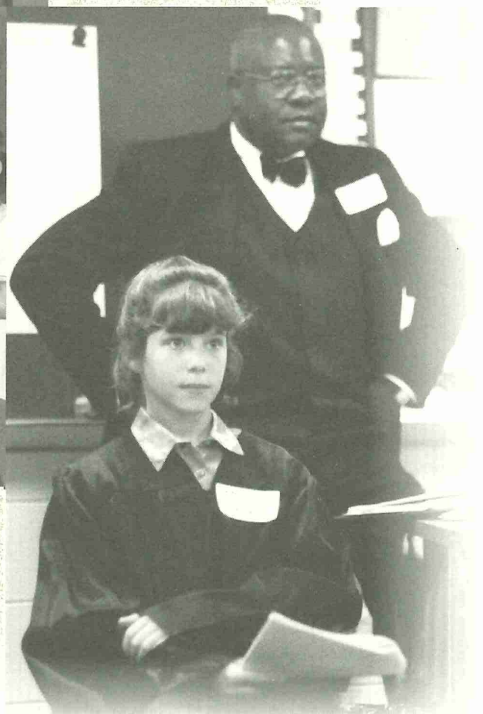
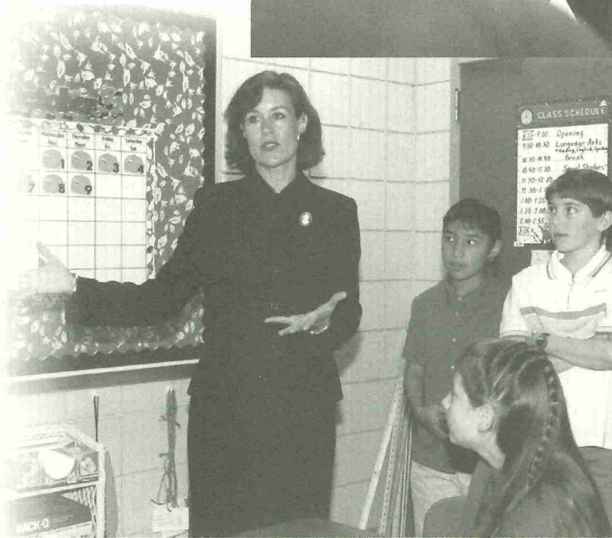
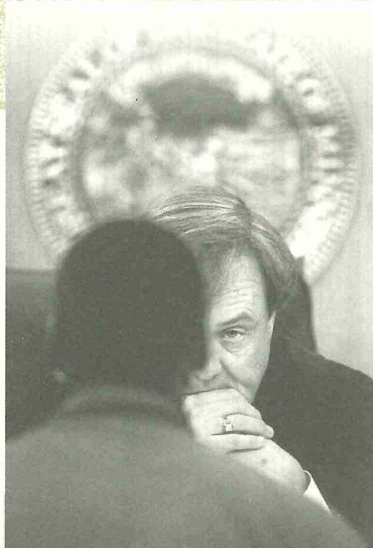


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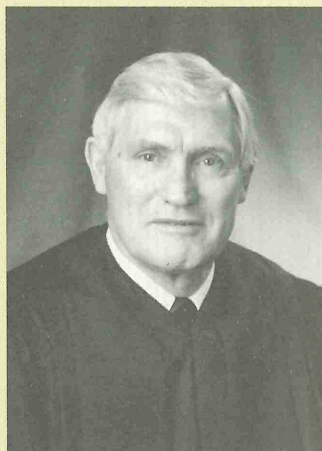
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Minnesota State Courts

Annual Report 1997

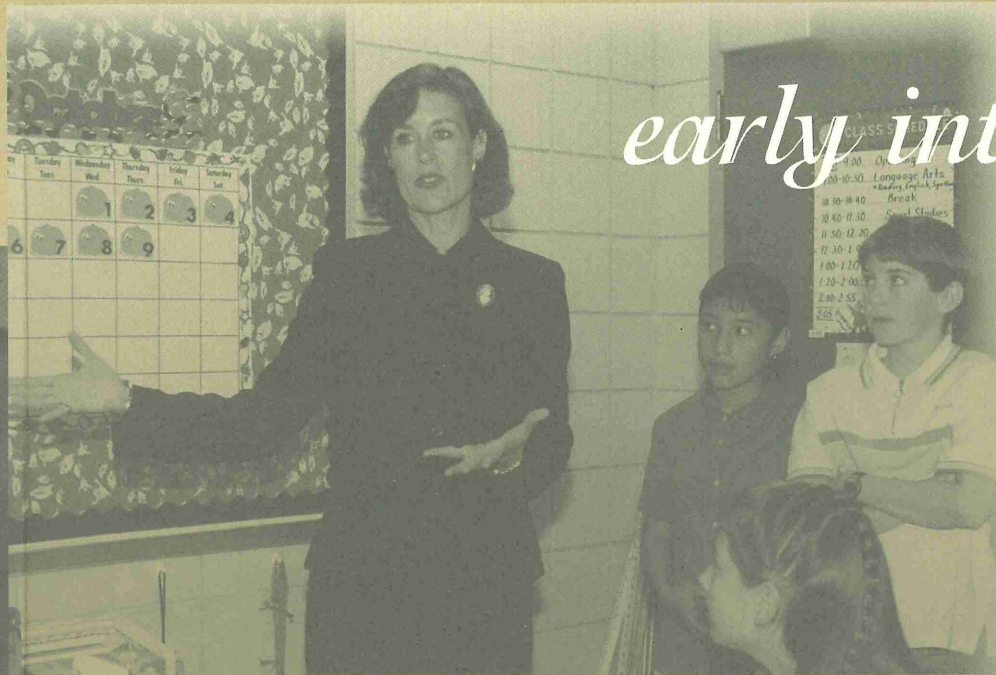


On January 29, 1998, Chief Justice A.M. "Sandy" Keith resigned from office. Chief Justice Keith's career of public service was a remarkable one. He served as a senator from his hometown of Rochester before serving as lieutenant governor in the 1960s. A distinguished family law practitioner, he served on many law-related committees over the years, including the Supreme Court's Gender Bias Task Force. He was appointed Associate Justice by Governor Rudy Perpich in 1989 and was elevated to the position of Chief Justice by Governor Perpich in 1990.

