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Court of Appeals

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<https://www.mncourts.gov/>

AT A GLANCE

The 19 judges serving on the Court of Appeals hear cases in three-judge panels in courthouses throughout the state. In 2023, 1,898 cases were filed with the Court of Appeals.

Court of Appeals decisions are the final ruling in about 95 percent of the appeals filed each year. Only about five percent of the Court’s dispositions are accepted by the Minnesota Supreme Court for further review.

The Court of Appeals serves all Minnesota citizens.

PURPOSE

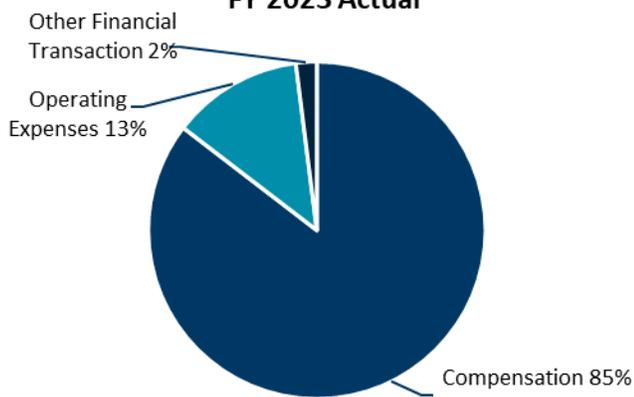
The mission of the Judicial Branch is to provide justice through a system that assures equal access for the fair and timely resolution of cases and controversies.

The Minnesota Court of Appeals provides the citizens of Minnesota with prompt and deliberate review of all final decisions of the trial courts, state agencies and local governments.

The Court of Appeals has jurisdiction over all final decisions of the district courts, except first degree murder convictions, which are appealed directly to the Supreme Court. The Court of Appeals also has jurisdiction to review certain decisions of administrative agencies and local governments.

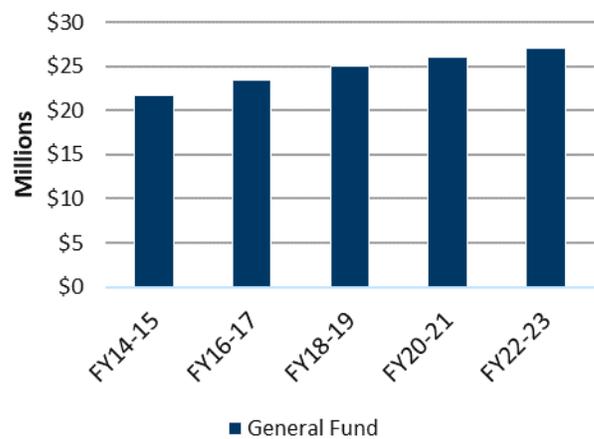
BUDGET

**Spending by Category
FY 2023 Actual**



Source: Budget Planning & Analysis System (BPAS)

Historical Spending



Source: Consolidated Fund Statement

The Court of Appeals’ fiscal year (FY) 2023 expenditures were \$14,167,000. The budget is funded 100 percent through the state general fund.

STRATEGIES

The Court of Appeals 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.

As part of the court’s effort to expedite justice and to make access to the appellate system less burdensome and expensive, the court’s 19 judges sit in three-judge panels and travel to locations throughout Minnesota to hear oral arguments.

By law, the Court must issue a decision within 90 days after oral arguments. This deadline is the shortest imposed on any appellate court in the nation. The Court expedites decisions on child protection cases, child custody cases, mental health commitments and other requested matters.

The Court of Appeals issues a precedential opinion, nonprecedential opinion, or order opinion on each case it considers on the merits.

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 Court of Appeals reviews performance measure results. This review is shared with the Judicial Council (the Judicial Branch’s governing body) twice a year.

The Court of Appeals has adopted the American Bar Association (ABA) standards for intermediate appellate courts, which measure cases from beginning (filing) to end (disposition). The goals are to have 75 percent of the cases disposed within 290 days of filing and 90 percent of cases disposed within 365 days of filing.

