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Supreme Court

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AT A GLANCE

- The Supreme Court, consisting of seven members, is the highest court in Minnesota, serving as the final guardian of the Minnesota Constitution and interpreting and applying the United States Constitution.
- In 2023, 83 direct appeals and 560 petitions for further review were filed with the Supreme Court.
- The Chief Justice is the administrative head of the Judicial Branch, which includes 322 justices and judges and 2,500 employees.
- The Supreme Court serves all Minnesota citizens.

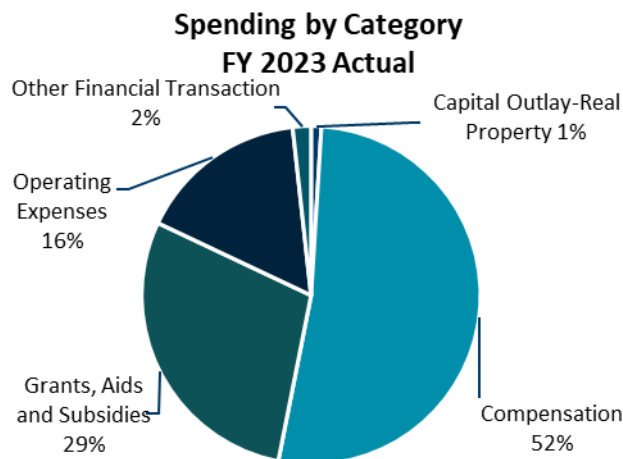
PURPOSE

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.

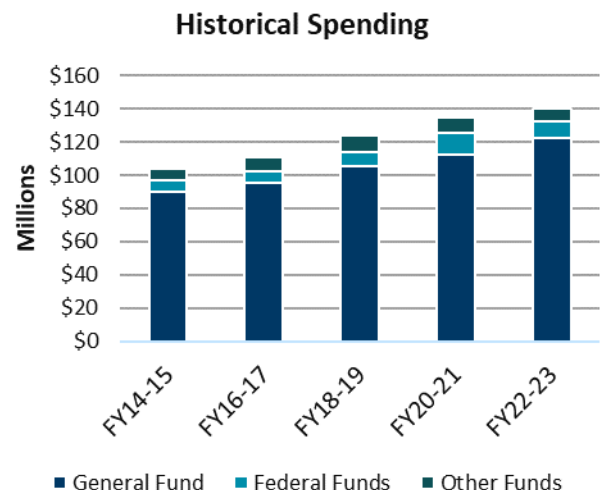
The Minnesota Supreme Court has original jurisdiction in remedial cases as prescribed by law, appellate jurisdiction over all cases, and supervisory jurisdiction over all courts in the state. Election contests and appeals for first-degree murder cases are automatically appealed to the Supreme Court. The Minnesota Supreme Court is solely responsible for the regulation of the practice of law and for judicial and lawyer discipline. The Court also promulgates rules of practice and procedure for the legal system in the state.

The Chief Justice is responsible for supervising administrative operations of the state court system.

BUDGET



Source: Budget Planning & Analysis System (BPAS)



Source: Consolidated Fund Statement

The Supreme Court spent \$74 million in fiscal year (FY) 2023. Of this amount, \$65 million (88 percent) was from general fund appropriations. The remaining \$9 million (12 percent) was funded through various sources, such as federal and local government grants, interest on lawyers' trust accounts, and fees. Due to legislative action, the Board of Civil Legal Aid will become a new, independent agency on July 1, 2025 (beginning of FY 2026). Currently part of the Supreme Court, those Civil Legal Services expenditures are included in the historical budget data charts.

STRATEGIES

As the state's highest court, the Supreme Court hears oral arguments in the State Capitol Courtroom and the Minnesota Judicial Center. The Supreme Court reviews matters on certiorari, meaning it reviews cases to set precedent, to clarify legal issues, to resolve statutory conflicts, and to answer constitutional questions. The Supreme Court considers appeals from judgments from the Court of Appeals, the Workers Compensation Court of Appeals, and the Tax Court. It hears special term matters, motions, and petitions for extraordinary relief. The Supreme Court also hears mandatory cases, including first degree murder convictions and election contests. The Court promulgates rules of practice and procedure for the legal system in the state.

