



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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WINTER 2025

## Minnesota Courts to Require Digital Exhibits Beginning Jan. 1, 2025

The new year will ring in a new process for the Minnesota Judicial Branch: as of Jan. 1, 2025, all court participants will be required to use the Minnesota Digital Exhibit System to upload hearing and trial evidence.

The Minnesota Digital Exhibit System, known as MNDES, allows attorneys and other court participants, including people representing themselves, to upload hearing and trial exhibits digitally from anywhere. The Minnesota Judicial Branch has been testing MNDES in a pilot program since 2021 in response to the increased number of virtual hearings. Now, a [Supreme Court ruling](#) makes MNDES mandatory for all hearing – virtual and in-person.

“Over the past three years, we have found that MNDES provides a secure and consistent means for people to manager hearing and trial exhibits,” said Chief Justice Natalie Hudson. “Just as we modernized electronic court filings, MNDES modernizes how we manage evidence in hearings.”

MNDES accommodates most evidence formats, including audio, video, images, and documents. Permitted file types can be found [online](#). The exhibits are stored in a secure platform and are not directly accessible

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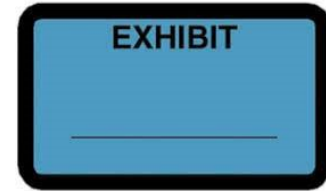
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Minnesota Courts to Require Digital Exhibits Beginning Jan. 1, 2025

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by or visible to the public, although judges and juries are able to view the information in court and during deliberations.

Instructional documents and frequently asked questions are available on the [MNDES page](#) of the Minnesota Judicial Branch website.



## Modernizing the Judicial Branch Parent Education Program

Late 2024 marks the implementation of significant updates to the Judicial Branch Parent Education Program, reflecting a year-long effort to enhance its accuracy, usability, and efficiency. These updates streamline operations and ensure consistent, reliable resources for families navigating challenging transitions. The changes are codified in an [updated order](#) issued by the Minnesota Supreme Court in September 2024, which amended the Parent Education Minimum Standards to align with modern practices and needs.

Parent education programs are designed to support families involved in dissolution, paternity, and other family law cases. These programs serve as an early intervention tool, fostering cooperation between parents, reducing adversarial conflict, and helping

parents focus on the best interests of their children. By addressing critical topics such as communication, co-parenting strategies, and the impact of conflict on children, these programs provide families with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate difficult transitions effectively.

### Key Enhancements

While the Supreme Court's order updated the standards for parent education delivery, several critical changes to improve program administration and accessibility were also implemented:

- Streamlined Application Process: A new enterable text application simplifies the process for programs seeking approval or renewal.
- Biennial Reapplication: Programs must now reapply every two years to confirm compliance with current standards and ensure the Judicial Branch website contains accurate information.
- Data Submission Requirements: Approved programs must provide usage data to the Judicial Branch, supporting oversight and continuous improvement.
- Centralized Resource: Parent education course listings are now consolidated on the Judicial Branch's [Parent Education Help Topic](#), replacing district or county listings. This ensures a single, authoritative source for program information, reducing confusion and administrative burden.



## The Role of Parent Education Programs

Parent education programs equip parents with essential skills and information. Required curriculum topics include:

- Positive communication and co-parenting strategies.
- The impact of divorce, separation, and conflict on children and families.
- Safety planning and conflict resolution.

- Legal processes and alternatives for resolving custody disputes.

## Ensuring Accessibility and Quality

The updated standards reflect a commitment to accessible and high-quality programming:

- Flexible Formats: Both in-person and online options are available, allowing parents to participate at their own pace.
- Qualified Instructors: Instruc-

tors must demonstrate expertise in family dynamics and complete training on the impact of domestic violence on children.

- Affordable Fees: Programs utilize a sliding fee scale, with fee waivers available to ensure financial accessibility.

## Additional Information

For more information about the updated Parent Education Program or to access the centralized course listings, visit the [Parent Education Help Topic](#).



## Grant Program Funds Courthouse Security Improvements in 23 Counties

Minnesota Supreme Court Chief Justice Natalie Hudson has announced the award of \$500,000 in grants through the Safe and Secure Courthouse Initiative. The grant funding will go towards the implementation of safety and security improvements in 23 county courthouses across Minnesota.

The counties receiving grants include Anoka, Benton, Blue Earth, Carlton, Chisago, Grant, Isanti, Koochiching, Mahnommen, McLeod, Mille Lacs, Mower, Norman, Otter Tail, Pine, Pope, Red Lake, Scott, Sibley, Swift, Todd, Waseca, and Wilkin.

