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District Courts

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AT A GLANCE

- In 2023, 981,257 cases were filed in district court
- District court proceedings are held in 104 locations throughout all 87 Minnesota counties
- District courts are organized into ten judicial districts for administrative purposes
- There are 296 district court judges
- District courts serve all Minnesota citizens

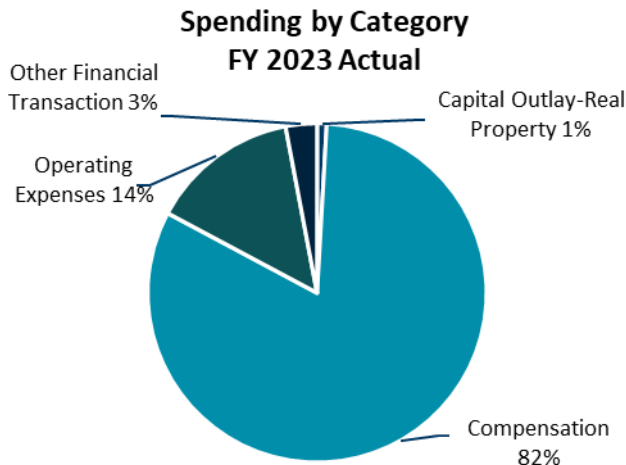
PURPOSE

The mission of the Judicial Branch is to provide justice through a system that assures equal access for the fair and timely resolution of cases and controversies.

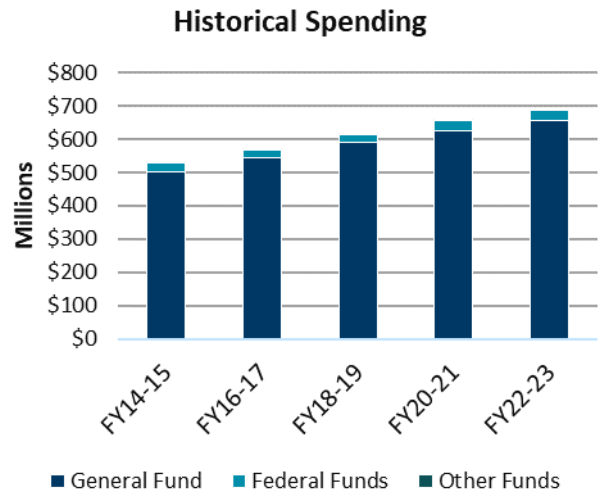
District courts are the backbone of the state’s court system. District courts provide access to the justice system across the state, with courthouses located in all 87 counties. For administrative purposes, district courts are divided among ten judicial districts. A chief judge serves as the administrative head in each judicial district. Judicial District Administrators assist the Chief Judge in carrying out their responsibilities. Court administration staff at the county level manage scheduling, case flow, finance, personnel, and juries.

District court judges hear everything from traffic tickets, civil and family conflicts, and first-degree murder trials. Some district courts may have separate divisions, such as criminal, civil, probate, family, and juvenile courts.

BUDGET



Source: Budget Planning & Analysis System (BPAS)



Source: Consolidated Fund Statement

District courts spent \$366 million in fiscal year (FY) 2023. Of this amount, \$349 million (95 percent) was from state general fund appropriations, while the remaining \$17 million (five percent) of funding was received from various other sources, such as federal and local government grants and donations from foundations.

STRATEGIES

The District Court conducts its functions in support of three strategic goals to deliver its mission:

- *Access to Justice - A justice system that is open, affordable, understandable, and provides appropriate levels of service to all users.*
Ensuring access to justice for all is an enduring commitment for Minnesota’s court system. It is also an increasingly challenging concern given changing court customer expectations, shifting demographics, and increased competition for scarce resources.
- *Effective Administration of Justice - A justice system that adopts approaches and processes for the fair and just resolution of all cases.*
Over the last two decades, Minnesota courts have worked diligently to become increasingly efficient and effective. The Judicial Branch is focused on being a well-managed court system that seeks innovative ways to promote justice for individual litigants in individual cases.
- *Public Trust and Accountability - A justice system that engenders public trust and confidence through impartial decision-making and accountability for the use of public resources.*
The Judicial Branch is accountable to the public. It is critical that the Judicial Branch maintain and continuously improve public trust and accountability, and it must meet this challenge by collaborating with court customers to eliminate disparities in the court system.