During his tenure on the court, Chief Justice Keith maintained a constant public presence, traveling throughout the state to observe the work of the trial courts and to listen to concerns from the bench, bar, and general public. He displayed a passion for justice and a desire that the courts of state devise better ways of serving the citizens of the state.

Upon leaving the bench, Chief Justice Keith resumed his law practice in Rochester. In addition, he joined the faculty of the Hamline University School of Law, where he serves as jurist in residence.

Minnesota State Courts



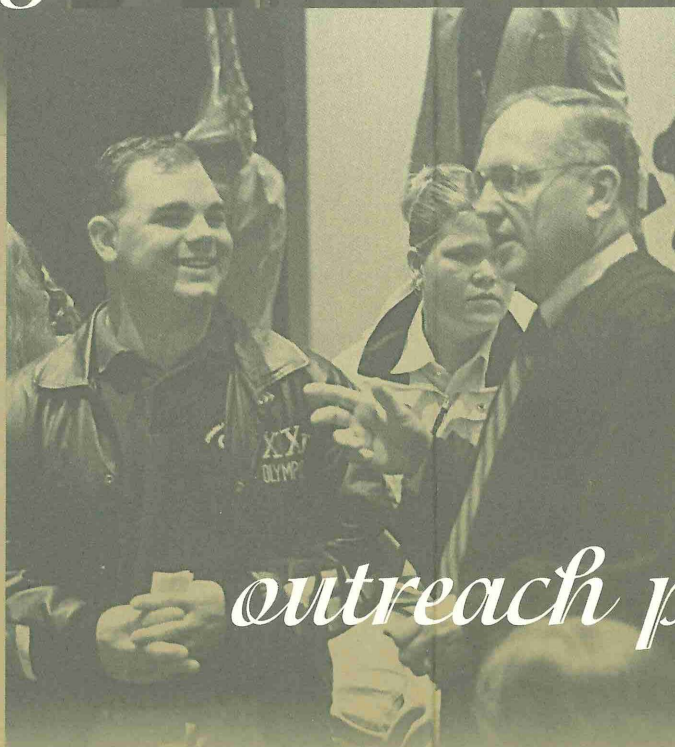
early intervention



community involvement



quality of justice



outreach programs

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STATE OFFICE BUILDING

ST. PAUL, MN 55155

Dear Minnesotans

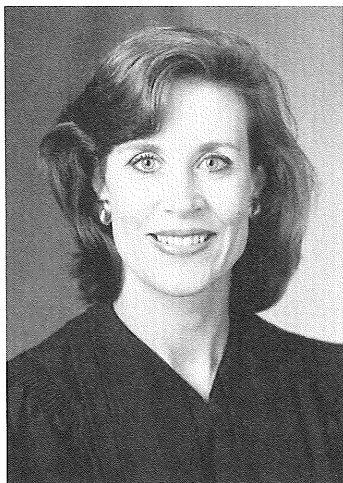
Dear Minnesotans,

It is common knowledge that the state court system faces many challenges: an annual caseload of nearly two million cases, an increase in serious juvenile crime, the strong connection between drug addiction and crime, and the need to resolve dissolution, custody, and child support issues in a way that promotes the well-being of children. Despite the increasing demands placed on trial courts to meet these challenges, I am pleased to report that the state court system continues to serve the citizens of the state well. The court system is responding to these challenges with innovative ideas that promise to improve the quality of justice.

Strategic Plan Implemented

The development of a strategic plan for the state court system is one of the most exciting and profound developments in the history of the courts. Traditionally, the court system has been reactive, responding to problems and issues rather than anticipating them. Though Minnesota's court system has been recognized nationally for its innovations, it is apparent that in these fast-paced times we must be proactive to the challenges awaiting us. In 1997, the Conference of Chief Judges approved the Minnesota Courts Strategic Plan For the Year 2005 and established an implementation committee that will coordinate how parts of the plan will be addressed in the years ahead.

Of the many challenges facing the judiciary, there are five that will be of great interest to the citizens and lawyers of Minnesota. They are access to justice, community involvement, greater accountability, adequate resources, early intervention and meaningful consequences. As to access to justice, the court system is committed to increasing justice system diversity and providing more information to people who use the system. We are committed to employing more bilingual staff and developing multi-



lingual forms, brochures and signage. Self-help options are becoming available at numerous public sites throughout the community including libraries and community centers, as well as at courthouses.

Community involvement is a key challenge that must be addressed. The court system is discussing a range of opportunities for community involvement with the courts, such as community advisory councils and focus groups. We want to regularly engage in

active outreach programs aimed at improving the public's understanding of the role, function, and limitations of the court system. It is imperative that the justice system work with citizens in our collective search for solutions to community problems.

The court system must be accountable to the citizens of Minnesota. The Conference of Chief Judges is working on establishing a formal mechanism for periodic review of trial court administrative practices, procedures, rules, programs, and organizational structures to identify changes that

improve the quality of service, control costs, streamline procedures, and promote access. Many judges have already implemented judicial evaluation programs that assist judges in improving their performance.

In the criminal justice system, it has long been recognized that early intervention and meaningful consequences can reduce recidivism. In 1997, the court system began working with the major stakeholders in Hennepin County to develop a community court pilot program. Such a court will focus on low-end, livability or gateway offenses, and could be physically located in a neighborhood affected by these offenses. Another example is the Hennepin County Drug Court, which uses an early intervention model. The average time between arrest, plea and beginning of treatment is under two weeks. About one-third of Hennepin County's entire felony caseload is now being handled by the drug court.

All of these initiatives demonstrate that the court system is increasingly active in anticipating and dealing with cutting-edge issues. Our innovative use

of technology and case management techniques have allowed judges and court staff to process cases more efficiently. But even our best efforts cannot avoid the fact that the court system needs adequate resources if we are to function in a manner that keeps the assembly line of justice moving while making the necessary improvements and innovations.

As I begin my term as Chief Justice, I see a court system that has made enormous strides. The leadership of the courts at all levels is outstanding, with judges realizing the importance of administration in making the wheels of justice turn. Our rules of practice are current and consistent statewide, while

new methods of dispute resolution are taking hold. Technology and administrative practices continue to improve and, most importantly, the value of innovation is recognized by the system as a whole. I am convinced that the court system, working with citizens and our partners in the other branches of government, will achieve remarkable results in the years ahead.