Safe and Secure Courthouse Initiative grants will help fund a variety of courthouse security improvements, including:

- Providing security training to courthouse officials and staff;
- Installing bullet-resistant glass at public service counters;
- Replacing aging security equipment;
- Reconstructing point of entry

areas;

- Implementing door locks, cameras, key card readers, and duress alarms;
- Installing or upgrading security screening stations at courthouse entrances; and
- Improve exterior building safety and security.

Grant awards ranged from \$750 to nearly \$101,000. Of the 23 counties receiving funding, nine were for less than \$10,000, and seven were for more than \$25,000. As required by law, each county will provide a dollar-for-dollar match for its grant award, in either cash or in-kind services.

### About the Safe and Secure Courthouse Initiative

The Safe and Secure Courthouse Initiative was established by Chief Justice Lorie Gildea in 2016 and was initially funded by a \$1 million appropriation from the Minnesota Legislature.

The grant program was based on a legislative proposal brought forward by the Courthouse Security

Workgroup, a statewide coalition of county and justice system partners convened by Chief Justice Gildea in 2014. The Workgroup included representatives from the Minnesota Judicial Branch, the Association of Minnesota Counties, the Minnesota Sheriffs' Association, the Minnesota County Attorneys Association, the Minnesota Board of Public Defense, and the Minnesota Inter-County Association.

An Advisory Panel, appointed by the Chief Justice, oversees the grant application and award process. The panel includes representatives from the Judicial Branch, county government, law enforcement, and state justice partners.

The Legislature has provided funding for the program three times. The Advisory Panel awarded grants totaling \$1 million in 2017, \$500,000 in 2022, and \$500,000 in 2024.



## Supreme Court Makes Legal Paraprofessional Program Permanent

The Minnesota Supreme Court has issued an [order](#) making the Legal Paraprofessional Program a permanent Judicial Branch program. The order also expands the scope of work approved Legal Paraprofessionals can perform as part of the program, and makes other changes to the Rules of Supervised Practice. The Supreme Court's order takes effect January 1, 2025.

### About the Legal Paraprofessional Program

The Minnesota Supreme Court established the [Legal Paraprofessional Pilot Project](#) in 2021 with the goal of increasing access to civil legal representation in case types where one or both parties typically appear without legal representation. The Pilot Project permits legal paraprofessionals, under the supervision of a Minnesota licensed attorney, to provide legal advice and, in some cases, represent a client in court in two legal areas: landlord-tenant disputes and family

law disputes.

In January 2024, the Legal Paraprofessional Pilot Project Standing Committee issued its final report, which recommended making the pilot a permanent Judicial Branch program and adding eligibility to provide advice and representation in additional case types. The Supreme Court accepted public comment and held a public hearing on the Standing Committee's recommendations.

### Summary of the Supreme Court's new order

The Supreme Court's [September 16, 2024, order](#) adopts many of the Standing Committee's recommendations. The order makes the Legal Paraprofessional Program a permanent Judicial Branch program and changes some of the existing Rules of Supervised Practice.

The amendments to the Rules of Supervised Practice will take effect January 1, 2025. The Pilot Program will

continue until December 31, 2024.

The most relevant changes to the Supervised Practice Rules include:

- Allow legal paraprofessionals to practice in Housing Court statewide (now including the Fourth District).
- Legal paraprofessionals are also now allowed to appear in court and give legal advice in the following case types:
  - Criminal expungement
  - Conciliation court
  - Consumer debt and student loan debt, even outside of conciliation court, where the amount in dispute is \$15,000 or less
  - Petty misdemeanor – only if, every two years, they complete at least three credit-hours of CLEs related to petty misdemeanors and the practice areas in which collateral consequences may arise



*Supreme Court Makes Legal Paraprofessional Program Permanent*

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- Less-complex probate and estate administration proceedings
- Proceedings before the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH)
- Proceedings challenging denial of unemployment benefits before the Department of Employment and Economic Development and denial of benefits administered by the Minnesota Department of Human Services
- Note: There were no changes to legal paraprofessionals abilities to practice in family law cases.

## Five Minnesota Judicial Branch Employees Receive 2024 Minnesota Association for Court Management (MACM) Awards

The Minnesota Association for Court Management announced the recipients of its 2024 awards at its annual conference in October.

### **Coach/Mentor of the Year – Max Mosser**

Accounting Manager, Second Judicial District

Max Mosser, Accounting Manager in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Judicial District, was awarded the Coach/Mentor of the Year award. This 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.

Max is an exceptional mentor who possesses empathy, experience, patience, honesty, and inspiration. He provides support, guidance and compassion in his leadership

and is a trusted advisor. He is positive and enthusiastic, shares his vast knowledge and advocates for the advancement of his team by encouraging training and development opportunities. He provides the big picture and helps his team understand their role in achieving goals. Max empowers others to be courageous and step outside their comfort zones. He helps others to lead with confidence and embrace change. Max has worked for the Judicial Branch since 2012.





