



# UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA RETIREES ASSOCIATION

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MARCH 26, 2019

# About Me

- Born in Plummer, MN
- B.A. from University of Minnesota Morris
- Worked in the U of M's Office of the General Counsel for 11 years
- Appointed as Hennepin County judge in 2005
- Appointed to Supreme Court in 2006
- Appointed as Minnesota's 22<sup>nd</sup> Chief Justice on July 1, 2010

Plummer



Morris



# The Minnesota Judicial Branch

- Process roughly 1.3 million cases every year
- Exist to protect your rights and freedoms, and peacefully resolve disputes
- Uphold one of the first promises of Minnesota's Constitution



*"Every person is entitled to...obtain justice freely and without purchase, completely and without denial, promptly and without delay"*

# Minnesota's Court System

**Supreme Court**

**Court of Appeals**

**District Courts**

- 87 district courts
- 294 judgeships
- Hear cases in more than 100 locations
- 1.23 million cases filed in 2018, including:
  - Criminal
  - Civil
  - Family
  - Juvenile
  - Probate/Mental Health

# Minnesota's Court System

**Supreme Court**

**Court of Appeals**

**District Courts**

- **19 judges**
- **Cases heard in three-judge panels**
- **2,050 cases filed in 2018**
- **Cases heard at the Minnesota Judicial Center and in regional centers across Minnesota**
- **Typically the final decision in 95% of all appeals**

# Minnesota's Court System

**Supreme Court**

**Court of Appeals**

**District Courts**

- 7 justices
- Highest court in Minnesota
- Released 146 opinions in 2018
- Reviews decisions of the Court of Appeals
  - Party files “Petition for Further Review”
  - Court chooses which petitions to accept, based on the significance of the legal issues involved in the case

# Minnesota's Court System

**Supreme Court**

**Court of Appeals**

**District Courts**

- Also hears appeals from Tax Court and Workers' Compensation Court of Appeals
- Certain appeals go straight to the Supreme Court, such as first-degree murder appeals and election disputes
- Supreme Court also responsible for attorney/judge discipline, and regulating the practice of law in Minnesota



# Role of the Chief Justice

- **As a member of the court: hears cases, helps decide cases and write opinions, issues orders on behalf of the court**
- **By statute, the administrative head of the state court system**

§ Subd. 4. **State court supervision.** The chief justice shall exercise general supervisory powers over the courts in the state, with powers including, but not limited to:

(a) Supervision of the courts' financial affairs, programs of continuing education for judicial and nonjudicial personnel and planning and operations research;

(b) Serving as chief representative of the court system and as liaison with other governmental agencies for the public; and

(c) Supervision of the administrative operations of the courts.

The chief justice may designate other justices or judges to assist in the performance of duties.