In addition to hearing appeals, the Supreme Court is responsible for regulating the practice of law and making recommendations for improvement of the judicial system.

The Chief Justice is responsible for supervising administrative operations of the state court system. The Chief Justice is assisted by the State Court Administrator's Office, which provides the administrative infrastructure for the Judicial Branch, including providing finance, human resources, technology, education, communications, research and evaluation, caseload management and cross-district judicial assignments. The Chief Justice serves as chair of the Judicial Council, the policy-making entity for the Judicial Branch.

The Supreme Court conducts its administrative 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.

The Judicial Council conducts a rigorous strategic planning process that guides the work of the State Court Administrator's Office in support of the Judicial Branch's three strategic goals. The strategic plan is reviewed and updated biennially.

In recent years, as part of the Judicial Council's strategic planning, the Minnesota Judicial Branch has engaged in a reform agenda to modernize and re-engineer the work of Minnesota's courts. These efforts have made Minnesota's court system more efficient and more convenient for court users, while increasing access to court records for customers and the public.

- Between 2012 and 2016, the eCourtMN Initiative transitioned Minnesota from paper-based court files to electronic case records. This transformation has made the work of Minnesota's courts more efficient, increased convenience for court users, enhanced information sharing between the state's justice partners, and greatly expanded access to court records and information.

- Following the successful eCourtMN Initiative, the Minnesota Judicial Branch worked to leverage the electronic case record to streamline and enhance court administration processes, and adopted the oneCourtMN Vision to deliver “high-quality, consistent, and convenient court administration services anywhere in the state.”
- In order to maintain access to justice during the COVID-19 pandemic, Minnesota courts transitioned the vast majority of court hearings to online courtrooms. While this transition was borne out of necessity, it quickly became clear that attorneys, litigants, and other court users often preferred the ease and convenience of conducting their official court business online.
- In 2022, the Minnesota Judicial Branch became one of the first court systems in the nation to commit to the long-term use of remote (online) district court hearings. The Minnesota Judicial Council adopted the oneCourtMN Hearings Initiative Policy, which set a temporary framework for how district courts would use both in-person and remote hearings to deliver timely and efficient access to justice.
- In 2024, the Minnesota Judicial Council adopted a new, permanent hearing framework for how district courts will use both in-person and remote hearings going forward. This new framework will take effect in February 2025.

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

The Supreme Court timing objectives identify the Court’s performance based on the case type: mandatory/original cases (e.g., First Degree Murder cases and election contests); discretionary cases (e.g., appeals from judgments from the Court of Appeals, the Workers Compensation Court of Appeals, and the Tax Court); and expedited cases (appeals in termination of parental rights and adoption cases).

Measure name	Measure type	Measure data source	Historical trend	Most recent data
Mandatory/Original Cases Ninety five percent of the cases will be disposed of within 180 days of submission to the Supreme Court.	Result	The number of cases that met the timing objective.	81 percent of 58 cases in 2022 and 81 percent of 57 cases in 2023 met the timing objective.	81 percent in 2023
Discretionary Cases Ninety five percent of petitions for further review should be disposed of within sixty days of the filing of the request for review.	Result	The number of cases that met the timing objective.	There was a decrease from 83 percent of 373 cases in 2022 to 56 percent of 285 cases that met the timing objective.	56 percent in 2023

Measure name	Measure type	Measure data source	Historical trend	Most recent data
Expedited Cases Ninety five percent of expedited appeals (termination of parental rights, adoptions) should be disposed of within 25 days of filing the appeal.	Result	The number of cases that met the timing objective.	There was an increase from 94 percent of 15 cases in 2022 to 100 percent of 15 cases that met the timing objective.	100 percent in 2023

Data are from the Judicial Branch 2022 & 2023 Performance Measures – Key Results and Measures Annual Reports (<https://mncourts.gov/mncourtsgov/media/CIOMediaLibrary/Documents/Annual-Report-2022-Performance-Measures.pdf> and <https://mncourts.gov/mncourtsgov/media/CIOMediaLibrary/Documents/Annual-Report-2023-Performance-Measures.pdf>).