Over the past 12 years, the Minnesota Judicial Branch has engaged in a reform agenda to modernize and re-engineer the work of Minnesota’s district courts. These efforts, outlined below, have made Minnesota’s system more efficient and more convenient for court users, while increasing access to court records for customers and the public.

- Between 2012 and 2016, the eCourtMN Initiative transitioned Minnesota district courts from paper-based court files to electronic case records. This transformation has made the work of Minnesota’s district courts more efficient, increased convenience for court users, enhanced information sharing between the state’s justice partners, and greatly expanded access to court records and information.
- Following the successful eCourtMN Initiative, the Minnesota Judicial Branch worked to leverage the electronic case records to streamline and enhance court administration processes, and adopted the oneCourtMN Vision to deliver “high-quality, consistent, and convenient court administration services anywhere in the state.”
- To maintain access to justice during the COVID-19 pandemic, Minnesota district courts transitioned the vast majority of court hearings to online courtrooms. While this transition was borne out of necessity, it quickly became clear that attorneys, litigants, and other court users often preferred the ease and convenience of conducting their official court business online.
- In 2022, the Minnesota Judicial Branch became one of the first court systems in the nation to commit to the long-term use of remote (online) district court hearings. The Minnesota Judicial Council adopted the oneCourtMN Hearings Initiative Policy, which set a temporary framework for how district courts would use both in-person and remote hearings to deliver timely and efficient access to justice.
- In 2024, the Minnesota Judicial Council adopted a new, permanent hearing framework for how district courts will use both in-person and remote hearings going forward. This new framework will take effect in February 2025.

RESULTS

It is the policy of the Minnesota Judicial Branch to establish core performance goals and to monitor key results that measure progress toward meeting these goals in order to ensure accountability of the Judicial Branch, improve overall operations of the court, and enhance the public’s trust and confidence in the Judiciary.

Throughout the year, the district courts are directed to review performance measure results. This review is shared with the Minnesota Judicial Council (the Judicial Branch’s governing body) twice a year.

An important goal is ensuring district courts resolve cases in a timely manner, and the Minnesota Judicial Branch is pleased to report that Minnesota district courts have eliminated the pandemic backlog of felony and gross misdemeanor cases.

Given the public health precautions in place during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of pending felony and gross misdemeanor cases had grown by nearly 40 percent. In response, the Minnesota Judicial Council adopted an aggressive backlog reduction goal and secured federal and state legislative funding to utilize senior judges, expand criminal case calendars, and organize special case resolution events to reduce this backlog of Major Criminal cases. By May 2024, Minnesota district courts had officially reduced the pending Major Criminal caseload to pre-pandemic levels, helping ensure timely access to justice and a high-functioning court system in Minnesota.

Below is a look at some other key performance measures for Minnesota’s district courts.

Measure name	Measure type	Measure data source	Historical trend	Most recent data
Statewide clearance rate – The clearance rate measures whether courts are disposing of as many cases as are filed in the same year. A clearance rate of 100 percent means as many cases were disposed in a year as were newly filed.	Result	Annual disposal and filing of court cases.	101 percent was unchanged from 2022 to 2023.	101 percent in 2023
Statewide time to disposition - time to disposition assesses the length of time it takes a court to process cases. The goal is to dispose 99 percent of cases within Judicial Branch time objectives.	Result	The disposal of cases within the Judicial Branch time objectives.	The percent increased from 90 percent in 2022 to 91 percent in 2023.	91 percent in 2023
Statewide age of pending cases - Assesses the percentage of cases that are pending beyond Judicial Branch time objectives for all cases at the end of the fiscal year (excluding minor criminal). The goal is one percent or lower.	Result	Cases that are pending beyond Judicial Branch time objectives for all cases at the end of the fiscal year (excluding minor criminal).	The percent decreased from 17 percent in 2022 to 13 percent in 2023 of cases pending beyond Judicial Branch time objectives.	13 percent in 2023

Data are from the Judicial Branch 2022 and 2023 Performance Measures – Key Results and Measures Annual Reports (<https://mncourts.gov/mncourtsgov/media/CIOMediaLibrary/Documents/Annual-Report-2022-Performance-Measures.pdf> and <https://mncourts.gov/mncourtsgov/media/CIOMediaLibrary/Documents/Annual-Report-2023-Performance-Measures.pdf>.