1997 Cost of Judicial Branch

1997 Judicial Branch Annual Operating Budget

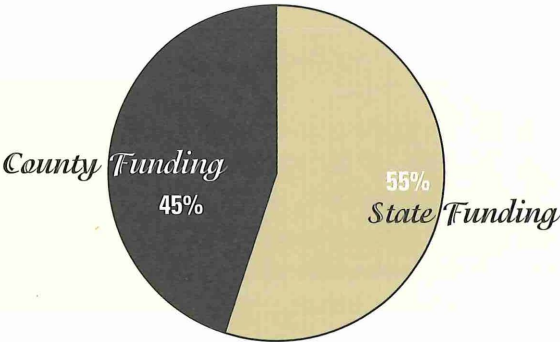
The state court system’s annual operating budget includes all three levels of the court system plus the state law library and other services.

*Estimate based on 3% inflationary increase over 1995

Supreme Court.	\$ 3,944,157
Civil Legal Services	5,895,899
State Court Administration	8,426,164
Community Dispute Resolution/Victim Offender Medication	244,399
State Law Library	1,760,792
Court of Appeals	5,860,381
Trial Courts	68,398,794
Total State Funding	94,530,586
County Funding (Est.**)	\$ 76,706,000
Total	\$ 171,236,586

State/County Burden 1997

The judicial branch’s operating budget is made up of state and county funding.





Minnesota Supreme Court

The Minnesota Supreme Court, as the court of last resort, hears appeals from the decisions of the Minnesota Court of Appeals, the Workers Compensation Court of Appeals and the Tax Court. The Court also takes appeals of first-degree murder convictions directly from the district courts and hears legislative-election contests.

The Supreme Court also spends a considerable amount of time administering the Minnesota judicial system. In recent years the Court has identified numerous issues that affect the quality of justice, including the need for reliable court interpreters, the importance of providing alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, and the elimination of racial and gender bias in the courts. Once an issue has been identified, the Court assembles a task force or committee of professionals and lay people that investigates the issue and makes recommendations to the Court on how to make improvements.

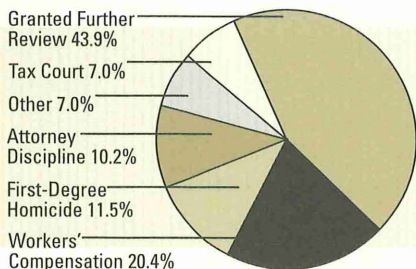
For example, in 1997 the Supreme Court received the report of the Legal Services Funding Committee. The committee, which was formed by the Court in 1996 to seek ways of providing adequate funding to legal aid organizations that serve indigent persons, recommended that Minnesota lawyers make a financial contribution to legal services. The Supreme Court agreed, raising the attorney registration fee by \$25 and allocating the \$800,000 raised to legal services funding. During 1997, other Supreme Court task forces examined visitation and child support, the guardian ad litem system, foster care, gender and racial fairness in the judicial system, judicial evaluation and court interpreters. In addition, the Court initiated a State Court/Tribal Court Committee, which brings

together state and Native American judges to discuss how their separate judicial systems operate and how greater cooperation may be achieved. Finally, the Court began to meet with the deans of the three Minnesota law schools to discuss issues relevant to legal education and the judicial system.

Apart from these task forces, each member of the Supreme Court serves as a liaison to judicial district and/or to a Supreme Court board. Several justices serve on rules committees which monitor the effectiveness of court rules, such as civil procedure, criminal procedure, and the general rules of practice for the district court. In 1997, the Court appointed a rules committee to review its own rules, the rules of civil appellate procedure.

Supreme Court Disposition Summary

	No. of Cases
Disposition by Option	
• Affirmed	80
• Affirmed as Modified	3
• Affirmed in Part, Reversed in Part	7
• Affirmed in part, reversed in Part & Remanded	7
• Certified Question of Law Answered	2
• Closed	24
• Reversed	28
• Reversed & Remanded	12
• Vacated	2
Total, by Opinion	165
Summary Affirmance	61
Per Curiam	9
Dismissed & Other	41
Petition for Review Denied	620
Total Dispositions	896



Supreme Court Case Flow 1993-1997

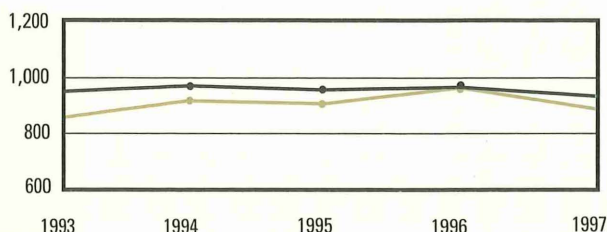
Despite an increase in petitions for review, which take more time to dispose, dispositions kept pace with filings.

• Filings • Dispositions

Supreme Court 1997 Case Filings

The composition of the Supreme Court's filings shows that the majority of its cases come from the Court of Appeals and the Workers' Compensation Court of Appeals.

Note: Petitions for further review denied not included.