The Minnesota Constitution, Article VI, https://www.revisor.mn.gov/constitution/#article_6, provides the legal authority for the Supreme Court. M.S. 2.724 provides legal authority for the chief justice’s administrative responsibilities: <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/2.724>. M.S. 480.05 provides legal authority for the Supreme Court’s rule making authority: <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/480.05>. M.S. 480.13-17 provide legal authority for the position and duties of the state court administrator: <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/480.13>, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/480.14>, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/480.15>, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/480.16>, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/480.17>.

(Dollars in Thousands)

	Actual FY22	Actual FY23	Actual FY24	Estimate FY25	Forecast Base		Governor's Recommendation	
					FY26	FY27	FY26	FY27

Expenditures by Fund

1000 - General	57,751	64,660	78,855	92,217	49,064	49,064	50,002	50,963
2000 - Restrict Misc Special Revenue	3,189	3,859	3,111	4,929	395	395	395	395
2001 - Other Misc Special Revenue	5			1				
2403 - Gift	251		64	72	25	25	25	25
3000 - Federal	4,826	5,506	5,923	9,347	7,869	7,869	7,869	7,869
4925 - Family and Medical Benefit Ins				30				
Total	66,022	74,025	87,954	106,596	57,353	57,353	58,291	59,252
Biennial Change				54,502		(79,844)		(77,007)
Biennial % Change				39		(41)		(40)
Governor's Change from Base								2,837
Governor's % Change from Base								2

Expenditures by Program

Supreme Court Operations	47,137	53,489	53,494	70,732	57,353	57,353	58,291	59,252
Civil and Family Legal Services	18,885	20,536	34,459	35,864				
Total	66,022	74,025	87,954	106,596	57,353	57,353	58,291	59,252

Expenditures by Category

Compensation	36,269	38,596	41,671	46,609	44,962	44,962	45,900	46,861
Operating Expenses	8,870	12,017	9,799	21,179	11,620	11,620	11,620	11,620
Grants, Aids and Subsidies	20,256	21,398	35,740	38,064	100	100	100	100
Capital Outlay-Real Property	3	724						
Other Financial Transaction	624	1,290	743	744	671	671	671	671
Total	66,022	74,025	87,954	106,596	57,353	57,353	58,291	59,252

Full-Time Equivalents

274.82	293.14	292.27	295.17	288.78	288.78	288.78	288.78
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Supreme Court

Agency Financing by Fund

(Dollars in Thousands)

	Actual	Actual	Actual	Estimate	Forecast Base		Governor's Recommendation	
	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY27	FY26	FY27
1000 - General								
Balance Forward In		3,110	11	1,840				
Direct Appropriation	60,517	61,582	80,686	90,377	49,064	49,064	50,002	50,963
Transfers In	175	849	95	216	216	216	216	216
Transfers Out	175	849	95	216	216	216	216	216
Cancellations		31	0					
Balance Forward Out	2,766		1,842					
Expenditures	57,751	64,660	78,855	92,217	49,064	49,064	50,002	50,963
Biennial Change in Expenditures			48,661		(72,944)		(70,107)	
Biennial % Change in Expenditures			40		(43)		(41)	
Governor's Change from Base							2,837	
Governor's % Change from Base							3	
Full-Time Equivalents	241.47	254.33	255.07	257.97	253.58	253.58	253.58	253.58

