



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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Minnesota District Courts Implement Hearing Changes

Minnesota courts began operating under new default hearing settings on February 3, 2025.

The new settings are part of a historic district court hearing framework the Minnesota Judicial Council voted to adopt in [July 2024](#).

Here is what changed:

- **Courts begin using default hearing settings**

All hearings in court cases are assigned a default setting: either in-person or remote. These default settings are based on case type. District courts will hold hearings according to these default settings unless a judicial officer orders a case-by-case exception or a deviation plan is in place.

- **Judges can allow exceptions to the default settings**

Judicial officers are able to deviate from the default hearing settings based upon the needs of the specific case without issuing an order or providing findings. A [request for a case-by-case exception](#) may be made by a party or initiated by the court.

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Minnesota District Courts Implement Hearing Changes

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- **Deviations can be requested**

Agencies, judicial districts, counties, and court divisions have the ability to request a deviation from the statewide default hearing settings under certain circumstances – for example, a district court may want to hold certain hearings remotely instead of in-person to increase access to justice partner services or legal repre-

sentation. These requests are reviewed and approved by the Judicial Council. Approved deviations are available for [adult criminal](#), [juvenile delinquency](#), and [non-criminal](#) hearings.

These new hearing rules are a direct result of feedback from court users about the Minnesota Judicial Branch's use of remote hearings during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. In a statewide survey of court

hearing participants, remote hearing attendees reported fewer barriers to attending their hearings than those who attended in person.

The new district court hearing settings reflect both the Minnesota Judicial branch's commitment to using in-person and remote hearings to deliver justice in Minnesota and the lessons learned and feedback gathered over the past two years under the oneCourtMN Hearings Initiative.

Report Highlights Minnesota's New District Court Hearing Framework

The Minnesota Judicial Branch has published a comprehensive review of the statewide effort to redesign district court hearings, documenting the analysis, stakeholder engagement, and decision-making that shaped Minnesota's new hearing framework.

The report, [The Future of Justice: Minnesota's New District Court Hearing Framework](#), serves as a historic record of how Minnesota

courts navigated unprecedented challenges to improve access to justice. It provides insight for judicial officers, staff, justice system stakeholders, and other state court systems seeking to learn from Minnesota's experience.

Now available on the [Publications and Reports page](#) of the Judicial Branch public website, the report details how the OneCourtMN Hearings Initiative evaluated hearing

practices and used data-driven insights to create a structured, statewide approach to court proceedings.

Key Highlights of the Report

The Future of Justice report explores:

- The key components of Minnesota's new district court hearing framework.



Report Highlights Minnesota's New District Court Hearing Framework

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- How pandemic-era innovations shaped a lasting framework for remote, hybrid, and in-person hearings.
- The stakeholder and public feedback that informed decisions about the future of hearings.
- The data-driven approach used to assess hearing formats and improve efficiency.
- Ongoing efforts to refine and enhance the hearing experience for all court users.

To read the full report, visit the Publications and Reports page on mncourts.gov.



Judicial Branch Releases Report on Efforts to Address, Eliminate Racial Bias in Courts

The Minnesota Judicial Branch's [Committee for Equality and Justice](#) has published a new document that details more than three decades of efforts to address and eliminate racial bias within the state's court system.

The [Minnesota Judicial Branch Response to the 1993 Race Bias Task Force Report](#) highlights progress made since the Branch's groundbreaking 1993 Race Bias Task Force Report while acknowledging that work still must be done to ensure equity and fairness for all court users.

"This report takes a close look at how the Minnesota Judicial Branch

has addressed the concerns raised in the findings of the 1993 Race Bias Task Force report," said Court of Appeals Judge JaPaul Harris, who co-chairs the Committee for Equality and Justice. "The goal is to ensure the Branch makes strategic changes to improve equal access to justice for all Minnesotans. It is important we share the progress we have made over the past 30-plus years while acknowledging there is more we can do and continuing our ongoing efforts in this area."