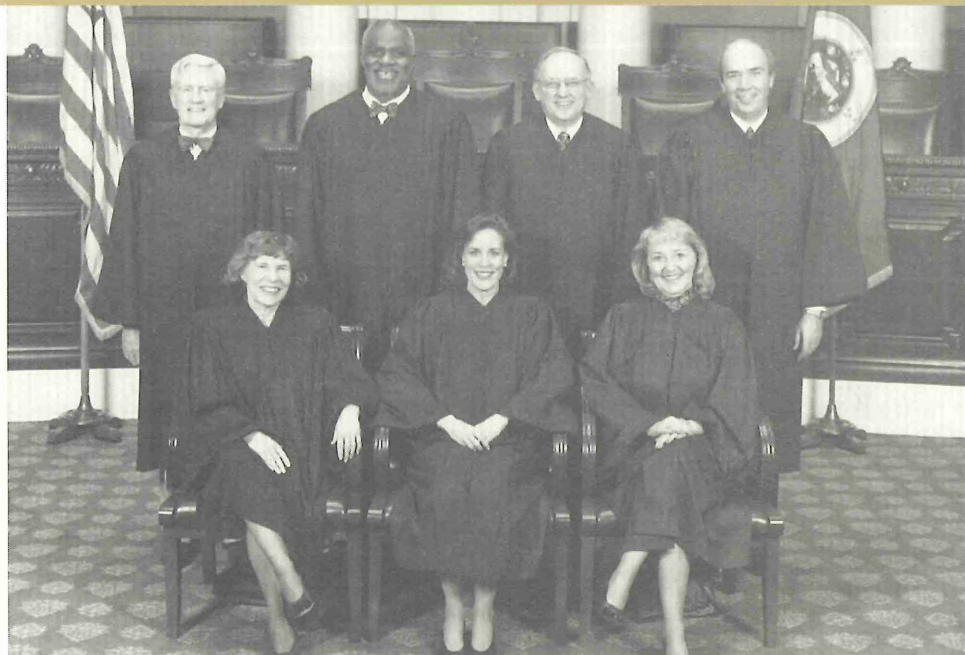


STANDING:

Justice Edward C. Stringer
Justice Alan C. Page
Justice Paul H. Anderson
Justice James H. Gilbert

SEATED:

Justice Esther M. Tomljanovich
Cheif Justice Kathleen A. Blatz
Justice Sandra S. Gardebring



Supreme Court Administrative Assignments - 1998

Chief Justice Kathleen A. Blatz

Juvenile Protection Rules - liaison
Pardon Board - statutory member
Inter-court Committee - chair

Justice Esther M. Tomljanovich

Rules of Criminal Procedure Committee - liaison
Sentencing Guidelines Commission
State Law Library Committee - chair
Minnesota News Council - chair
9th District - liaison

Justice Sandra S. Gardebring

Rules of Civil Appellate Procedure Committee - chair
Civil commitment Rules Committee - liaison
Judicial Branch Technology Planning Commission - chair
Tribal Courts - liaison
State Funding Task Force - liaison
3rd District - liaison
6th District - liaison

Justice Alan C. Page

Lawyers Professional Responsibility Board - liaison
Board of Law Examiners - liaison
Race Bias Implementation Committee - chair
4th District - liaison
10th District - liaison

Justice Paul H. Anderson

Rules of Civil Procedure Committee - chair
Race Bias Implementation Committee - member
Judicial Evaluation Committee - liaison
Court Interpreter Advisory Committee - chair
Minnesota Board of Continuing Legal Education - liaison
4th District - liaison
5th District - liaison

Justice Edward C. Stringer

Minnesota State Bar Association
Continuing Legal Education

Client Security Board - liaison

Strategic Planning - liaison

Lawyers Trust Account Board - liaison

2nd District - liaison

7th District - liaison

Justice James H. Gilbert

General Rules of Practice Committee - liaison

Minnesota State Bar Association

Standing Committee for Administration of

No-fault Arbitration - liaison

Legal Services Advisory Committee - liaison

Board of Legal Certification - liaison

1st District - liaison

8th District - liaison

The Supreme Court continued its community outreach and public education efforts in 1997. In the spring of 1997, the Court heard oral argument in Fergus Falls, and in the fall held court in Willmar. This initiative, which began in 1995, provides local high school and college students with the opportunity to observe oral arguments and to discuss various aspects of the judicial branch of government with the justices. The justices also visit local schools to meet with elementary and secondary school students and to discuss the types of issues the Court confronts. In addition, the justices meet with members of the local bar association and community leaders. This type of community outreach helps to demystify the judicial process, while giving the Court a chance to listen to different voices of the community.

On September 30, 1997, Chief Justice A.M. "Sandy" Keith announced his retirement, effective January 29, 1998. Chief Justice Keith was appointed associate justice in 1989 and was sworn in as chief justice on December 1, 1990. On October 8, 1997, Governor Arne Carlson announced the appointment of Justice Kathleen Blatz as Chief Justice and the appointment of Minneapolis attorney James H. Gilbert as Associate Justice, both of whom were sworn-in on January 29, 1998.

Minnesota Court of Appeals

Mission Statement

"The Minnesota Court of Appeals exists to provide the people with impartial, clear and timely appellate decisions made according to law."

Vision

"The Minnesota Court of Appeals strives to be an accessible intermediate appellate court that renders justice under the law fairly and expeditiously through clear, well-reasoned decisions and promotes cooperative effort, innovation, diversity, and the professional and personal growth of all personnel."

Consistent with its mission and vision statements, the Minnesota Court of Appeals continues to address issues relating to the public's access to the appellate process, by undertaking initiatives ranging from making the process more understandable for pro-se litigants to assuring physical access for persons with disabilities. The court also has received funding for an interactive video project that should be implemented by autumn 1998, making possible interactive video hearings that will allow faster and more convenient access to the court for litigants in areas of the state most distant from the Twin Cities.

Judges Edward Parker and Fred Norton retired during 1997. Judge Gordon Shumaker, formerly Ramsey County chief judge, was appointed to the vacancy created by Judge Parker's retirement.

The legislature funded the judicial system's request to upgrade its technology, so that the Court of Appeals

can create more efficient systems for the electronic communication of information. For example, an electronic case tracking system is about to be implemented, which will make case management easier and allow the quick identification of all issues under review by the Court at any given time.

In addition to disposing of 2,330 cases during 1997, judges of the Minnesota Court of Appeals during the past year served the legal profession and the community at large in a variety of capacities. For example, judges of the Court served on Minnesota Supreme Court advisory committees relating to judicial evaluation, the rules of civil procedure, the rules of appellate procedure, media access to the courts, tribal courts, judicial election/retention, juvenile protection rules, and judicial recall rules. Judges of the Court also served with the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws and on the Minnesota Board on Judicial Standards and the Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission.

Judges were active in bar association activities as members of the state bar association board of governors and county bar association governing councils and committees.

Also during 1997, judges of the Minnesota Court of Appeals served on advisory boards and boards of trustees for both Minnesota and out-of-state law schools and universities, on advisory boards to continuing legal education providers, and on the boards of numerous local and state-wide civic organizations.