2000 - Restrict Misc Special Revenue

Balance Forward In	2,261	2,762	4,041	8,919	11,768	24	11,768	24
Receipts	3,566	5,072	7,988	7,778	2,729	2,729	2,729	2,729
Transfers In		0						
Transfers Out					14,078	2,342	14,078	2,342
Balance Forward Out	2,639	3,975	8,917	11,768	24	16	24	16
Expenditures	3,189	3,859	3,111	4,929	395	395	395	395
Biennial Change in Expenditures				993		(7,250)		(7,250)
Biennial % Change in Expenditures				14		(90)		(90)
Governor's Change from Base								0
Governor's % Change from Base								0
Full-Time Equivalents	5.38	5.32	5.32	5.32	3.32	3.32	3.32	3.32

2001 - Other Misc Special Revenue

Balance Forward In	0	1	1	1				
Receipts	6	0						
Balance Forward Out	1	1	1					
Expenditures	5			1				
Biennial Change in Expenditures				(4)		(1)		(1)
Biennial % Change in Expenditures								

Supreme Court

Agency Financing by Fund

(Dollars in Thousands)

	Actual FY22	Actual FY23	Actual FY24	Estimate FY25	Forecast Base FY26 FY27		Governor's Recommendation FY26 FY27	
Governor's Change from Base								0
Governor's % Change from Base								

2403 - Gift

Balance Forward In	307	98	101	59	10	7	10	7
Receipts	1	3	23	23	22	22	22	22
Balance Forward Out	56	101	60	10	7	4	7	4
Expenditures	251		64	72	25	25	25	25
Biennial Change in Expenditures				(115)		(86)		(86)
Biennial % Change in Expenditures						(63)		(63)
Governor's Change from Base								0
Governor's % Change from Base								0

3000 - Federal

Balance Forward In	1,047	867	1,298	1,478				
Receipts	4,639	5,935	6,104	7,869	7,869	7,869	7,869	7,869
Balance Forward Out	860	1,295	1,478					
Expenditures	4,826	5,506	5,923	9,347	7,869	7,869	7,869	7,869
Biennial Change in Expenditures				4,938		468		468
Biennial % Change in Expenditures				48		3		3
Governor's Change from Base								0
Governor's % Change from Base								0
Full-Time Equivalents	27.97	33.49	31.88	31.88	31.88	31.88	31.88	31.88

4925 - Family and Medical Benefit Ins

Balance Forward In				15				
Direct Appropriation			15	15	0	0	0	0
Balance Forward Out			15					
Expenditures				30				
Biennial Change in Expenditures				30		(30)		(30)
Biennial % Change in Expenditures								
Governor's Change from Base								0
Governor's % Change from Base								

(Dollars in Thousands)

	FY25	FY26	FY27	Biennium 2026-27
Direct				
Fund: 1000 - General				
FY2025 Appropriations	90,377	90,377	90,377	180,754
Base Adjustments				
All Other One-Time Appropriations		(2,590)	(2,590)	(5,180)
One-Time IT Appropriations		(5,163)	(5,163)	(10,326)
Programs Moving to New Agencies		(33,560)	(33,560)	(67,120)
Forecast Base	90,377	49,064	49,064	98,128
Change Items				
Operating Adjustment		938	1,899	2,837
Total Governor's Recommendations	90,377	50,002	50,963	100,965
Fund: 4925 - Family and Medical Benefit Ins				
FY2025 Appropriations	15	15	15	30
Base Adjustments				
All Other One-Time Appropriations		(15)	(15)	(30)
Forecast Base	15			
Total Governor's Recommendations	15			
Dedicated				
Fund: 2000 - Restrict Misc Special Revenue				
Planned Spending	4,929	395	395	790
Forecast Base	4,929	395	395	790
Total Governor's Recommendations	4,929	395	395	790
Fund: 2001 - Other Misc Special Revenue				
Planned Spending	1			
Forecast Base	1			
Total Governor's Recommendations	1			
Fund: 2403 - Gift				
Planned Spending	72	25	25	50
Forecast Base	72	25	25	50
Total Governor's Recommendations	72	25	25	50
Fund: 3000 - Federal				
Planned Spending	9,347	7,869	7,869	15,738
Forecast Base	9,347	7,869	7,869	15,738
Total Governor's Recommendations	9,347	7,869	7,869	15,738