# Judicial Branch Administration

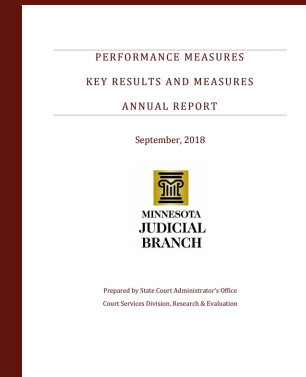
**FY19 Budget:  
\$346 million**

**Total judgeships:  
320**

**Total court staff:  
Approx. 2,600**

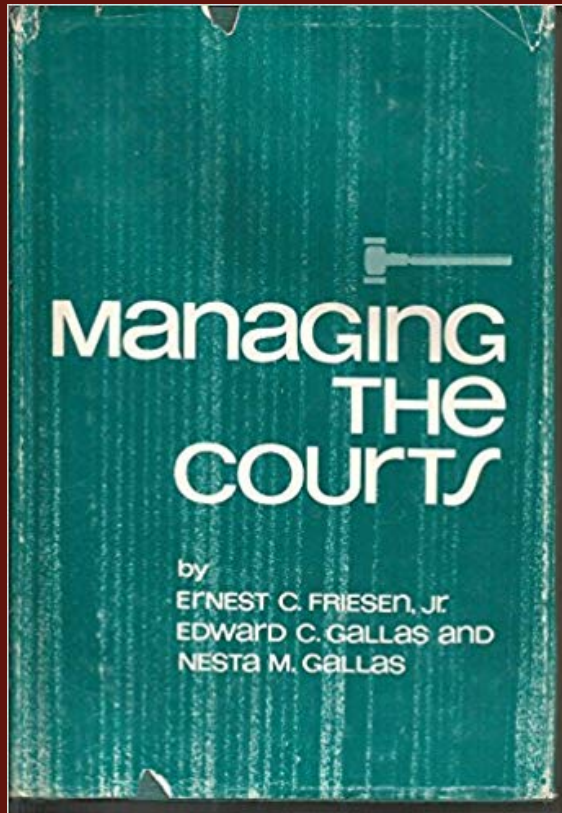
## Minnesota Judicial Council

- The statewide policymaking authority for the Judicial Branch
- Chaired by the Chief Justice
- 25 members with statewide representation of judges and staff
- Develops statewide strategic plan and annual performance measures



# Judicial Branch Administration

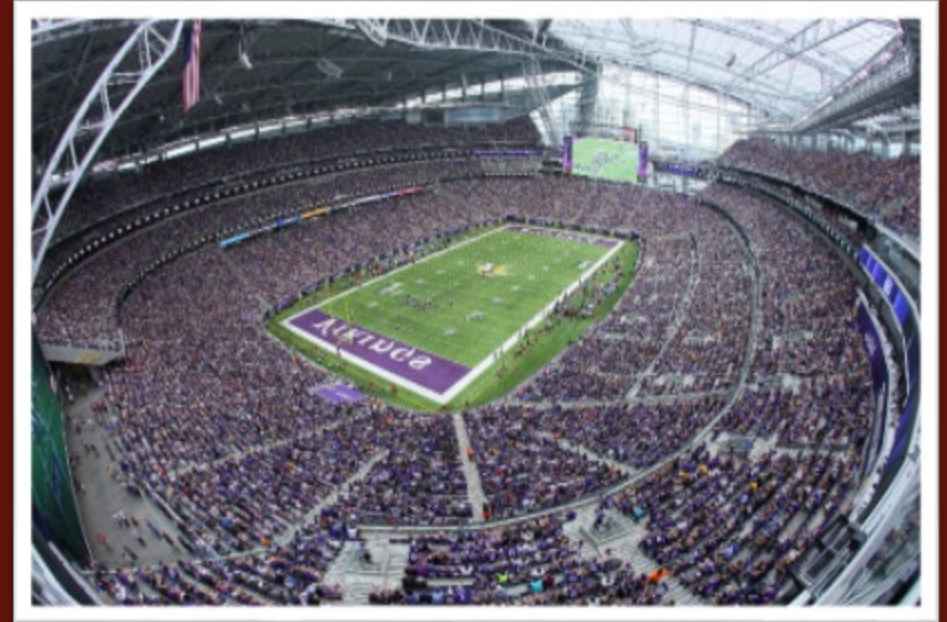
## Ernest C. Friesen, Author



- Named Minnesota and Utah as the two best managed court systems in the country at the 2015 National Association for Court Management Annual Conference
- Specifically cited each state's reliance on a Judicial Council model, which makes governance "more pluralistic, interconnected, and collaborative."
- Called the Judicial Council model: "A better way to govern state courts."

# Supporting Self-Represented Litigants

- Like many states, Minnesota has a sizable “justice gap” – the difference between the number of people who need free/low-cost legal services and the number of volunteer/low-cost attorneys available to help them
- As a result Minnesota has seen a sizable increase in the number of self-represented litigants entering the court system.



If US Bank Stadium was filled with Minnesotans eligible for legal aid, there would only be 22 attorneys available to serve everyone in the stadium.