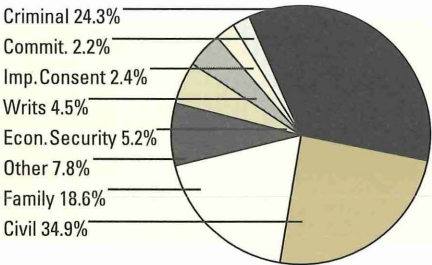


Court of Appeals Disposition Summary

Disposition by Option	No. of Cases
• Affirmed	1114
• Affirmed as Modified	27
• Affirmed in Part, Reversed in Part	48
• Affirmed in Part, Reversed in Part & Remanded	109
• Certified Question of Law Answered	1
• Vacated	6
• Dismissed	6
• Reversed	123
• Reversed & Remanded	133
• Summary Affirmation	2
• Withdrawn	0
Total, by Opinion	1569
Order Opinion	71
Denied/Discharged	169
Dismissed	500
Certified/Transferred	5
Stayed, Remanded	16
Total Dispositions	2330

STANDING: Honorable James C. Harten, Honorable Randolph W. Peterson, Honorable Roger M. Klaphake, Honorable Robert H. Schumacher, Honorable Thomas J. Kalitowski, Honorable Marianne D. Short, Honorable Jack Davies, Honorable Roland C. Amundson, Honorable Bruce D. Willis.

SEATED: Honorable Gary L. Crippen, Honorable Doris Ohlsen Huspeni, Honorable Edward J. Parker, Chief Judge Edward Toussaint, Jr., Honorable Harriet Lansing, Honorable R.A. (Jim) Randall, Honorable Fred C. Norton.

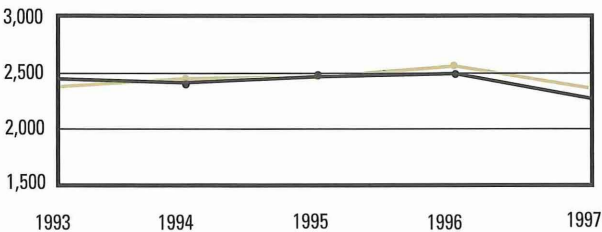


Court of Appeals 1997 Case Filings

Criminal cases, which are about 24 percent of the Court of Appeals' filings, include felony, gross misdemeanor and petty misdemeanor cases. Civil cases make up 35 percent of the Court's caseload.

Court of Appeals Case Flow 1993-1997

The relationship of filings to dispositions remained stable in 1997. Cases continue to be disposed of within the statutory 90-day limit.



Trial Courts

Drug Court Succeeds in its First Year

National statistics suggest that 60-85% of all criminal defendants are either arrested under the influence or charged with crimes meant to support their substance abuse. In the past decade, the number of felony drug-related cases in this state increased by more than 155%. With the pressure of exploding caseloads and an understanding that drug abuse is a root cause of our increasing crime rates, we have searched for more effective approaches.

In January 1997, the Hennepin County bench implemented a new approach — the Hennepin County Drug Court. The court is designed to move all felony drug cases more quickly through the courts and to directly link offenders with services such as treatment, probation, housing, employment, education, and training.

A primary feature of the Drug Court is rapid intervention, as it is one of the main factors affecting the recidivism rate. An individual appears in the Drug Court less than 18 hours after arrest. At the same time as the court appearance, the defendant obtains a chemical dependency assessment, a urine test with immediate results, and if appropriate, an immediate treatment placement. A second court appearance occurs approximately one week after the first appearance. The goal of the second appearance is to resolve the defendant's case, with the court using all the traditional remedies available to the judge. Once a case has been disposed of, defendants continue to return to Drug Court for bi-weekly reviews of their progress by the judge. At these reviews, the judge is able to apply intermediate sanctions to immediately respond to minor violations of the terms of supervision.

Judge Kevin Burke, who serves as the judge of the Drug Court, was awarded the 1997 FBI Director's Community Leadership Award for his work in developing and implementing this new approach to handling drug cases. Though the Drug Court is still experimental and evolving, its goals for defendants remain simple and relevant: less drug dependency, less criminal recidivism, achievement of gainful employment, and responsible parenthood.

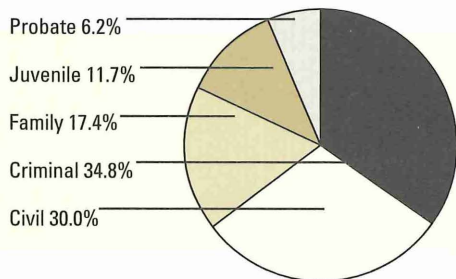
During its first year of operation, the Drug Court has been remarkably successful in meeting its goals. The length of time from arrest to disposition was cut from nearly 6 months to an average of 30 days. There was a dramatic reduction in drug use among offenders. While 95% tested positive for drugs at their first appearance, only 7% tested positive for cocaine and 16% for marijuana in subsequent, twice weekly urinalysis. Only 7% of drug offenders were re-arrested for a drug felony in the first year. Drug prosecutions were up 47% in 1997 over the previous year, accounting for a full one-third of all felony cases in Hennepin County. Yet, because of the streamlined processing of the Drug Court, Hennepin County saved \$250,000 from reduced jail bed days associated with drug cases. It also cut in half the number of court appearances required to dispose of drug cases, resulting in direct time savings for criminal justice officials and staff.

Visitation and Child Support Enforcement Strengthened

Established by the Supreme Court in November 1995, the Advisory Task Force on Visitation and Child Support Enforcement was charged with the responsibility for making recommendations regarding: (1) methods for resolving visitation matters in an efficient, nonadversarial setting; (2) statutory changes that would encourage compliance with court-ordered visitation; and (3) the effectiveness and impact of a policy linking visitation and payment of child support. The Task Force's Final Report was submitted in January 1997 with the following results:

Mandatory Parent Education:

As a method of preventing visitation disputes, the Legislature amended M.S. § 518.157 to require implementation of one or more parent education programs in each judicial district for the purpose of educating parents involved in dissolution proceedings about the impact that divorce, the restructuring of families, and judicial proceedings have upon children and families. By January 1, 1998, each judicial district had implemented mandatory parent education programs in compliance with the legislative mandate and minimum program standards established by the Supreme Court. A total of 56 parent education programs have been implemented.