Measure name	Measure type	Measure data source	Historical trend	Most recent data
Percentage of civil cases disposed within 290 days	Result	The number of civil cases reflected in the Minnesota Appellate Case-Management System (MACS) showing less than 290 days from filing to disposition	The percentage increased from 86 percent in FY2021 to 94 percent in FY2023	94 percent (FY23)

Measure name	Measure type	Measure data source	Historical trend	Most recent data
Percentage of civil cases disposed within 365 days	Result	The number of civil cases reflected in the Minnesota Appellate Case-Management System (MACS) showing less than 365 days from filing to disposition	The percentage increased from 97 percent in FY2021 to 99 percent in FY2023	99 percent (FY23)
Percentage of criminal cases disposed within 290 days of filing	Result	The number of criminal cases reflected in the Minnesota Appellate Case-Management System (MACS) showing less than 290 days from filing to disposition	The percentage increased from 44 percent in FY2021 to 60 percent in FY2023	60 percent (FY23)
Percentage of criminal cases disposed within 365 days	Result	The number of criminal cases reflected in the Minnesota Appellate Case-Management System (MACS) showing less than 365 days from filing to disposition	The percentage increased from 78 percent in FY2021 to 93 percent in FY2023	93 percent (FY23)
Percentage of juvenile protection cases disposed within 290 days	Result	The number of juvenile protection cases reflected in the Minnesota Appellate Case-Management System (MACS) showing less than 290 days from filing to disposition	The percentage remained the same: 100 percent in FY2021 and 100 percent in FY2023	100 percent (FY23)
Percentage of juvenile protection cases disposed within 365 days	Result	The number of juvenile protection cases reflected in the Minnesota Appellate Case-Management System (MACS) showing less than 365 days from filing to disposition	The percentage remained the same: 100 percent in FY2021 and 100 percent in FY2023	100 percent (FY23)
Percentage of juvenile delinquency Cases disposed within 290 days	Result	The number of juvenile delinquency cases reflected in the Minnesota Appellate Case-Management System (MACS) showing less than 290 days from filing to disposition	The percentage increased from 94 percent in FY2021 to 100 percent in FY2023	100 percent (FY23)

Measure name	Measure type	Measure data source	Historical trend	Most recent data
Percentage of juvenile delinquency Cases disposed within 365 days	Result	The number of juvenile delinquency cases reflected in the Minnesota Appellate Case-Management System (MACS) showing less than 365 days from filing to disposition	The percentage remained the same: 100 percent in FY2021 and 100 percent in FY2023	100 percent (FY23)

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

The Minnesota Constitution, Article VI, provides the legal authority for the Court of Appeals; https://www.revisor.mn.gov/constitution/#article_6. Minn. Stat. Chapter 480A; <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/480A> provides the authority for Court of Appeals operations.

Court of Appeals

Agency Expenditure Overview

(Dollars in Thousands)

	Actual FY22	Actual FY23	Actual FY24	Estimate FY25	Forecast Base	
					FY26	FY27

Expenditures by Fund

1000 - General	12,938	14,167	14,362	15,456	15,259	15,259
Total	12,938	14,167	14,362	15,456	15,259	15,259
Biennial Change				2,713		700
Biennial % Change				10		2

Expenditures by Program

Court Of Appeals	12,938	14,167	14,362	15,456	15,259	15,259
Total	12,938	14,167	14,362	15,456	15,259	15,259

Expenditures by Category

Compensation	11,481	12,076	12,794	13,823	13,823	13,823
Operating Expenses	1,453	1,779	1,565	1,627	1,430	1,430
Grants, Aids and Subsidies	2					
Other Financial Transaction	3	313	3	6	6	6
Total	12,938	14,167	14,362	15,456	15,259	15,259

Full-Time Equivalents

	87.42	92.43	88.17	88.17	88.17	88.17
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(Dollars in Thousands)

	Actual FY22	Actual FY23	Actual FY24	Estimate FY25	Forecast Base	
					FY26	FY27
1000 - General						
Balance Forward In		593		197		
Direct Appropriation	13,490	13,574	14,559	15,259	15,259	15,259
Balance Forward Out	552		197			
Expenditures	12,938	14,167	14,362	15,456	15,259	15,259
Biennial Change in Expenditures				2,713		700
Biennial % Change in Expenditures				10		2
Full-Time Equivalents	87.42	92.43	88.17	88.17	88.17	88.17

(Dollars in Thousands)

	FY25	FY26	FY27	Biennium 2026-27
Direct				
Fund: 1000 - General				
FY2025 Appropriations	15,259	15,259	15,259	30,518
Forecast Base	15,259	15,259	15,259	30,518

