

Agency Purpose

The Minnesota's trial courts resolve citizens' criminal cases and civil disputes.

- ⇒ **Mission** – To provide justice through a system that assures equal access for the fair, competent, and timely resolution of cases and controversies.
- ⇒ **Vision** – The general public and those who use the court system will refer to it as accessible, fair, consistent, responsive, free of discrimination, independent, and well managed.

Core Functions

The trial court has original statewide jurisdiction in all civil and criminal actions within district boundaries. There are 10 judicial districts, and 275 district court judges. A family court division, juvenile court division, probate division, conciliation court division, and a traffic and ordinance violations bureau exist in the district court.

In support of these core functions, the trial courts are implementing the following service strategies:

- ⇒ Set case processing and case management standards, and institute monitoring programs for exceptions to ensure timely disposition of cases.
- ⇒ Develop programs to allow litigants meaningful access to the court process, e.g., court interpreter programs, free legal services for the poor, and self-help programs for persons who choose to guide their own litigation.
- ⇒ Explore ways to use technology to improve and expedite the work of the courts, including making justice more consumer oriented.
- ⇒ Develop programs and technologies to provide judges the critical information needed to make timely and sound case and policy decisions.
- ⇒ Delegate legal research and where possible draft decision writing to law clerks, freeing judges to spend more time hearing cases or directing the case dispositional activities.
- ⇒ Review and evaluate court practices and policies to identify the need for systemic improvement through the Conference of Chief Judges and committees established by the Supreme Court.
- ⇒ Explore greater integration and coordination with other justice and social service agencies.
- ⇒ Develop an adequate and stable funding base, and transfer funding responsibilities from the counties to the state to ensure the uniform implementation of state mandates and policies.

Operations

With more than two million cases filed each year, the work of the trial courts has a substantial impact on Minnesotans.

Judges are assisted in their adjudicative work by law clerks (who perform legal research) and court reporters (who record trial proceedings). Court administration staff at the county and district level manage scheduling, case flow, finance, personnel, and juries.

At A Glance

- ◆ Each year, there are more than two million cases filed in Minnesota's trial courts.
- ◆ Trial court judges in Minnesota are among the hardest working in the country. They handle an average of 49% more cases each than do judges in states with comparable court systems.
- ◆ Caseloads continue to increase while time per case is being cut.
- ◆ The Legislative Auditor found that from FY 1996-01, filings of major cases statewide in trial courts increased twice as fast as expenditures on the judiciary.
- ◆ The judiciary is completing a massive transformation, moving from a county-funded to state-funded system. In FY 2006 all Trial Courts will be state funded.
- ◆ The trial courts are implementing its new Minnesota Court Information System (MNCIS) technology application in counties throughout the state.
- ◆ The judicial branch operates in a constantly changing environment.
 - ⇒ Laws, case types, and legal sanctions change annually.
 - ⇒ Caseload volume is determined by other branches and levels of government.
- ◆ The Minnesota courts regularly review their effectiveness by monitoring:
 - ⇒ case filing trends;
 - ⇒ case clearance rates; and
 - ⇒ elapsed case time from filing to disposition.

The Conference of Chief Judges (CCJ) is the elected, policy-making body of the trial courts, responsible for budgeting and overall governance of administrative matters. It is assisted by the judicial district administrators and the State Court Administrator's Office.

Budget

Of the funding for the Trial Courts, over 99% is from General Fund direct appropriations. Federal (and other) grants represent a very small, but growing source of funding. Another small source of funding which will increase over time is reimbursements assessed for Guardian ad Litem services.

Of the Trial Court Expenditures, 91% is for personnel costs. Of this amount, 23% is judge costs, and 58% is costs for non-judicial personnel. Mandated services (which include Guardian ad Litem, Interpreter, Psychological Exams, jury, and In Forma Pauperis) add up to 10% of the cost of the Trial Courts. This includes personnel costs for staff guardians ad litem and interpreters, as well as those paid on a contract basis.

The Trial Courts have 2,661.86 full-time equivalent employees.

Contact

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Dollars in Thousands

	Current		Forecast Base		Biennium 2006-07
	FY2004	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	
<u>Direct Appropriations by Fund</u>					
General					
Current Appropriation	175,287	196,633	196,633	196,633	393,266
Forecast Base	175,287	196,633	220,191	220,221	440,412
Change		0	23,558	23,588	47,146
% Biennial Change from 2004-05					18.4%
<u>Expenditures by Fund</u>					
Direct Appropriations					
General	165,502	206,439	220,191	220,221	440,412
Statutory Appropriations					
General	459	419	428	442	870
Federal	463	463	205	205	410
Miscellaneous Agency	717	1,452	17	18	35
Total	167,141	208,773	220,841	220,886	441,727
<u>Expenditures by Category</u>					
Total Compensation	139,790	164,870	184,941	184,978	369,919
Other Operating Expenses	26,430	42,444	35,900	35,908	71,808
Local Assistance	221	24	0	0	0
Other Financial Transactions	700	1,435	0	0	0
Total	167,141	208,773	220,841	220,886	441,727
<u>Expenditures by Program</u>					
Trial Courts	167,141	208,773	220,841	220,886	441,727
Total	167,141	208,773	220,841	220,886	441,727
Full-Time Equivalent (FTE)	2,028.4	2,330.6	2,661.9	2,661.9	