



Minnesota Judicial Branch Judge Salaries

Presented to the Compensation Council

Jeff Shorba, State Court Administrator
July 16, 2026



**MINNESOTA
JUDICIAL BRANCH**

Overview

- After a two-year pay freeze (FY26 and FY27), Minnesota's judge salaries have fallen significantly behind similar public sector attorneys, private attorneys, and judges in other states.
- Due largely to these compensation challenges, Minnesota is struggling to recruit experienced attorneys to serve on the bench.
- This issue is of major importance at this moment, as a recent statewide study of judicial workload shows Minnesota needs approximately 40 additional judges to efficiently and effectively manage the state's current caseload.
- **To address these issues, the Minnesota Judicial Council supports increasing judicial officer compensation by 10% in FY28 and 4% in FY29.**

About Minnesota's Judiciary

- 322 total judges across 10 judicial districts and two appellate courts.
 - 296 district court judges
 - 19 Court of Appeals Judges
 - 7 Supreme Court justices
- Minnesota Judicial Branch FY26/27 budget: \$929 million
 - Approximately 1% of state's General Fund Budget
 - Approximately 90% of MJB budget goes to judge/staff salaries
- The Judicial Branch is entirely legislatively funded
 - All fines and fees collected by the courts are deposited in the General Fund
 - Judge salaries set by Legislature

Current Judicial Salaries (FY25-FY27)

District Court Judge (286): \$190,117

District Court Chief Judge (10): \$199,622

Court of Appeals Judge (18): \$202,528

Court of Appeals Chief Judge (1): \$212,650

Supreme Court Associate Justice (6): \$214,935

Supreme Court Chief Justice (1): \$236,429



MN Judicial Salaries Not Keeping Pace with Inflation, Market

Year	MN Judicial Salary Increase (FY)	MN Wage and Salary Growth (CY)	U.S. Inflation (CY)
2020	2.5%	0.2%	1.2%
2021	2.5%	7.0%	4.7%
2022	2.5%	6.9%	8.0%
2023	0.0%	4.5%	4.1%
2024	8.0%	4.8%	2.9%
2025	4.0%	4.1%	2.6%
2026	0.0%	3.9% <i>(forecast)</i>	2.5% <i>(forecast)</i>
2027	0.0%	3.8% <i>(forecast)</i>	2.8% <i>(forecast)</i>
Cumulative	21.0%	40.9% <i>(incl. forecast)</i>	32.5% <i>(incl. forecast)</i>

Sources: MJB salary data; MMB Feb. 2026 Forecast; BEA/FRED; Minneapolis Fed CPI table. Cumulative totals are compounded.

MN Judges Falling Behind Public, Private Sector Attorneys

FY27 Minnesota Judicial Branch Judge Salaries	2026 Minneapolis Attorneys: Average salary with 15 years of experience (Economic Research Institute)	2026 Law Firm Partner: Average Base Salary (bonus not included) (Payscale.com)	2024 County Attorney Salaries (Minnesota County Attorneys Association Salary Survey)
District Court Judge \$190,117	\$204,860	\$241,936	Anoka County \$218,525
District Court Chief Judge \$199,622			Carver County \$213,757
Court of Appeals Judge \$202,528			Dakota County \$219,813
			Scott County \$212,737

MN Judges Falling Behind Judges in Other States

- Every year, the National Center for State Courts tracks judge salaries across all 50 states and US territories.
 - The data is adjusted for cost of living between states.
- Minnesota's current judicial salary freeze means Minnesota judges are losing ground compared to their peers across the country.

2021 MN Judge Salary Rank

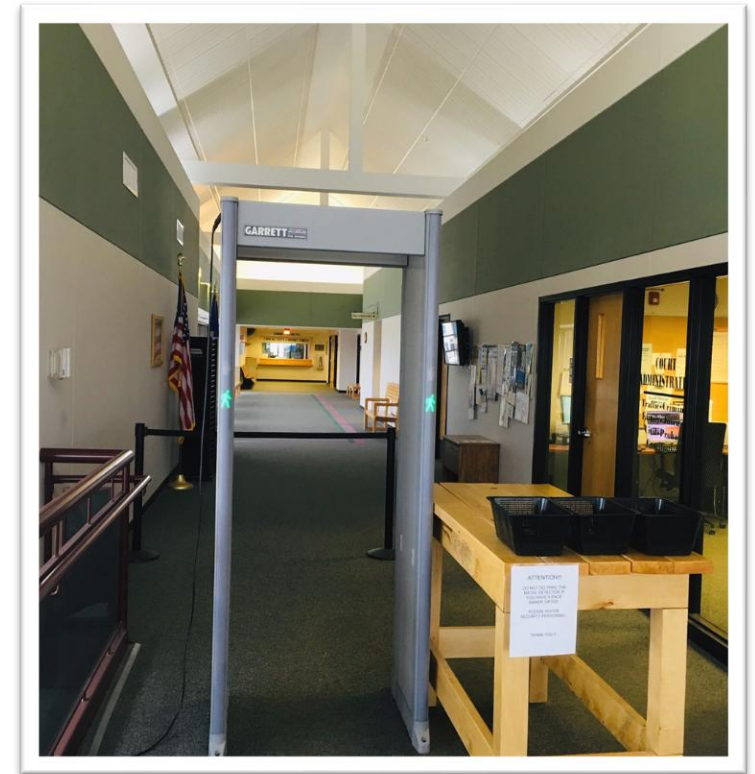
- District Court: #18
- Court of Appeals: #20
- Supreme Court: #23