The Minnesota Constitution, Article VI; https://www.revisor.mn.gov/constitution/#article_6, provides the authority for the District Court. Minn. Stat Chapters 484, 485, 486, 491, 491A, 492, and 493; https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/part/JUDICIARY_ provide the legal authority for district court operations.

District Courts

Agency Expenditure Overview

(Dollars in Thousands)

	Actual FY22	Actual FY23	Actual FY24	Estimate FY25	Forecast Base		Governor's Recommendation	
					FY26	FY27	FY26	FY27
<u>Expenditures by Fund</u>								
1000 - General	306,179	349,318	354,454	431,381	384,090	384,090	392,179	400,470
2000 - Restrict Misc Special Revenue	1,704	1,558	1,689	3,819	1,754	1,754	1,754	1,754
2001 - Other Misc Special Revenue	27	33	24	29				
2403 - Gift	135	83	113	487	13	13	13	13
3000 - Federal	12,606	7,892	13,613	16,160	10,266	10,266	10,266	10,266
3015 - ARP-State Fiscal Recovery	5,154	4,807						
6000 - Miscellaneous Agency	2,563	2,271	3,421	7,729	7,728	7,728	7,728	7,728
Total	328,366	365,962	373,314	459,605	403,851	403,851	411,940	420,231
Biennial Change				138,590		(25,217)		(748)
Biennial % Change				20		(3)		(0)
Governor's Change from Base								24,469
Governor's % Change from Base								3

Expenditures by Program

District Courts	328,366	365,962	373,314	459,605	403,851	403,851	411,940	420,231
Total	328,366	365,962	373,314	459,605	403,851	403,851	411,940	420,231

Expenditures by Category

Compensation	283,131	300,256	315,652	327,542	327,505	327,505	335,594	343,885
Operating Expenses	39,100	52,099	47,738	109,742	58,299	58,299	58,299	58,299
Grants, Aids and Subsidies	1,262	1,282	1,428	2,873	4,119	4,119	4,119	4,119
Capital Outlay-Real Property	116	3,323	19	3,090	3,268	3,268	3,268	3,268
Other Financial Transaction	4,757	9,001	8,477	16,358	10,660	10,660	10,660	10,660
Total	328,366	365,962	373,314	459,605	403,851	403,851	411,940	420,231

Full-Time Equivalent

	2,707.73	2,899.55	2,791.97	2,792.21	2,744.17	2,744.17	2,744.17	2,744.17
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District Courts

Agency Financing by Fund

(Dollars in Thousands)

	Actual FY22	Actual FY23	Actual FY24	Estimate FY25	Forecast Base		Governor's Recommendation	
					FY26	FY27	FY26	FY27
1000 - General								
Balance Forward In		20,926		24,606				
Direct Appropriation	326,372	329,146	379,062	406,775	384,090	384,090	392,179	400,470
Transfers In	3,998	5,932	4,181					
Transfers Out	3,998	6,686	4,181					
Cancellations		0						
Balance Forward Out	20,193		24,608					
Expenditures	306,179	349,318	354,454	431,381	384,090	384,090	392,179	400,470
Biennial Change in Expenditures				130,338		(17,655)		6,814
Biennial % Change in Expenditures				20		(2)		1
Governor's Change from Base								24,469
Governor's % Change from Base								3
Full-Time Equivalents	2,608.14	2,801.66	2,737.78	2,737.72	2,689.81	2,689.81	2,689.81	2,689.81