*Five Minnesota Judicial Branch Employees Receive 2024 Minnesota Association for Court Management (MACM) Awards*

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### **Early Career Excellence Award – Tracey Ames**

Administrative Manager, Second Judicial District

Tracey Ames, Administrative Manager in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Judicial District, received the Early Career Excellence Award. This 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.

Tracey oversees the Leadworker Unit and four Treatment Courts in Ramsey County and serves on the Treatment Court Initiative Workgroup. She has built highly effective and collaborative teams in a short amount of time and has been instrumental in the development and implementation of several projects including district-wide onboarding and training, flexible courtrooms, and electronic workflows. She provided support, encouragement, and accolades to staff during times of rapid

change and uncertainty, which resulted in stability during a critical time of shifting goals, expectations, and objectives. In her work with the treatment courts, she pursues community agency partnerships, coordinates outreach opportunities, promotes an annual pro-social event, celebrates milestones and achievements, and positively impacts the quality of service to stakeholders. Tracey has worked for the Judicial Branch since December of 2018.

### **Champion of Change – Deb Mueske**

District Administrator, Seventh and Eighth Judicial Districts

Deb Mueske, District Administrator in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Judicial Districts, 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.

Deb is an outstanding leader who isn't afraid to take her own approach and challenge long-standing ways of doing business. She communicates clear

vision and has created new cultures of wellness and collaboration amongst her teams. She builds trust by creating space for open conversations and discussion regarding new concepts and initiatives, and by making change happen together. Through strategic planning and using District Guiding Principles, she guides others through stages of change, keeping customer service, efficient process, and district benefit as high priority. She encourages leadership to get involved in state-wide initiatives and involvement in committees and projects based on strengths. Deb has contributed to and been an integral part of many initiatives and implementations, some of which include in-court updating and district-wide centralized processing in many areas of court. Deb has worked for the Judicial Branch since January of 2001.

### **Distinguished Service Award – Lori O'Brien**

Anoka County Court Administrator (retired), Tenth Judicial District

Lori O'Brien, Anoka County Court Administrator (retired) in the 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial District, received the Distinguished Service Award. This award recognizes



*Five Minnesota Judicial Branch Employees Receive 2024 Minnesota Association for Court Management (MACM) Awards*

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es 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.

Lori has demonstrated all of these qualities and more with her 35 years of public service in the Wisconsin and Minnesota courts. For the past ten years specifically as the Anoka County Court Administrator, she has skillfully led a complex, larger court successfully through challenging times involving high volume case-loads, complex culture, and a global pandemic. Not only has she navigated creating a county that focuses on striving to care about quality and effectiveness, she has also taken on other centralized units in the 10th District throughout her time in Anoka. She has continually been a voice of inclusion and helped her team focus on forward-thinking approaches as the Branch continues to lead in innovative practices and projects. Lori was described in her nomination as a wonderful mentor and effective leader. A hands-on

leader who is dependable and cares about her teams. This does not stop at court administration. Lori established strong justice partner relationships with her responsive and timely communication style, and it is clear she makes it a priority to be a good justice partner team member. Her impact on the Anoka Court Administration office and 10th District will be long-lasting and she will be greatly missed as she retired this November 2024.

#### **Lifetime Achievement Award – Gail Clapp**

Business Practices Unit Manager,  
Fourth Judicial District

Gail Clapp, Business Practices Unit Manager in the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District, received the 2024 Lifetime Achievement Award. This award honors a recipient's many contributions to the court management profession and their years of service to the Judicial Branch.

Gail began her career with the Minnesota Judicial Branch in 1985 and during her tenure she has served in numerous roles in Hennepin County, including as a supervisor in the juve-

nile and criminal divisions, and as Manager of the Business Practice Unit, since 2007. She has a dedicated and long history of employment with the 4th Judicial District, as well as participation on many local and statewide committees, some of which include Civil and Criminal Process Advisory Workgroups, HJIP projects, as well as membership of the National Association for Court Management.

Gail's current and historical knowledge of the courts is immense. She leads by example, supporting her team through challenges and change, and encourages thinking "big picture" when faced with challenging questions. Gail's expertise and innovative efforts have had great impact in the 4<sup>th</sup> District. Some of her accomplishments to note include contributions to large-scale process re-engineering and improvement projects district-wide, early implementation of eFS and the associated divisional workflow and nodal changes, and ongoing communication, training, and collaboration with divisions in the 4<sup>th</sup> District of cutting-edge technology and business practice initiatives.