(Dollars in Thousands)

	FY25	FY26	FY27	Biennium 2026-27
Revenue Change Summary				
Dedicated				
Fund: 2000 - Restrict Misc Special Revenue				
Forecast Revenues	7,778	2,729	2,729	5,458
Total Governor's Recommendations	7,778	2,729	2,729	5,458
Fund: 2403 - Gift				
Forecast Revenues	23	22	22	44
Total Governor's Recommendations	23	22	22	44
Fund: 3000 - Federal				
Forecast Revenues	7,869	7,869	7,869	15,738
Total Governor's Recommendations	7,869	7,869	7,869	15,738
Non-Dedicated				
Fund: 1000 - General				
Forecast Revenues	524	537	557	1,094
Total Governor's Recommendations	524	537	557	1,094

Supreme Court

FY 2026-27 Biennial Budget Change Item

Change Item Title: Operating Adjustment

Fiscal Impact (\$000s)	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
General Fund				
Expenditures	938	1,899	1,899	1,899
Revenues	0	0	0	0
Other Funds				
Expenditures	0	0	0	0
Revenues	0	0	0	0
Net Fiscal Impact = (Expenditures – Revenues)	938	1,899	1,899	1,899
FTEs	0	0	0	0

Recommendation:

The Governor recommends additional funding of \$938,000 in FY 2026 and \$1,899,000 in each subsequent year from the general fund to help address operating cost increases at the Supreme Court.

Rationale/Background:

The cost of operations rises each year due to increases in employer-paid health care contributions, FICA and Medicare, along with other salary and compensation-related costs. Other operating costs, like rent and lease, fuel and utilities, and IT and legal services also grow. This cost growth puts pressure on operating budgets that remain flat year to year. The Supreme Court faces challenging decisions to manage these rising costs within existing budgets, while maintaining the services Minnesotans expect. This recommendation provides additional resources to help address these cost pressures and pay for operations.

The Supreme Court requests funding for salary increases and the employer share of health insurance increases. The Judicial Branch does not negotiate its own insurance agreements – it participates in the general plan negotiated by Minnesota Management and Budget. The Supreme Court also requests funding for the increased cost of leasing office space in the Minnesota Judicial Center. This request is sought to support the core mission and services of the Supreme Court.

Proposal:

The Governor recommends increasing operating budgets to support current services. For the Supreme Court, this funding will help cover expected growth in employee compensation and insurance, lease costs, and other operating costs.

Dollars in Thousands

Net Impact by Fund	FY 26	FY 27	FY 26-27	FY 28	FY 29	FY 28-29
General Fund	938	1,899	2,837	1,899	1,899	3,798

Results:

This recommendation is intended to help the Supreme Court address rising cost pressures and mitigate impacts to current levels of service and information to the public.

Supreme Court

Federal Funds Summary

(Dollars in Thousands)