2000 - Restrict Misc Special Revenue

Balance Forward In	2,237	2,240	2,130	2,093				
Receipts	1,649	1,615	1,600	1,674	1,702	1,702	1,702	1,702
Transfers In	51	58	50	52	52	52	52	52
Balance Forward Out	2,234	2,354	2,091					
Expenditures	1,704	1,558	1,689	3,819	1,754	1,754	1,754	1,754
Biennial Change in Expenditures				2,246		(2,000)		(2,000)
Biennial % Change in Expenditures				69		(36)		(36)
Governor's Change from Base								0
Governor's % Change from Base								0
Full-Time Equivalents	7.29	6.86	6.70	6.70	6.70	6.70	6.70	6.70

2001 - Other Misc Special Revenue

Balance Forward In	5	5	5	5				
Receipts	27	33	23	24				
Balance Forward Out	5	5	4					
Expenditures	27	33	24	29				
Biennial Change in Expenditures				(6)		(53)		(53)
Biennial % Change in Expenditures				(11)		(100)		(100)
Governor's Change from Base								0

District Courts

Agency Financing by Fund

(Dollars in Thousands)

	Actual	Actual	Actual	Estimate	Forecast Base		Governor's Recommendation	
	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY27	FY26	FY27
Governor's % Change from Base								

2403 - Gift

Balance Forward In	234	243	390	381				
Receipts	144	230	104	106	13	13	13	13
Balance Forward Out	243	390	381					
Expenditures	135	83	113	487	13	13	13	13
Biennial Change in Expenditures				382		(574)		(574)
Biennial % Change in Expenditures				175		(96)		(96)
Governor's Change from Base								0
Governor's % Change from Base								0
Full-Time Equivalents	0.79	0.07	0.13	0.13				

3000 - Federal

Balance Forward In	9,195	7,740	10,007	5,894				
Receipts	10,327	10,370	9,499	10,266	10,266	10,266	10,266	10,266
Balance Forward Out	6,917	10,217	5,893					
Expenditures	12,606	7,892	13,613	16,160	10,266	10,266	10,266	10,266
Biennial Change in Expenditures				9,275		(9,241)		(9,241)
Biennial % Change in Expenditures				45		(31)		(31)
Governor's Change from Base								0
Governor's % Change from Base								0
Full-Time Equivalents	44.71	43.16	46.12	47.66	47.66	47.66	47.66	47.66

3015 - ARP-State Fiscal Recovery

Balance Forward In		4,807						
Direct Appropriation	9,961							
Balance Forward Out	4,807							
Expenditures	5,154	4,807						
Biennial Change in Expenditures				(9,961)		0		0
Biennial % Change in Expenditures				(100)				
Governor's Change from Base								0
Governor's % Change from Base								

District Courts

Agency Financing by Fund

(Dollars in Thousands)

	Actual	Actual	Actual	Estimate	Forecast Base		Governor's Recommendation	
	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY27	FY26	FY27
Full-Time Equivalents	46.80	47.80	1.24					

6000 - Miscellaneous Agency

Balance Forward In	37,216	31,553	30,100	28,354	3,573	2,680	3,573	2,680
Receipts	(2,769)	865	1,671	(17,052)	6,835	6,835	6,835	6,835
Balance Forward Out	31,884	30,147	28,351	3,573	2,680	1,787	2,680	1,787
Expenditures	2,563	2,271	3,421	7,729	7,728	7,728	7,728	7,728
Biennial Change in Expenditures				6,316		4,306		4,306
Biennial % Change in Expenditures				131		39		39
Governor's Change from Base								0
Governor's % Change from Base								0

District Courts

Agency Change Summary

(Dollars in Thousands)