# Supporting Self-Represented Litigants

## In-Person Services

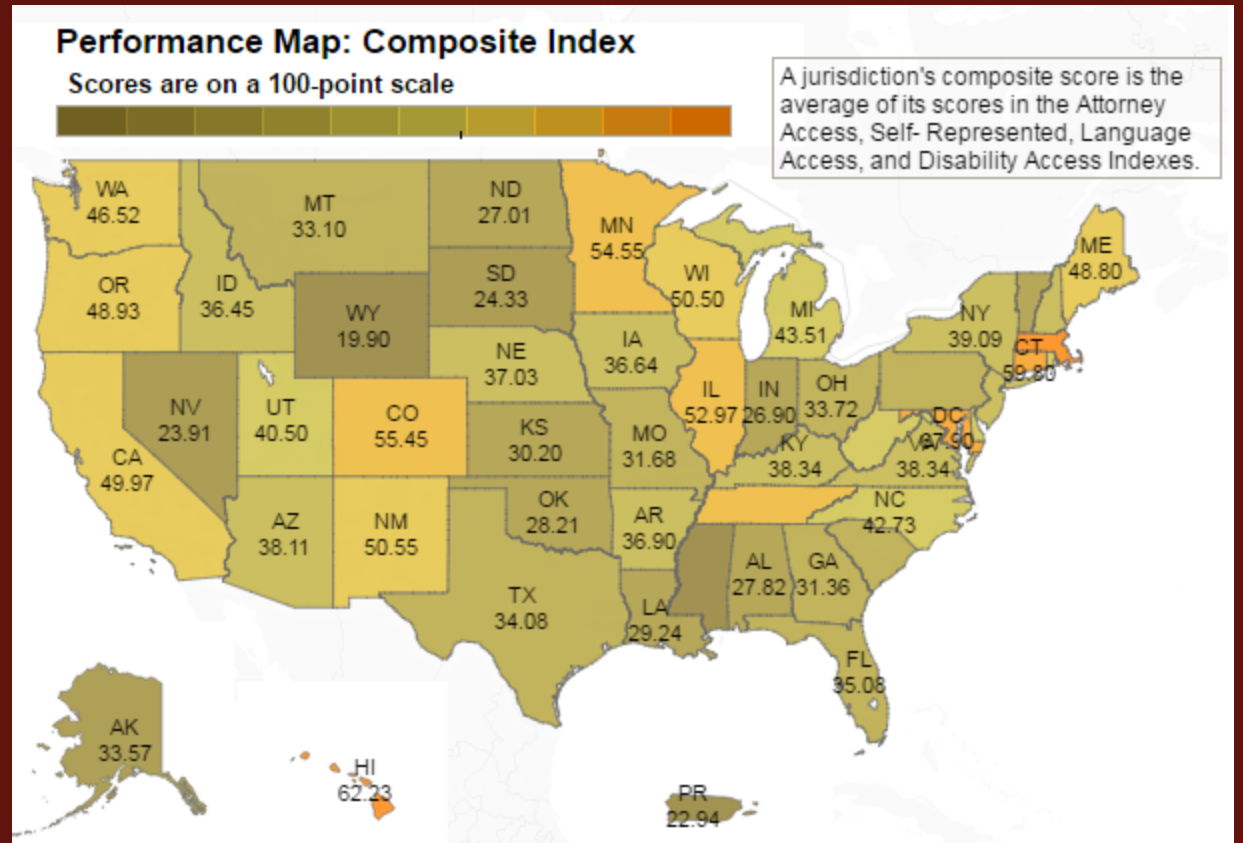
- 10 county courthouses offer staffed walk-in self-help centers
- The State Law Library provides a monthly self-help clinic for people seeking to file an appeal
- Self-help workstations (with a computer, printer, and phone connected to the Statewide Self Help Center) are available in nearly every court location