Background on the 1993 Racial Bias Task Force Report

The [1993 Minnesota Supreme Court Task Force on Racial Bias in the Judicial System Report](#) was one of the earliest comprehensive exami-

nations of racial bias in the courts. It documented disparities in areas such as sentencing, jury composition, and access to interpreters and other court resources. The report concluded with a series of recommendations aimed at eliminating these inequities and fostering public trust in the judicial system.

Progress in Key Areas Over Three Decades

The Judicial Branch has implemented numerous initiatives in response to the 1993 report, demonstrating a sustained commitment to equity and justice. These efforts include:

- **Policy and Practice Reforms:** Reforms inspired by the 1993 report include the



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adoption of guidelines to reduce sentencing disparities, revisions to jury management practices to eliminate barriers, and updates to bail policies to minimize the disproportionate impact on communities of color.

- **Judicial Education and Training:** The Judicial Branch has made education on diversity, equity, and inclusion a cornerstone of its training programs. Judges and court staff regularly participate in mandatory training on implicit bias, cultural competency, and trauma-informed practices to enhance fairness in judicial decision-making and court interactions.
- **Jury Diversity Outreach:** The Judicial Branch has developed extensive outreach programs to increase racial diversity in jury pools. Efforts include hosting informational sessions at schools, community centers, and places of worship; distributing promotional materials to encourage

jury service; and collaborating with community organizations to address barriers to participation.

- **Language Access Expansion:** Recognizing the diverse linguistic needs of Minnesota's population, the Judicial Branch has increased interpreter services and made multilingual resources readily available. A centralized interpreter scheduling system and ongoing training for interpreters ensure effective communication in court proceedings.
- **Enhanced Data Collection and Transparency:** The Judicial Branch has implemented a race data collection initiative to track and analyze disparities in sentencing, pretrial release decisions, and other key court operations. This data informs policy decisions and helps identify areas requiring further attention.
- **Formation of the Committee for Equality and Justice (CEJ):** Established in 2010,

the CEJ leads efforts to promote equity within the courts. The committee supports local Equal Justice Committees, which address issues such as jury diversity, bias reduction, and community engagement. CEJ initiatives include statewide listening sessions, development of DEI resources, and fostering community dialogues.

- **Access to Justice Improvements:** Efforts to close the justice gap include expanding self-help centers, launching the Legal Paraprofessional Pilot Project, and creating user-friendly resources for self-represented litigants. These initiatives have enhanced access for historically underserved communities.
- **Community Engagement Initiatives:** The Judicial Branch has hosted numerous community dialogues to foster trust and transparency. Events such as warrant forgiveness clinics and courthouse tours have provided



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direct outreach to communities and demonstrated the court's commitment to fairness.

Looking Forward

While the report celebrates the progress the Judicial Branch has made, it is meant as a milestone rather than a conclusion. Through the Committee for Equality and Justice, the Judicial Branch is working on:

- Strengthening partnerships with community organizations and justice system stakeholders.
- Enhancing training and educational resources for court staff and judicial officers.
- Using data analytics to identify and address emerging disparities.
- Expanding outreach to underrepresented populations to ensure equal access to jury service and other court processes.

For more information, read the [2024-25 Committee for Equality and Justice Strategic Plan](#) on the [Committee for Equality and Justice](#) page on mncourts.gov.



Dakota County Recognized for Eviction Prevention Work

Dakota County's Eviction Prevention Services and Navigation team was selected as a finalist for the 2025 HEROES Award. This award, which stands for Honoring Effective Responsive Outstanding Efficient Service, highlights the teamwork across the county, frequently involving various departments and divisions. It reflects the county's mission and its core values of service, integrity, people, and innovation.

The Prevention Services and Navigation team has worked to develop

and implement a program to address eviction prevention and homelessness in Dakota County. They have done this by partnering with outside agencies and developing rapport with landlords as well as with other outside agencies who share similar missions to provide referrals and client connections. Through their efforts they have been able to support tenants facing eviction in Dakota County with financial support and connections to needed services to uplift families and promote housing stability.

