



# MINNESOTA DISTRICT JUDGES ASSOCIATION

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Judge Lois Conroy



MINNESOTA DISTRICT  
JUDGES ASSOCIATION

MDJA

## **OUR LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES**


1. Law Clerk Market Adjustment
2. Judicial & Staff Cost of Living Increases
3. Safety
4. Pensions



# LAW CLERK PAY

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## *Law Clerks, Indispensable*



The Judicial Branch cannot function without quality law clerks who:


- Research the Law
- Help Draft Quality and Well-Reasons Legal Decisions
- Nearly 100% of Minnesota Judges stated that clerks are “essential” or “very important” to perform their duties.



# LAW CLERK PAY

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## *Current & Competitive Pay*

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- Starting salary of a district law clerk is **\$57,712.**
  - 95% of Judges believe this is too little compensation that does not accurately reflect their value.
  - Average starting salary for an entry-level public law attorney is **\$74,526.**

# LAW CLERK PAY




## *The Effects of Uncompetitive Pay*

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- Hiring: 93% of judges have seen a decline in qualified law clerk applications in the past five years.
  - Hiring: Nearly 90% of the few applications were rated as "fair" or "poor."
  - Retention: quality law clerks cannot afford to stay. When clerks leave the branch their median departing salary is approx. \$30,000 more at approx. \$85,000.

# How Did We Get Here?



## *District Judge Law Clerk Committee*

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- Serious concerns raised about law clerk recruitment, retention and financial well-being
  - MDJA Committee - Started June 2022
  - Met monthly through December 2022 - culminated in comprehensive survey to determine severity of the issue and weigh in on solutions

# Survey

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## *Results Clear: Action Needed*


- 509 responses in one week: 54.5% judge, 45.5% law clerks
- 74% of judges have hired a law clerk in the last 2 years
- 64% have had difficulty hiring or retaining qualified law clerks at some point in the last 5 years
- 66% have been without a full complement of law clerks between 1 month--over three months



# LAW CLERK PAY



## *One-time Market Adjustment*

- Closing the gap between District Court Law Clerks' current pay and the competitive corridor for other entry-level public law attorneys in Minnesota.
  - One-time market adjustment.
  - FY24 of *\$5.674 M*
  - FY25 of *\$5.674 M*
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# TIMING

MDJA has been carefully:

- Listening to our 300 judge members.
- Listening to our 337 law clerks.
- Listening to input from legislative members and staff

Why not included it in the Judicial Branch Budget?

Too important an issue to not address because not included in the initial request forwarded by the Governor.

# SERVICE TO MINNESOTANS

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The Courts have an obligation to the Citizens of Minnesota for:

- Timely Decisions
- Quality Orders
- The proper function of the judiciary and service to Minnesotans is directly tied to the indispensable work of our law clerks.





# Thank You

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Questions?