## Remote Services

- The Statewide Self Help Center answers questions from self-represented litigants by phone and email
- The Judicial Branch website features more than 50 “Help Topics” on key legal issues
- Guide and File is a new online tool that uses simple interviews to help users fill out and file court forms

# Supporting Self-Represented Litigants

Minnesota is one of the highest scoring states in the nation on the Justice Index, which measures access to justice for those who cannot afford an attorney, those with disabilities, and those with limited-English proficiency



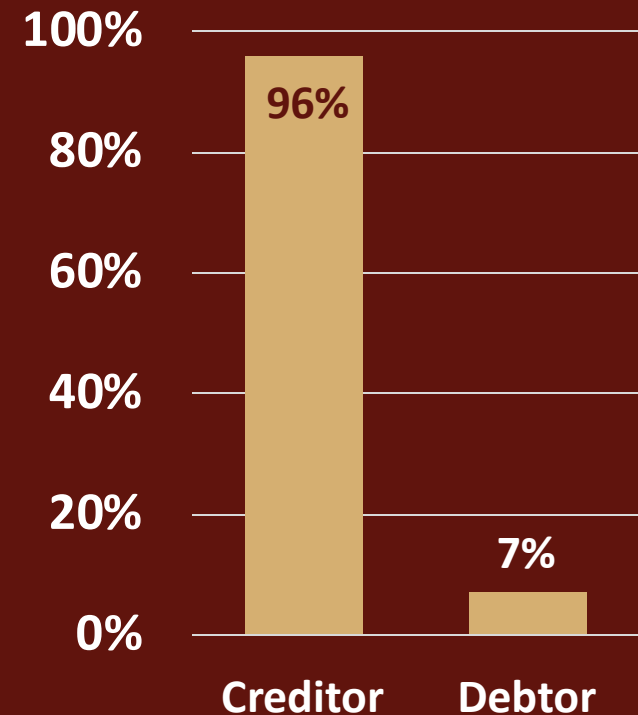
[www.justiceindex.org](http://www.justiceindex.org)

# Supporting Self-Represented Litigants

## Legal Paraprofessional Pilot

- Order issued March 8, 2019, Implementation by February 2020
- Allows “legal paraprofessionals” to provide advice and representation to those needing attorneys (under the supervision of a licensed attorney)
- Focus is on case types like debtor-creditor disputes, where one party (e.g., the credit card company) is generally represented by an attorney while the other party (e.g., the credit card holder) generally is not

Percent of Creditor-Debtor cases in which the parties are represented by an attorney



# Treatment Courts

- Target non-violent criminal offenders who suffer from addiction to alcohol or other drugs, or who have mental health issues that played a role in their offense.
- Defendants are closely monitored as they go through treatment, and are subject to regular court appearances and drug testing.
- Ultimately, the goal for a defendant who enters a treatment court is to leave sober, healthy, employed, and with stable housing.