	FY25	FY26	FY27	Biennium 2026-27
Direct				
Fund: 1000 - General				
FY2025 Appropriations	406,775	406,775	406,775	813,550
Base Adjustments				
All Other One-Time Appropriations		(23,685)	(23,685)	(47,370)
Current Law Base Change		1,000	1,000	2,000
Approved Transfer Between Appropriation				
Forecast Base	406,775	384,090	384,090	768,180
Change Items				
Operating Adjustment		8,089	16,380	24,469
Total Governor's Recommendations	406,775	392,179	400,470	792,649
Dedicated				
Fund: 2000 - Restrict Misc Special Revenue				
Planned Spending	3,819	1,754	1,754	3,508
Forecast Base	3,819	1,754	1,754	3,508
Total Governor's Recommendations	3,819	1,754	1,754	3,508
Fund: 2001 - Other Misc Special Revenue				
Planned Spending	29			
Forecast Base	29			
Total Governor's Recommendations	29			
Fund: 2403 - Gift				
Planned Spending	487	13	13	26
Forecast Base	487	13	13	26
Total Governor's Recommendations	487	13	13	26
Fund: 3000 - Federal				
Planned Spending	16,160	10,266	10,266	20,532
Forecast Base	16,160	10,266	10,266	20,532
Total Governor's Recommendations	16,160	10,266	10,266	20,532
Fund: 6000 - Miscellaneous Agency				
Planned Spending	7,729	7,728	7,728	15,456
Forecast Base	7,729	7,728	7,728	15,456
Total Governor's Recommendations	7,729	7,728	7,728	15,456
Revenue Change Summary				

District Courts

Agency Change Summary

(Dollars in Thousands)

	FY25	FY26	FY27	Biennium 2026-27
<i>Dedicated</i>				
Fund: 2000 - Restrict Misc Special Revenue				
Forecast Revenues	1,674	1,702	1,702	3,404
Total Governor's Recommendations	1,674	1,702	1,702	3,404
Fund: 2001 - Other Misc Special Revenue				
Forecast Revenues	24			
Total Governor's Recommendations	24			
Fund: 2403 - Gift				
Forecast Revenues	106	13	13	26
Total Governor's Recommendations	106	13	13	26
Fund: 3000 - Federal				
Forecast Revenues	10,266	10,266	10,266	20,532
Total Governor's Recommendations	10,266	10,266	10,266	20,532
Fund: 6000 - Miscellaneous Agency				
Forecast Revenues	(17,052)	6,835	6,835	13,670
Total Governor's Recommendations	(17,052)	6,835	6,835	13,670
<i>Non-Dedicated</i>				
Fund: 1000 - General				
Forecast Revenues	19,361	19,357	19,357	38,714
Total Governor's Recommendations	19,361	19,357	19,357	38,714

District Courts

FY 2026-27 Biennial Budget Change Item

Change Item Title: Operating Adjustment

Fiscal Impact (\$000s)	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
General Fund				
Expenditures	8,089	16,380	16,380	16,380
Revenues	0	0	0	0
Other Funds				
Expenditures	0	0	0	0
Revenues	0	0	0	0
Net Fiscal Impact = (Expenditures – Revenues)	8,089	16,380	16,380	16,380
FTEs	0	0	0	0

Recommendation:

The Governor recommends additional funding of \$8,089,000 in FY 2026 and \$16,380,000 in each subsequent year from the general fund to help address operating cost increases at the District Courts.

Rationale/Background:

The cost of operations rises each year due to increases in employer-paid health care contributions, FICA and Medicare, along with other salary and compensation-related costs. Other operating costs, like rent and lease, fuel and utilities, and IT and legal services also grow. This cost growth puts pressure on operating budgets that remain flat year to year. District Courts face challenging decisions to manage these rising costs within existing budgets, while maintaining the services Minnesotans expect. This recommendation provides additional resources to help address these cost pressures and operations.

The District Courts requests funding for salary increases and the employer share of health insurance increases. The Judicial Branch does not negotiate its own insurance agreements – it participates in the general plan negotiated by Minnesota Management and Budget. This request is sought to support the core mission and services of the District Courts and to allow the Courts to continue to undertake initiatives designed to increase efficiency, reduce costs, and improve public services.

Proposal:

The Governor recommends increasing operating budgets to support current services. For the District Courts, this funding will help cover expected growth in employee compensation and insurance, and other operating costs.

Dollars in Thousands

Net Impact by Fund	FY 26	FY 27	FY 26-27	FY 28	FY 29	FY 28-29
General Fund	8,089	16,380	24,468	16,380	16,380	32,759

Results:

This recommendation is intended to help the District Courts address rising cost pressures and mitigate impacts to current levels of service and information to the public.