In early 2019, staff began attending court hearings to understand the problem further and observed clear inequities in the hearing process. Dakota County tenants facing eviction attended court hearings without legal representation while property owners were represented in court by attorneys. Tenants did not seem to understand the court process fully. They were often agreeing to settlements on timelines that were beyond their financial reach and would ultimately result in eviction. Tenants did not have ready access to the



Dakota County Recognized for Eviction Prevention Work

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financial or legal tools available to them to help avoid eviction. They also did not have access to services to help prevent future housing instability. There was a trend of people needing emergency shelter who had a recent eviction. Often the eviction appeared to be avoidable if the tenant had accessed financial or other resources available to them.

Based on the needs identified at eviction court, a group of interested partners formed a workgroup to develop a local intervention that could benefit tenants, the courts, and the broader emergency housing system. The group met throughout 2019 to review eviction statistics and research findings, as well as and results from established eviction court clinics. They sought input and perspectives from tenants, landlords, and the courts. The group established needed program elements, including:

- Providing legal support and court navigation to tenants during eviction hearings
- Assisting tenants in successfully fulfilling the terms of settlement agreements
- Providing crisis navigation services if an eviction was unavoidable

This work resulted in the formation of the Dakota County Housing Clinic in August 2021. Partners included Dakota County Social Services, Dakota County Employment and Economic Assistance, Dakota County District Court, non-profit partners 360 Communities, Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services, Legal Assistance of Dakota County, area landlords and property owners, and the Family Housing Fund foundation. Community Mediation Minnesota was added in 2023 as a new partner. Funding for this project started with federal Emergency Rental Assistance funds and has transitioned to state and local Affordable Housing Aid.

Housing court hearings are held multiple days each week via Zoom. During the hearings, the judge introduces service partners to the tenants and tenants are allowed to meet individually with 360 Communities and/or legal services. The Housing Clinic teams assess the tenants' needs and establish an action plan based on the eviction action. This can include referrals to financial assistance, help with the legal process, or help accessing longer term services. Financial assistance referrals are made immediately to the Dakota County

Social Services Prevention Services and Navigation team or a team at 360 Communities. These teams can gather needed paperwork and quickly process eviction prevention funds. 360 Communities also offers 30 days of case management following the court hearing to make connections to other needed services and the Dakota County Prevention team can provide longer term case management to set up services for ongoing stability.

From January 1, 2024 – September 30, 2024, the Dakota County Housing Clinic served 687 households. Dakota County has hearing outcome data on 342 of these households. Of these, evictions were prevented in 83% of cases. In contrast, among households not served by the Housing Clinic, evictions were prevented in only 56% of cases. Tenants were also connected to other resources to promote long-term stability.

Dakota County tenants, landlords, and property managers and communities all directly benefit from Housing Clinic and Prevention Services and Navigation. Ultimately, the program helps prevent evictions and homelessness in Dakota County.



Remote Public Access to Appellate Briefs Begins April 1

The Minnesota Supreme Court recently [issued an order](#) that will authorize remote public access to appellate briefs beginning April 1, 2025.

Currently, briefs filed with the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals are not viewable in [P-MACS](#), the remotely accessible version of the Minnesota Appellate Courts Case Management System. Court rules allow the State Law Library to provide remote access to appellate court briefs, but only if it has the resources to do so, and if it ensures

that non-public data is redacted from the briefs.

The Supreme Court's January 7, 2025, order includes amendments to the Rules of Civil Appellate Procedure and Rules of Public Access to Records of the Judicial Branch that will authorize remote public access to appellate briefs in P-MACS, effective April 1.

The rule changes include an express presumption that appellate case records are public unless a statute,

court rule, or court order directs otherwise. Similar to district court filing rules, parties to an appeal will be responsible for preventing disclosure of non-public information in appellate filings and must correctly designate appellate filings as "confidential" or "sealed" when there is supporting authority for such a designation. The updated rules provide parties to an appeal with directives for handling specific types of information and provide options for filing redacted briefs, if necessary.



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