

# Judicial Retention Analysis: Insights from Former Judges

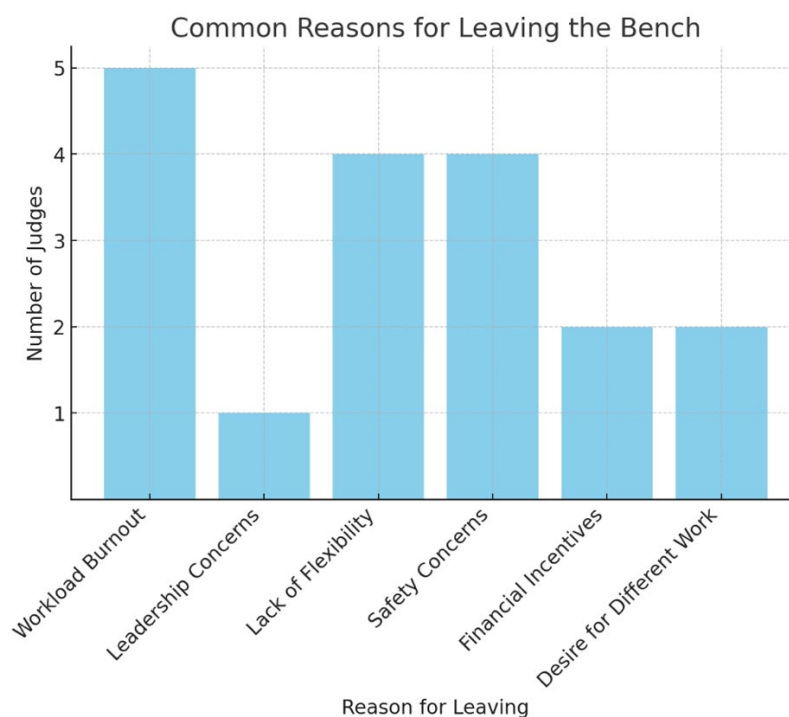
PREPARED FOR THE MINNESOTA DISTRICT JUDGES ASSOCIATION

By

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In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in judges retiring early or transitioning back to attorney roles. To understand the reasons behind this shift, former judges were interviewed, providing valuable insights into the challenges faced on the bench and their motivations for leaving. While it is a relatively small sample size, the exits are noteworthy because it was historically thought that once a judgeship was attained judges typically remained in that role until full retirement. Their responses highlighted several recurring themes, including workload burnout, lack of flexibility, concerns about leadership, security issues, and financial considerations.

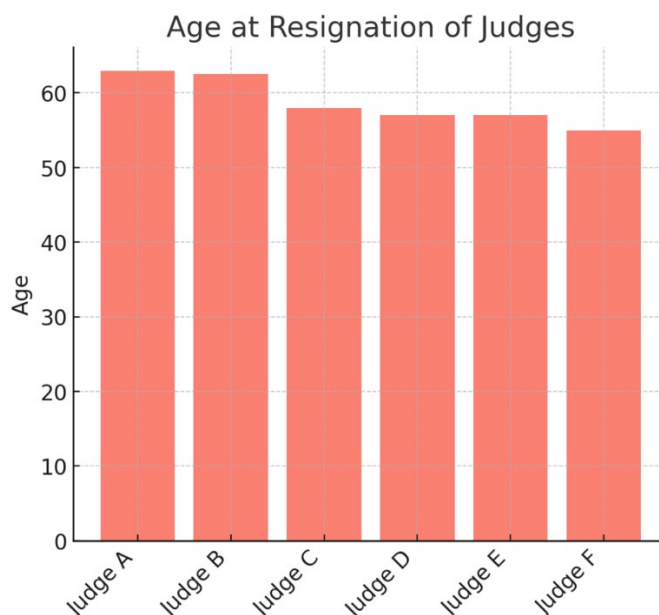


One of the most prominent factors influencing judicial retention is the overwhelming workload. Five of the six judges noted that post-pandemic changes led to heavier caseloads, making the job increasingly stressful. What was once a manageable schedule became an all-day commitment in court, leaving little time for case preparation. The shift to digital systems also added an unexpected administrative burden, further straining judicial resources. Two judges specifically expressed frustration over the fact that judicial pay did not increase in line with the growing workload, making it difficult to justify remaining in the position when less stressful and more financially rewarding opportunities were available elsewhere.

Leadership and institutional support also played a role in judges' decisions to leave the bench. One judge expressed concern that there was a lack of respect for district trial judges from higher courts and judicial administration, leading to dissatisfaction. The perception that the system had become increasingly rigid, limiting judicial discretion, also reduced job satisfaction. Additionally, four judges highlighted that the inflexible nature of the job made it difficult to balance work with personal responsibilities.

Security concerns were another factor cited in the interviews. Each of the six judges reported experiencing some level of concern about their personal safety. Some noted incidents where they

were followed or encountered individuals waiting for them near their vehicles. While law enforcement provided support in certain cases, judges often felt they were responsible for handling their own security measures, which added another layer of stress to the job. The lack of adequate courtroom security and protective measures contributed to their decisions to leave the bench for roles with better safety assurances.



Age at resignation varied among the judges, but the trend suggested that some were leaving earlier than expected, with resignations occurring in their late 50s instead of serving until full retirement age. This shift suggests that the judicial role is no longer viewed as a long-term career path but rather as a phase before transitioning to a different legal or administrative position. The financial aspect also played a role in retention, as starting salaries for attorneys in certain positions now rival judicial pay, making those roles more appealing.

The decision to leave the bench was not taken lightly by any of the judges interviewed. Their responses reveal systemic issues that, if left unaddressed, may continue to drive experienced judges away from the judiciary. Addressing workload concerns, improving judicial compensation, providing greater flexibility, enhancing security measures, and fostering better leadership and institutional support could be key to improving judicial retention in the future. Without such changes, the judiciary may struggle to attract and retain the talent necessary to uphold the integrity and efficiency of the legal system.