District Courts

Federal Funds Summary

(Dollars in Thousands)

Federal Agency and ALN	Federal Grant Name Brief Purpose	FY 2024 Actual	FY 2025 Budget	FY 2026 Base	FY 2027 Base	Required State Match or MOE?	FTEs
Department of Justice (Funds pass through the Dept. of Public Safety) 20.608	National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Judicial Ignition Interlock/Substance Abuse Court - Federal funds to support Treatment Courts (DWI, Drug & Family Dependency Treatment Courts). Grant funds support agency activities.	\$ 2,280	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	Yes	5.00
Department of Health & Human Services (Funds pass through the Department of Human Services) 93.563	Expedited Child Support Program - Reimbursement for the federal share (66%) of Expedited Child Support. Grant funds support agency activities.	\$ 10,167	\$ 12,928	\$ 7,034	\$ 7,034	Yes	37.07
Department of Justice (Funds pass through the Dept. of Public Safety) 16.738	JAG Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Program - The JAG Program provides states, tribes, and local governments with critical funding necessary to support a range of program areas: law enforcement, prosecution, indigent defense, courts, crime prevention and education, corrections and community corrections, drug treatment and enforcement, planning, evaluation, and technology improvement. Grant funds support agency activities.	\$ 39	\$ 211	\$ 211	\$ 211	No	0.00
Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women 16.021	Justice Systems Response to Families - Federal Funds to improve the response of all aspects of the civil and criminal justice system to families with a history of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking, or in cases involving allegations of child sexual abuse. Grant funds support agency activities.	\$ 174	\$ 174	\$ 174	\$ 174	No	1.00
Department of Justice Treatment Court Discretionary Grant Program 16.585	Office of Justice Program -- Drug Court Discretionary Grant Program - Federal Funds to equip courts and community supervision systems with the necessary tools and resources, utilizing the most current evidence-based practices and principles, to intervene with participants who abuse substances while preparing them for success in the community. Grant funds support agency activities.	\$ 676	\$ 676	\$ 676	\$ 676	Yes	4.00

District Courts

Federal Funds Summary

(Dollars in Thousands)

Federal Agency and ALN	Federal Grant Name Brief Purpose	FY 2024 Actual	FY 2025 Budget	FY 2026 Base	FY 2027 Base	Required State Match or MOE?	FTEs
Department of Justice Veterans Treatment Court Discretionary Grant Program 16.043	The Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) Grant Program - Provides financial and technical assistance to states, state courts, local courts, units of local government, and federally recognized Indian tribal governments to implement and enhance the operations of Veterans Treatment Courts. Grant funds support agency activities.	\$ 169	\$ 171	\$ 171	\$ 171	No	0.59
Dept. of Health and Human Service 93.243	Second Judicial District Treatment Court Unit Expansion and Enhancement Grant - Federal funds to expand substance abuse treatment capacity in adult treatment drug courts and adult tribal healing wellness courts. Grant funds support agency activities.	\$ 108	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	No	0.00
Federal Fund – Agency Total		\$ 13,613	\$ 16,160	\$ 10,266	\$ 10,266		47.66

Narrative

In FY2026 and FY2027 the Trial Courts will continue to receive federal funding for Child Support, NHTSA Judicial Ignition Interlock/Substance Abuse Court, MN OJP Byrne Justice Assistance, and the Office of Justice Program (OJP) Department of Justice. The NHTSA Judicial Ignition Interlock/Substance Abuse Court and OJP grants fund the treatment courts which include DWI, Drug, Family Dependency Treatment and Mental Health. The OJP grant also funds mentoring on select Domestic Violence Courts. The Expedited Child Support Program receives federal reimbursement at a rate of 66% for eligible expenditures, so less spending with state appropriated dollars would result in a proportionate decrease in federal reimbursement. The remaining grants require a state spending match of approximately 25%. Estimates were based on past funding. Grants that will be ending did not include revenue projected past the end date.