Federal Agency and ALN	Federal Grant Name Brief Purpose	FY 2024 Actual	FY 2025 Budget	FY 2026 Base	FY 2027 Base	Required State Match or MOE?	FTEs
Department of Justice (Funds pass through the Department of Public Safety) 16.588	Point of Contact Position - Federal funds to support a position advising the SCAO on topics of domestic and sexual violence. Funds pass through the Department of Public Safety for distribution. Grant funds support agency activities.	\$ 87	\$ 111	\$ 111	\$ 111	Yes	0.55
Department of Health & Human Services (Funds pass through the Department of Human Services) 93.563	Expedited Child Support Program - Payments for the federal share (66%) of Expedited Child Support. Expenditures include costs for personnel, magistrates, and operations. Grant funds support agency activities.	\$ 4,596	\$ 7,129	\$ 5,652	\$ 5,652	Yes	24.20
Department of Health & Human Services 93.586	Court Improvement Program - Expenditures for the Children Justice Initiative Grant. These grants are awarded to the state from the Federal Department of Human Services Administration for Children and Families. Grant funds support agency activities.	\$ 549	\$ 624	\$ 623	\$ 623	Yes	3.75
Department of Justice 16.585	Office of Justice Program – Statewide Operationalizing Equity Grant Program - Funding is to improve, enhance, or expand adult drug court and veterans treatment court services statewide. Grant funds support agency activities.	\$ 152	\$ 413	\$ 413	\$ 413	Yes	1.10
Department of Health & Human Services Administration for Community Living (ACL) 93.747	Elder Abuse Prevention Interventions Program - To develop, implement, and evaluate successful or promising interventions, practices, and programs to prevent elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation, including adult protective services programs. Through this program, ACL hopes to demonstrate how existing research can be used to craft new, useful programs to address elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation and improve and enhance adult protective services programming. Grant funds support agency activities.	\$ 414	\$ 414	\$ 414	\$ 414	Yes	1.78

Supreme Court

Federal Funds Summary

(Dollars in Thousands)

Federal Agency and ALN	Federal Grant Name Brief Purpose	FY 2024 Actual	FY 2025 Budget	FY 2026 Base	FY 2027 Base	Required State Match or MOE?	FTEs
Department of Health & Human Services Services Administration for Children and Families 93.556	Families Program - To prevent child maltreatment among families at risk through the provision of supportive family services; 2) to assure children's safety within the home and preserve intact families in which children have been maltreated, when the family's problems can be addressed effectively; 3) to address the problems of families whose children have been placed in foster care so that reunification may occur in a safe and stable manner; 4) to support adoptive families by providing support services as necessary so that they can make a lifetime commitment to their children. Grant funds support agency activities.	\$ 74	\$ 406	\$ 406	\$ 406	No	0.50
Department of Health & Human Services (Funds pass through the Department of Human Services) 93.658	IV-E Foster Care program helps states, Indian tribes, tribal organizations and tribal consortia (tribes) to provide safe and stable out-of-home care for children under the jurisdiction of the state or tribal child welfare agency until the children are returned home safely, placed with adoptive families, or placed in other planned arrangements for permanency. The program provides funds to assist with the costs of foster care maintenance for eligible children; administrative costs to manage the program; and training for public agency staff, foster parents and eligible professional partner agency staff. Grant funds help support agency activities.	\$ 52	\$ 250	\$ 250	\$ 250	Yes	0.00
Federal Fund – Agency Total		\$ 5,923	\$ 9,347	\$ 7,869	\$ 7,869		31.88

Narrative

In FY2026 and FY2027 the Supreme Court will continue to receive federal funding for Child Support and the Court Improvement Program. The Order for Protection database grant ended in FY2014 and was replaced by the Stop Violence Against Women Act for a Point of Contact position grant. This grant has a state match of approximately 30%. The Expedited Child Support Program funds magistrates, personnel, and operating costs. The Expedited Child Support Program receives federal reimbursement at a rate of 66% for eligible expenditures, so less spending with state appropriated dollars would result in a proportionate decrease in federal reimbursement. The Court Improvement Program improves the processing of child protection cases and the outcomes for abused and neglected children.

Supreme Court

Federal Funds Summary

(Dollars in Thousands)

Estimates were based on past funding. The ACL Elder Justice Innovation Grant was awarded to support the development and advancement of new and emerging issues related to elder justice. DHHS Adm for Children and Families State Tribal Partnership Grant is a 5 year grant with the purpose of fostering collaboration among multidisciplinary teams to improve outcomes for American Indian families. DHS Title IV-E Foster Care Program Grant will help to support partnership agencies with staff training. Grants that will be ending did not include revenue projected past the end date.