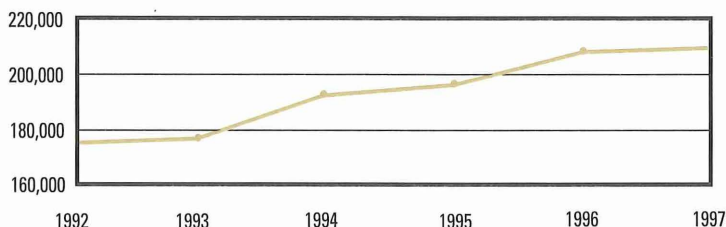


Judicial Workload

Judicial workload is a measure of how much time the judiciary spends on a particular type of case.

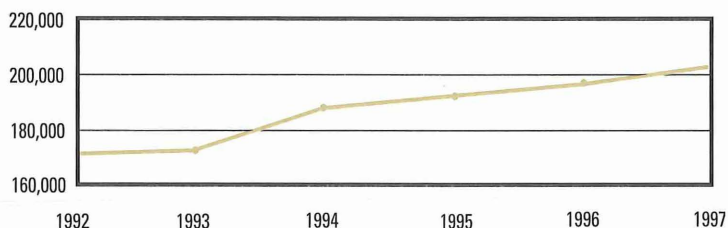
Major Case Filings

The number of major case filings increased 22 percent since 1991.



Major Case Dispositions

Despite the shortage of financial and human resources, judges continue to dispose of more cases each year.



Visitation Expeditors: As a method of expeditiously resolving visitation disputes in a nonadversarial setting, the Legislature amended the existing visitation expeditor statute (M.S. § 518.1751) to encourage more use of visitation expeditors and to clarify their purpose, qualifications, role, and authority.

Cooperation for the Children Pilot Project: As an experimental approach to resolving visitation disputes in an efficient, nonadversarial setting, the Cooperation for the Children Pilot program was revised to require mandatory participation in mediation as a prerequisite to requesting a court hearing on visitation disputes. Ramsey County was designated as the pilot site and commenced case processing on January 1, 1998.

Non-Linkage of Visitation and Child Support Payments: The Legislature adopted the Task Force's recommendation that the issues of visitation and child support should not be linked on the grounds that access to children and payment of support are separate and distinct issues and denial of one should not be a justification for the refusal to provide the other.

Foster Care and Adoption Processing Streamlined

The Foster Care and Adoption Task Force was established by the Supreme Court in October 1995 for the purposes of: (1) identifying court rules, standards, procedures, and policies designed to achieve safe, timely, and permanent placements for abused and neglected children; (2) evaluating the performance of the judicial system in delivering the services provided in the identified rules, standards, procedures, policies, and laws; (3) assessing the quality and adequacy of the information available to courts in child welfare cases; and (4) assessing the extent to which existing rules, standards, procedures, policies, and laws facilitate or impede achievement of permanent and safe placement of children and the extent to which requirements imposed on the courts impose significant administrative burdens on the courts. The Task Force's Final Report was submitted to the Court in January 1997. Pursuant to the Task Force's recommendations, the following statutory changes were made during the 1997 legislative changes:

The timelines for processing maltreatment and child protection cases were tightened:

- Voluntary foster placements are limited to 90 days.
- Twelve-month "Permanency Timeclock" is clarified and made cumulative.
- Limit of 90 days placed on the time a child may be continued in out of home placement without adjudication in a child protection proceeding.
- Time frames are established for completing relative searches and adoption subsidy agreements.
- Courts given authority to cease reunification efforts when deemed futile.

The Roles and Responsibilities of Case Participants were Clarified:

- Law enforcement must notify parents that the child may be placed with a relative or designated parent instead of in a shelter care facility.
- A simplified, uniform process for filing private child protection petitions was established.
- Relatives are made a party to the case when the permanency placement is to transfer custody to the relative.
- Tribal representatives must be recognized and allowed to participate in State Court (Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) proceedings.
- The guardian ad litem statute was amended to provide that a guardian ad litem will be appointed in all cases, that separate counsel shall be available for the guardian ad litem, and that it is the responsibility of the guardian ad litem, not the parent, to offer waiver of the rights of the child.
- Role of county attorney to represent both the social service agency and public interest is clarified.

Adoption Process Strengthened:

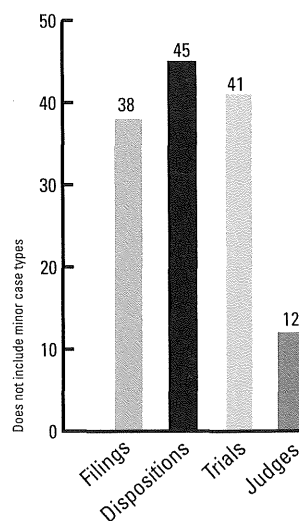
- Following termination of parental rights, the court, the guardian ad litem and counsel for the child shall continue on the case until the adoption is finalized.
- Following termination of parental rights, in-court review hearings are held every three months.
- Creation of a Putative Fathers' Registry.

Statewide Orders for Protection Database Improves Public Safety

The state court system, working in collaboration with the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Corrections, began a pilot testing orders for protection database that will dramatically enhance the effectiveness of orders for protection as a tool for dealing with domestic violence. Six counties are testing the system that provides computerized tracking of orders for protection. The computerized system will make these orders promptly available from the court to police squad cars. Because law enforcement officers must verify an order for protection when responding to a call from a victim, the immediacy of the communication through technology is an important tool in saving lives. The development of comprehensive and easily accessible criminal information systems remains a high priority for stakeholders in the criminal justice system. This database is the first phase of an effort that will eventually include tracking systems for DWIs, serious juvenile offenses and probation violations.

Changes Since 1986

Between 1986 and 1996, the number of case dispositions grew by 49 percent while the number of judges handling the cases grew by only 12 percent. *Percent Change 1986-1996.*



Judge Kevin Burke was awarded the 1997 FBI Director's Community Leadership Award for his work in developing and implementing Drug Court in Hennepin County.