# MINNESOTA JUDICIAL BRANCH



## Minnesota Judicial Branch FY26-27 Budget Request

### Strengthening Justice for All Minnesotans

The Minnesota Judicial Branch's FY2026-27 budget request is focused on ensuring Minnesota's courts remain accessible, secure, and effective for all Minnesotans. These investments will protect constitutional rights, improve the efficiency of the state's courts, and help the judicial system serve the people of Minnesota more equitably and effectively.

*The Judicial Branch is seeking an increase of 12.51% over the Branch's starting biennial base budget in FY 2026-27.*

Budget Item Request	FY 2026-27	FY 2028-29
Judge/staff compensation, health insurance, lease costs	\$77,301,000	\$104,396,000
Digital accessibility	\$5,100,000	\$1,764,000
Justice partner access	\$4,000,000	\$800,000
Forensic examiner rate increase	\$7,222,000	\$7,222,000
Jury per diem and mileage	\$18,448,000	\$18,448,000
Cyber security ongoing funding		\$3,500,000
Psychological services budget deficit		\$10,634,000
Interpreter deficit		\$2,580,000
Jury deficit		\$1,576,000
<b>TOTAL REQUEST</b>	<b>\$ 112,071,000</b>	<b>\$150,920,000</b>

#### Request: \$77.301 million total FY 2026-2027

- Increase judicial officer salaries by 6% and create an employee compensation increase pool in both FY26 and FY27.
- Fund for the employer-share of anticipated health care cost increases.
- Fund the increased cost of leasing office space in the Minnesota Judicial Center.

#### Addressing Judicial Branch Workforce Challenges & Lease Increases

Despite recent legislative investments, Judicial Branch compensation remains significantly behind other public sector employers in Minnesota. Since 2020, the Judicial Branch's employee turnover rate has increased by 15%, while the number of applicants for each open position has fallen by 27%. This investment will ensure the Judicial Branch can attract and retain experienced judicial officers and court staff.

#### Creating a Digitally Inclusive Court System

The Minnesota Judicial Branch is committed to complying with new federal digital accessibility guidelines to ensure equal access to online court resources. This funding will be used to update Judicial Branch websites, online resources, and other digital material to help make the court system inclusive for all Minnesotans.

#### Request: \$5.1 million in FY 26-27 and \$1.764 million in FY 28-29

To meet new federal digital accessibility guidelines.

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# MINNESOTA JUDICIAL BRANCH



## **Request: \$4 million in FY 26-27 & \$800,000 in FY 28-29**

To improve electronic data sharing with state and local justice partners.

## **Justice System Modernization**

The Minnesota Judicial Branch recently established a workgroup to develop recommendations for improving how the Judicial Branch shares documents and court information with state and local government agencies. This funding will allow the Judicial Branch to implement the workgroup's recommendations, increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the state's overall justice system.

## **Ensuring Timely Psychological Evaluations**

Between FY2020 and FY2023, the need for psychological examinations in both criminal and civil commitment cases increased by 143%. However, there is currently a shortage of qualified psychological examiners willing to take on these cases, given the below-market payment rate offered by the Judicial Branch. This funding will allow the Judicial Branch to offer a competitive compensation that aligns with the current market in order to attract and retain qualified examiners.

## **Request: \$7.222 million in FY 26-27**

To increase pay for contract forensic psychological examiners from \$136 per hour to \$175 per hour.

## **Request: \$18.448 million in FY 26-27**

- To raise the juror per diem rate from \$20/day to \$100/day.
- To raise juror mileage reimbursement from \$0.54/mile to \$0.67/mile (the current IRS standard mileage rate).

## **Making Jury Duty More Accessible**

Jurors play a vital role in the justice system, and a representative jury pool supports public trust and confidence in the courts. The current low per diem for jury service does not reflect the potential costs jurors incur when participating in jury duty. Increasing the per diem will help address the economic hardship associated with jury service, and may help ensure a diverse and representative jury pool.

## **Funding Ongoing Cyber Security Needs**

During the 2024 legislative session, the Legislature provided temporary funding to strengthen the Branch's Cyber Security Program. The temporary funding expires at the end of FY 2027. Because cybercrime is becoming increasingly organized, and cybercriminals are continually modifying their attacks, the branch needs ongoing funding to evolve and expand its efforts to mitigate the risk of data breaches, system outages, and cyber-attacks.

## **Request: \$3.5 million in FY 28-29**

For permanent funding for the Judicial Branch Cyber Security Program.

## **Request: \$14.790 million in FY 28-29**

To address long-term deficits in Psychological Services, Court Interpreter, and Jury programs.

## **Addressing Long-Term Deficits in Core Court Operations**

During the 2024 Legislative Session, the Legislature provided temporary funding to address the rising costs of statutorily mandated in the Judicial Branch. That temporary funding will expire at the end of FY 2027. The Judicial Branch is seeking permanent funding to address the deficits in these programs, beginning in FY 2028.

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