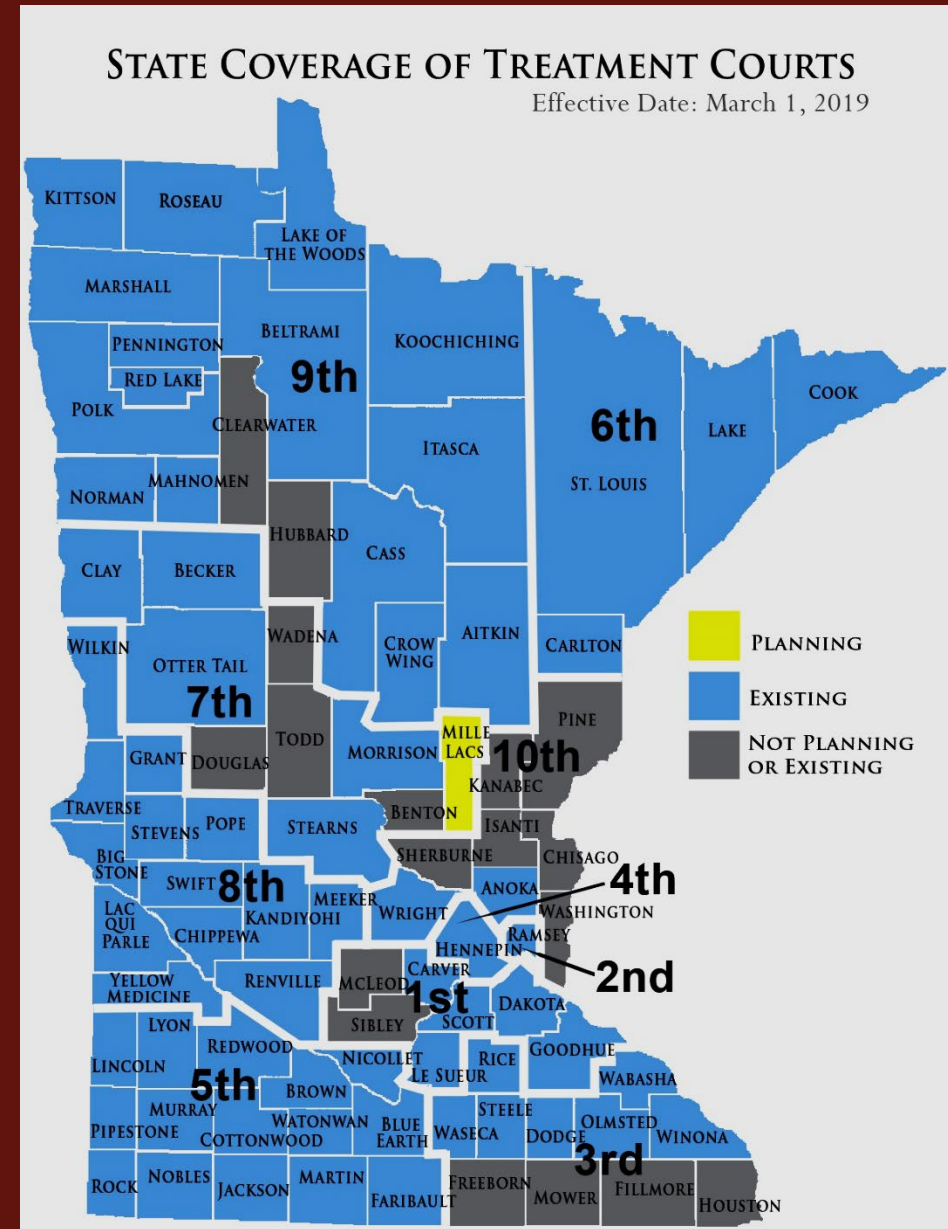
## Types

- Drug Court
- DWI Court
- Family Dependency Court
- Juvenile Drug Court
- Mental Health Court
- Veterans Court



# Treatment Courts

- 63 operational treatment court programs
- 80% of Minnesota counties participate in a treatment court



# Treatment Courts

## Do They Work?

### State Evaluations

#### Drug Court Evaluations:

- Reduced recidivism
- Spent less time incarcerated
- Showed gains in life skills

