



MINNESOTA JUDICIAL BRANCH
MINNESOTA JUDICIAL CENTER
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Senator Ron Latz, Committee Chair
Judiciary and Public Safety Committee
3105 Minnesota Senate Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Chair Latz and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

On behalf of the judges and staff of the Minnesota Judicial Branch, I write in support of S.F. 1417, the Judiciary and Public Safety budget bill. While this bill does not include full funding of the Judicial Branch's biennial budget request, we appreciate the thoughtful and targeted investments reflected in the bill.

The proposed funding in this bill supports a 1.5% compensation increase for judicial officials and court staff, covers the employer's share of anticipated healthcare cost increases, and addresses rising lease expenses at the Minnesota Judicial Center. These investments reflect a recognition of the essential role that judges and court staff play in maintaining a fair and functioning justice system. We sincerely thank Chair Latz and committee members for prioritizing these needs within a very constrained budget target. This funding helps ensure that we do not need to divert resources from core court functions to cover basic operational costs.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that even with the increase, the Judicial Branch continues to face significant compensation challenges. Judicial officer and staff salaries remain significantly behind other public-sector employers in Minnesota. This ongoing disparity puts the Judicial Branch at a competitive disadvantage and threatens our ability to maintain a high-performing court system over the long term. We hope the Legislature will continue to work with us in the future to address these long-term challenges.

We are also grateful that the bill includes funding to increase payment rates for forensic examiners who provide mental health examinations in civil commitment and criminal proceedings. This critical funding will help the Judicial Branch continue to recruit and retain

qualified examiners to deliver these vital services and uphold the Constitutional rights of Minnesotans.

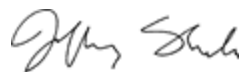
We also appreciate the onetime funding allocated for compliance with federal digital accessibility standards. This investment represents a meaningful step toward enhancing systemwide efficiency and ensuring equitable access to court information and services. While this initiative is foundational to promoting fairness and timely access, it does come with ongoing operational costs that are not addressed in the current bill. We look forward to continued discussions about sustainable funding strategies to support this important work over the long term including the opportunity for carryforward authority to ensure the most effective and strategic use of these appropriations.

Finally, we thank the committee for including the Judicial Branch's three policy proposals in S.F. 1098 that will be combined with S.F. 1417. These measures will help modernize statutory language and improve court processes for judges, staff, and court users across Minnesota. We are also especially appreciative of the inclusion of real estate provisions under the Judicial and Staff Safety and Security Act, which will help strengthen protections and improve safety for judicial officers.

We acknowledge the state's challenging budget circumstances and understand the difficult decisions involved. While we were disappointed that the budget target provided to the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee was not sufficient to fully fund the Judicial Branch's request, we commend Chair Latz and committee members for their thoughtful and resourceful approach in allocating their budget.

The Minnesota Judicial Branch appreciates the dedication and support of the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee this session. We recognize our shared commitment to upholding justice and ensuring a fair and accessible legal system for all Minnesotans. We value our strong partnership with the Legislature and look forward to continuing our collaborative efforts to secure the resources necessary to fulfill our constitutional responsibilities.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey Shorba".

Jeffrey Shorba
State Court Administrator