on private law and human rights have been published extensively. She has completed certified legal training courses in Georgia and Europe, and has participated in exchange programs in Germany and the United States.

While visiting Scott County District Court, Judge Meskhishvili shadowed First Judicial District Chief Judge Caroline Lennon and other judges, and also observed an array of hearings in family, civil, and criminal cases.

“Having Judge Meskhishvili visit has been a great opportunity to hear how other court systems work, and to evaluate how we do our work,” said Chief Judge Lennon. “We don’t often think

about what it would be like to set up a court system from scratch.”

Judge Meskhishvili’s main goal is to observe how other countries deliberate cases, learn from the similarities and differences from what she has experienced as a judge, and ultimately take that information back to improve the courts in Georgia.

From her experience in Minnesota, Judge Meskhishvili learned that judges in Minnesota and Georgia have similar approaches to cases. However, judges in the U.S. decide cases based on both the law and precedent, while judges in Georgia decide cases solely based on the law. The other main difference is that once a case is decided in the U.S., the judge continues to hear motions and hold additional hearings after the initial case issue has been resolved, whereas in Georgia, another agency called the En-

forcement Bureau enforces the judge’s order after a decision is made in the case. Judges in Georgia are not involved with compliance of court orders.

Based on Judge Meskhishvili’s experience specifically in Scott County, where she observed cases for two weeks, she stated that she appreciates how ethical and kind judges are there. She observed the judges working hard to protect human dignity and the rights of the people that come before them so that all people are treated equally and fairly. She expressed her gratefulness to her counterparts in the U.S. for the opportunity to learn from them.

Georgia is a developing democracy of 30 years, has a population of 3.7 million people, and borders Turkey, Russia, and the Black Sea.

First District Courts Take Justice to the County Fairs

The local county fair might seem like the last place you would expect to see judges and court staff, but it turns out it is a great place to educate people about the judicial system.

“People kept telling us they were surprised at how much they learned at our booth,” said Dakota County Court Administrator Maria King. “Some even mentioned ours was the last booth they would want to visit but,

when they did, they ended up leaving with a better perception of the courts.”

This was the first time Dakota, McLeod, and Sibley County District Courts hosted booths at their local



First District Courts Take Justice to the County Fairs

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county fairs, so they didn't know what to expect. To their surprise, the booths proved popular with the public.

"We had a terrific turnout," said McLeod and Sibley County Court Administrator Karen Messner.

"People were genuinely interested in learning about the court system and kept telling us how glad they were that we were there."

One of the reasons judges and court staff chose to host the booths was to promote court employment opportunities. All three courts have open positions, including court operation associates, court reporters, and law clerks. Fairgoers were surprised to hear that many court positions do not require a law degree.

"They had no idea," King said. "The courts are a great place to work and being at the fair allowed us to show people that."

The booths also educated fairgoers about jury duty and the importance of

having a diverse jury pool. In between handing out pencils shaped like gavels and other court giveaways, judges and court staff dispelled myths about jury duty and explained why it was so important for people to serve.

"A lot of people who stopped by the booth shared their experiences of being called as a juror," King said. "Others had no idea how they could get called to serve, so we explained that juries are randomly selected from a source list, which pulls names from state voter registration, driver's license, and ID card information."

A big draw at the McLeod and Sibley District Court booths was a "history corner" featuring an old-fashioned oath book, a stenograph machine, two historic law books, an old-time seal stamp, and an antique box once used for drawing jurors' names.

"People absolutely loved it," Messner said. "They were especially intrigued by the juror box – the fact that we

used to pull names out of a box surprised even some of the adults."

The highlight for judges and court staff was meeting people who had positive experiences with the court. One fairgoer walked up to the Dakota County District Court booth and hugged the judge who was staffing it. The judge had presided over the woman's treatment court case six years prior, and she credited him with her sobriety.

"It was an incredible moment," King said. "And it shows you how important our justice system is."

In the end, staff at both counties agreed that being at their county fairs was a worthwhile experience – one they would encourage other district courts to try.

"So many people thanked us for our public service, which is uncommon," Messner laughed. "It was definitely worth it to be there, and I would absolutely do it again."



Minnesota Courts Make Electronic Proof of Insurance Permanent

If you have been charged with No Proof of Insurance or No Insurance, and the vehicle you were driving was insured on the date of the offense, you can now submit your proof of insurance online. Minnesota's Court Payment Center recently made the electronic submission of proof of insurance a permanent option on the [Minnesota Judicial Branch website](#).

The court conducted an electronic proof of insurance pilot program last year to test whether court customers found electronic submissions helpful. The response was overwhelmingly positive: 40% of insurance submissions to the Minnesota Court Payment Center were done online.

"We really didn't publicize the electronic proof of insurance option during the pilot period, so we were pleasantly surprised to see that so many people used it," said Court Pay-

ment Center Manager Rebecca Becker. "We're thrilled that court customers appreciate, value, and will use an online submission method for their proof of insurance documentation."

Submitting proof of insurance online is simple:



1. Go to the [Pay Fines page](#) of [mncourts.gov](#)
2. Select the [How do I show proof of insurance?](#) tab
3. Click on [Email: Request to submit via email](#)

After submitting the email web form, you will receive a confirmation email to which you can reply with an electronic copy – a photo or a PDF – of your proof of insurance.

The idea for an electronic insurance submission process sprung from customer feedback. The Branch surveys court customers every few years about its processes, and the ability to do court business online was something customers requested.

"Customers told us they wanted more self-service options," Becker said.

"Submitting insurance documents via email seemed a natural fit, so we worked on making it simple, secure, and speedy."

Electronic Proof

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