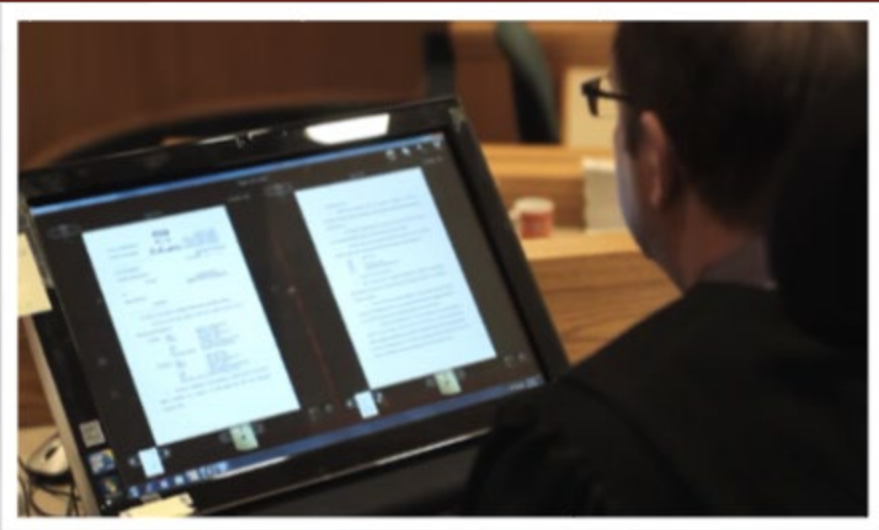
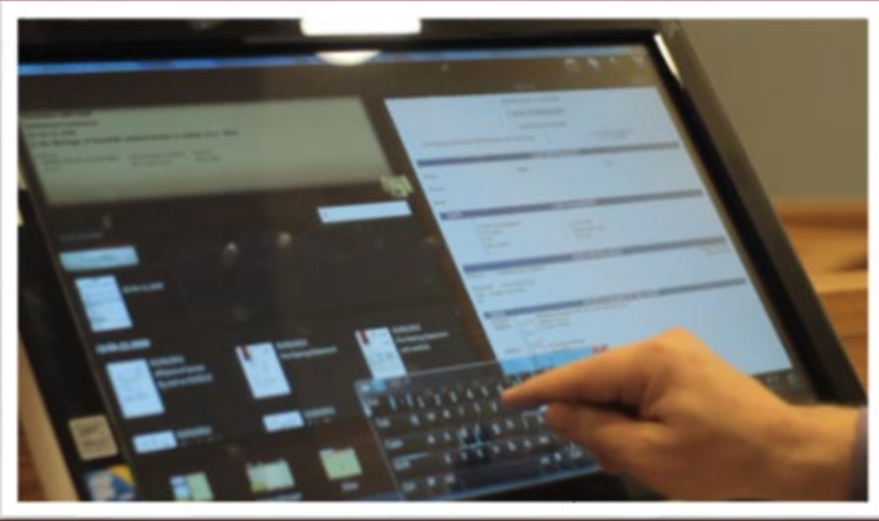
#### DWI Court Evaluation:

- Reduced recidivism
- Completion rates > national avg.
- Save taxpayer dollars

### National Evaluations

- Adult drug courts produce an average return on investment of \$2-\$4 for every \$1 invested
- Net economic savings for local communities of \$3,000 to \$22,000 per participant

# Modernizing Our Courts



- **Electronic case records**
- **Electronic filing**
- **Electronic tools in the courtroom**
- **Electronic information sharing**
- **Electronic access for the public**

# A Nation-Leading Justice System



- Increasing access to justice by expanding services to self-represented litigants
- Embracing criminal justice reform aimed at improving outcomes, reducing recidivism, and saving costs
- Increasing justice system efficiency and effectiveness by leveraging new technologies and reengineering

# Protecting Our Justice System

How we keep our justice system strong and independent?



# Protecting Our Justice System

How we keep our justice system strong and independent?

- Ensure adequate funding for our courts and justice system



# Protecting Our Justice System

How we keep our justice system strong and independent?

- Ensure adequate funding for our courts and justice system
- Preserving fair, non-partisan, merit-based judicial selection



# How you can get involved

- **Guardians ad Litem (GAL) – or child advocates – represent the best interest of the child in custody/parenting time disputes, and cases alleging abuse or neglect.**
- **Minnesota currently relies on 255 professional GALs and 263 volunteers.**
- **There is no special degree or educational requirement to be a child advocate volunteer.**
- **Looking for responsible, professional adults with a concern for children and commitment to public service.**



**Interested in volunteering?**  
**Visit: [mn.gov/guardian-ad-litem](https://mn.gov/guardian-ad-litem)**





MINNESOTA  
JUDICIAL  
BRANCH



**Thank You!**