Court of Appeals

FY 2026-27 Biennial Budget Change Item

Change Item Title: Maintain Core Justice Operations

Fiscal Impact (\$000s)	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
General Fund				
Expenditures	902	1,852	1,852	1,852
Revenues	0	0	0	0
Other Funds				
Expenditures	0	0	0	0
Revenues	0	0	0	0
Net Fiscal Impact = (Expenditures – Revenues)	902	1,852	1,852	1,852
FTEs	0	0	0	0

Request:

The Judicial Branch is requesting \$2,754,000 in the FY 2026-27 biennium to increase the compensation of Court of Appeals judges by 6% in FY 2026 and 6% in FY 2027, provide a 6% compensation pool increase for employees in FY 2026 and 6% in FY 2027, fund unavoidable health insurance premium increases, and Department of Administration lease cost increases in each year. The request represents an 9.02% increase in the Court of Appeals biennial base budget. The request maintains the current complement of employees.

Rationale/Background:

In order for the Judicial Branch to continue driving innovation in the state’s court system and improve services to Minnesotans, the Judicial Branch needs to retain and attract skilled and knowledgeable employees and judges who can maintain and operate a modern, efficient, and technology-based court system. However, the Judicial Branch faces two significant challenges:

- Despite significant compensation increases last biennium, the Minnesota Judicial Branch compensation structure remains behind its public-sector comparators by 6%. Adequate funding is necessary to retain and motivate a qualified workforce relative to local competitors and to not fall below the broader job market in the future. Minnesota also needs to ensure that judge salaries remain competitive with other public sector legal positions. Today, judges in some counties make less than the county attorneys who appear before them.
- The Minnesota Judicial Branch continues to face challenges with recruitment and retention. Since 2020, the Judicial Branch’s employee turnover rate has increased by 15%. The top reason departing employees provide for leaving the Judicial Branch is wage/salary. During the same period, the number of applicants for each open position within the Judicial Branch has fallen by 27%.

The Court of Appeals also requests funding for the employer share of unavoidable health insurance increases. Health insurance premiums are estimated to increase by 7.26% in 2026 and 7.27% in 2027. The Judicial Branch does not negotiate its own insurance agreements – it participates in the general plan negotiated by Minnesota Management and Budget. The Judicial Branch cannot absorb the increased employer insurance contribution costs and would need to divert funding from court functions to pay for this increase without additional funding.

The Court of Appeals also requests funding for the increased cost of leasing office space in the Minnesota Judicial Center. The Judicial Branch cannot absorb the increased lease costs and would need to divert funding from court functions to pay for this increase without additional funding.

Proposal:

The FY2026-27 biennial budget request maintains the current level of services provided by the Minnesota Judicial Branch. The salary increases are meant to continue efforts to protect the rights of our citizens, ensure prompt services, and deliver efficient dispute resolution, through the Branch’s ability to retain and recruit qualified, skilled staff and judges. In addition, the request for funding unavoidable health insurance increases will hold court services harmless from rising insurance costs for Judicial Branch judges and employees. Lastly, the Court of Appeals is seeking \$129,000 in FY 2026-27 to cover the increases in lease costs administered by the Department of Administration.

Impact on Children and Families:

A fully staffed Minnesota Judicial Branch benefits all Minnesotans by providing equitable and timely access to justice.

Equity and Inclusion:

A fully staffed Minnesota Judicial Branch benefits all Minnesotans by providing equitable and timely access to justice.

Tribal Consultation:

Does this proposal have a substantial direct effect on one or more of the Minnesota Tribal governments?

- Yes
- No

IT Costs:

This is not an information technology proposal.

Results:

This request is sought to support the core mission and services of the Court of Appeals and to allow the Courts to continue to undertake initiatives designed to increase efficiency, reduce costs, and improve public services.

In FY 2017, the Branch implemented a formal pay-for-performance structure for unrepresented staff and prioritized pay-for-performance in collective bargaining, ensuring that all employee increases are based on performance. These pay-for-performance structures recognize exemplary performance and serve as performance accountability mechanisms.

Minnesotans bring their most important and complex matters to the courts for resolution. Judges and staff work every day to help the people resolve these disputes. At the same time staff and judges are driving major innovation within the court system. Their innovations are improving service to the public and creating new efficiencies throughout the justice system. It is critically important that the Judicial Branch continue to retain and attract a workforce that builds on this innovation.

Statutory Change(s):

This proposal does not require statutory changes.