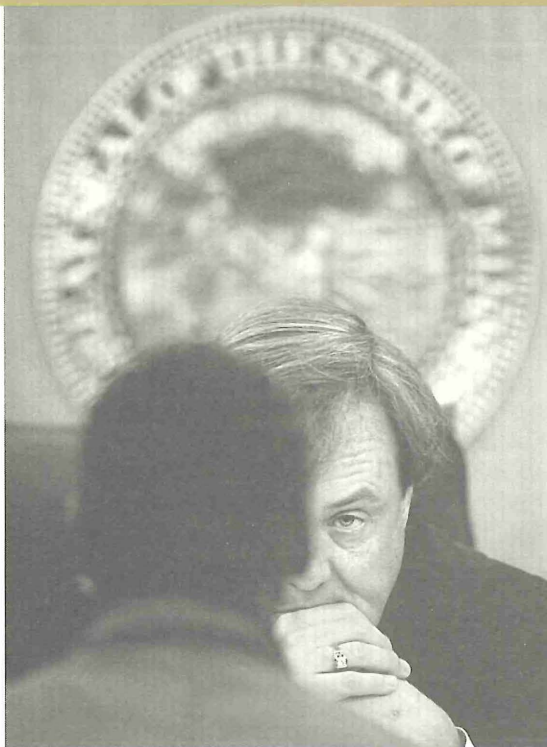


Photo courtesy of Star Tribune, Brian Peterson

Quality of Guardian Ad Litem Services to be Strengthened by New Rules

Following up on the recommendations of the Guardian Ad Litem Task Force aimed at assuring competent, well-trained, and appropriately supervised guardians ad litem throughout the state, the Supreme

Court adopted new Guardian Ad Litem Rules that require the appointment of guardian ad litem program coordinators to recruit, appoint, supervise, and evaluate guardians ad litem. The rules also put in place stringent new pre-service training requirements. The rules were made effective January 1, 1999 to provide judicial districts with sufficient lead time to respond to these new requirements.

Administration of Justice Issues

Judicial Branch Strategic Plan Creates Blueprint and Establishes System Priorities

In 1997, the court system moved ahead with its strategic plan. Following a thorough inventory of the issues that included input from over 300 stakeholders in civil, criminal, family, mental health, and juvenile law, the Minnesota Courts adopted a plan that contains a mission statement, a vision statement, a set of core values, and a discussion of emerging trends. Based on these fundamental conclusions, the plan identified eleven themes and strategies to be pursued that will shape the way the court system looks in the year 2005.

These themes demonstrate the need for proactive judicial strategies that address critical legal and societal needs:

Judicial Branch Leadership - The Judicial branch must exercise a greater leadership role to establish and advance a justice system agenda through interbranch and cross justice system policy coordination and collaboration.

Coordination and Collaboration at the Operating Level Within the Local Justice System - The justice system and social service agencies must be fully coordinated and integrated in performing their functions.

Access to Justice - The justice system needs to be open, affordable and understandable, and minimum levels of services provided, for all users.

Accountability - The Minnesota judicial system should be accountable to the public.

Expanded Use of Alternative Forums - The use of alternative forums for different case types should be expanded.

Case Management - In the handling of cases, judicial personnel must assume responsibility for the active management of cases from filing to disposition.

Efficiency Through Sharing of Resources - Greater efficiencies can be realized by consolidation, relaxing venue, making use of regional trial centers and sharing of resources across county and district lines.

Crime and the Court's Role in Promoting the Rule of Law - Courts should explore new ways to expedite the court process, increase the accountability and effectiveness of court sanctions, and articulate to the public their sentencing process, considerations and limitations.

Expanded and Innovative Use of Technology - Technology should be used to improve and expedite the work of the court including making justice more consumer oriented.

The identification of these themes and the development of appropriate strategies to meet these ambitious goals provide a rationale and a blueprint for change. The Supreme Court recognized the importance of this initiative by establishing the Strategic Planning Implementation Committee. Under the leadership of its chair, Judge Edward Lynch of the First Judicial District, the committee has begun to identify key issues and set priorities on a year-by-year basis. The committee will monitor ongoing plans and projects and will recommend appropriate modifications and establish annual action plans as the court system moves toward the year 2005.

Judicial Branch Technology Committee Plans for the Future

The Judicial Branch Technology Planning Committee, chaired by Justice Sandra Gardebring, met for the first time in February 1997. The committee, which meets quarterly, is charged with the responsibility of serving as the centralized decision-making body for determining which business practices will be supported by technology and software applications, determining the operational, industry, and formal standards which will be adopted by the judicial branch for technology, setting priorities for modifications of current systems and development of new systems and initiatives, and serving as a central focus for communicating internally and externally the technology vision. The committee is organized into three subcommittees, including data policy and access, new technologies and data standards, and business practices and resources.

Court Net Established as New Organizational Communications Vehicle

In 1997, the state court system began developing and piloting Court Net, an intranet (internal network) information system that will be accessed by court employees using their web browsers. Information that will likely be on Court Net includes personnel policies, job postings, agenda and minutes of Conference of Chief Judges meetings and other judicial branch committees and task forces, on-line court statistics, and various material posted by individual departments.



The Stearns County Courthouse was the site of a trial staged on Earth Day by Sartell Elementary School Students to resolve issues related to real-life wetlands issues near their new school. Judge Roger Klaphake, of the Court of Appeals, loaned his robe to Judge Legal Eagle. Other parties were Harry Heron, Cyrus Squirrel and their friends in Mushy Marsh. Parents served as jurors.

Web Site Receives National Recognition

The state court system's web site on the internet (www.courts.state.mn.us) continued to expand, providing more information to lawyers, judges, publishers, and the public. The opinions of the Court of Appeals are released every Tuesday at 1:00 p.m. on the webpage and the opinions of the Supreme Court are released every Thursday at 1:00 p.m. The State Law Library has created a searchable archive of all appellate opinions released on the internet dating from May 1996. Users can locate an opinion by title, case number, or release date.

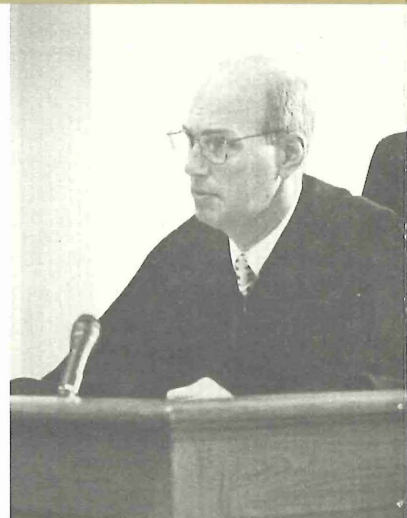
The web site was recognized by Lycos, one of the three global internet index and guide services to the entire World Wide Web, as in the top 5% of government web sites. More improvements and enhancements will be made to the web site in the near future.

Courts Work to Improve Customer Service

In recent years, the court system has recognized that consumers of court services are used to dealing with businesses that are more customer driven and offering self-service opportunities. Recognizing these expectations, the court system has begun a major statewide initiative to improve services and help persons who are not familiar with the legal system. Hennepin County district court took a major step in this direction with the establishment of a Self-Help Center. The center provides brochures and information about lawyer referral services, low-fee and no-fee legal services to qualifying individuals, and other services. A specially trained court employee is present most of the day to answer questions and assist persons. In addition, computer terminals provide public access to public court data on civil and criminal cases, unlawful detainers and judgments. In the future, conciliation and probate court records will be on line.

Ramsey County district court has made it easier and faster for people to pay traffic tickets. The Ramsey County Traffic Violations Bureau has accepted credit cards payments since 1995. In 1997, the district court established a Voice Response Unit (VRU), which is an automated telephone information line. The VRU quickly gives accurate information regarding traffic

Judge Steven Ruble, Seventh Judicial District, was named 1997 Judge of the Year by the Conference of Chief Judges (CCJ).



and parking fines without having to wait for an operators assistance. Persons may use the VRU system to pay their traffic fines by credit card. This is the first system of its kind in the court system.

1997 State Court System "Excellence in Service" Award

Sibley County Court Administrator Nancy Harms and her staff including Bea Goetsch, Jan Agre, Bonnie Paulsen, Karen Messner, and Emily Anderson were presented the 1997 State Court System "Excellence in Service" Award. The award was in recognition of their work as a pilot site for the Minnesota Telecommunications Collaborative, interactive videoconferencing for commitment hearings, OFP (orders for protection) tracking system, and the automated criminal justice judgment sentencing form.

Judge of the Year Award

Judge Steven Ruble, Seventh Judicial District, was named 1997 Judge of the Year by the Conference of Chief Judges (CCJ). The CCJ acknowledged Ruble for his leadership in the nation's first restorative justice initiative that includes sentencing circles adapted from traditional methods of dispute resolution by some Native American communities. Ruble formed a partnership with the Indian community in the Mille Lacs area and worked with the Department of Corrections to develop sentencing recommendations for offenders. The judge retains the final sentencing authority. The process gives community leaders, victims and perpetrators the opportunity to identify and discuss the complexities and consequences of a crime and to propose effective, long-term ways of dealing with community problems.

Roster of Chief Judges

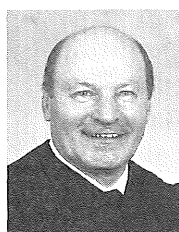
1998



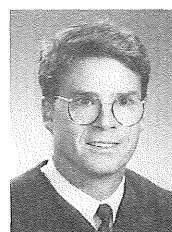
Judge Leslie Metzen
First District



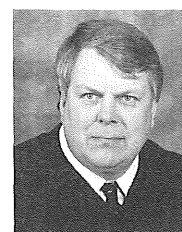
Judge Lawrence D. Cohen
Second District



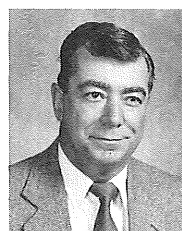
Judge Gerald Wolf
Third District



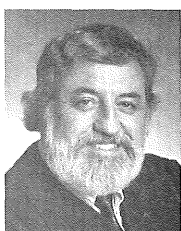
Judge Daniel H. Mabley
Fourth District



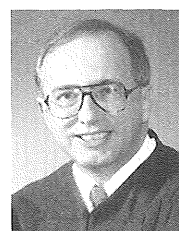
Judge Bruce Gross
Fifth District



Judge John T. Oswald
Sixth District



Judge William E. Walker
Seventh District; Chairman,
Conference of Chief Judges



Judge Gerald J. Seibel
Eighth District



Judge Dennis Murphy
Ninth District

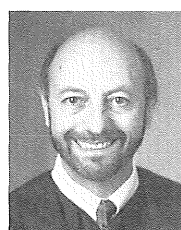


Judge Gary J. Meyer
Tenth District

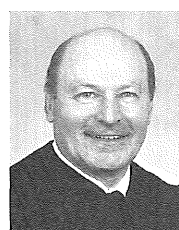
1997



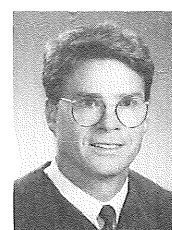
Judge Leslie Metzen
First District



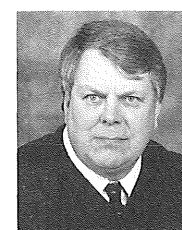
Judge Gordon W. Shumaker
Second District



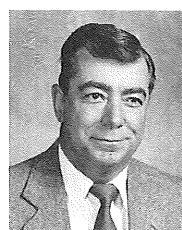
Judge Gerald Wolf
Third District



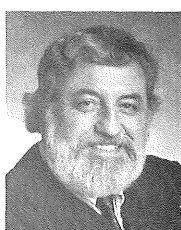
Judge Daniel H. Mabley
Fourth District



Judge Bruce Gross
Fifth District



Judge John T. Oswald
Sixth District



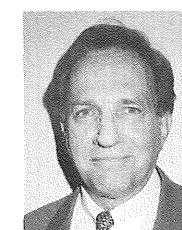
Judge William E. Walker
Seventh District; Chairman,
Conference of Chief Judges



Judge Bruce Christopherson
Eighth District



Judge Dennis Murphy
Ninth District



Judge Gary J. Meyer
Tenth District

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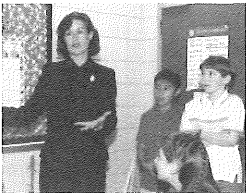


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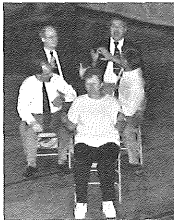


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