2026 MN Judge Salary Rank

- District Court: #21
- Court of Appeals: #28
- Supreme Court: #32

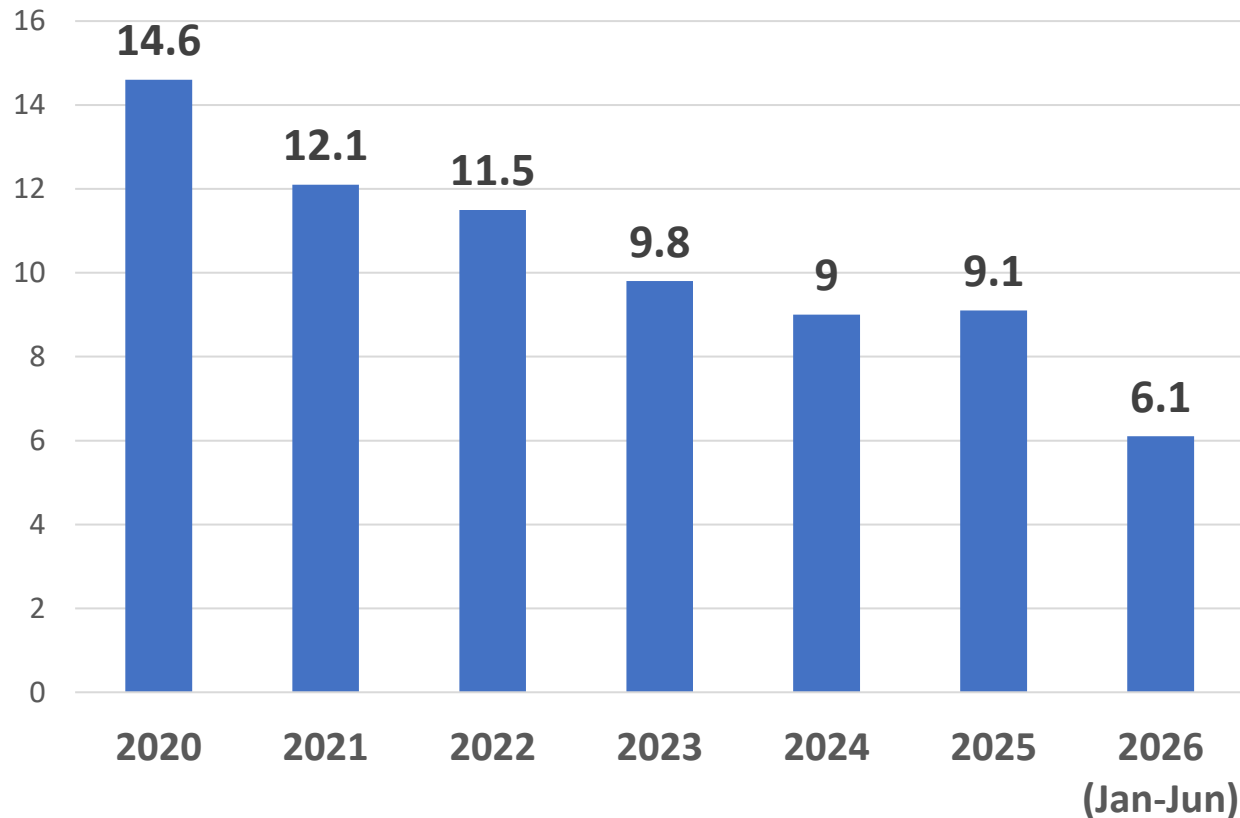
Minnesota Judges Facing Rising Threats to Safety, Security

- Both nationally and in Minnesota, threats to public officials – including judges and court staff – are on the rise.
- A review of reported safety and security incidents at the Judicial Branch was conducted in 2024 and 2025. The results showed:
 - Total incidents reported went up by 47%.
 - Threats to a person, self, or property went up by 85%.
 - Reported disturbances occurring in a court facility went up by 50%.



Far Fewer Attorneys Applying for Open Judgeships

**# of Applicants per District Court
Judicial Vacancy, by year**



- The number of attorneys applying for each district court vacancy **declined by 38%** from 2020 to 2025.
- **2026 is looking even worse.** In the first half of 2026, the Governor received an average of just six applications for each judicial vacancy.
- The **uncompetitive salary offered to judges and other challenges of public service are clearly having an impact** on judicial recruitment.

A Growing Need for More Judges in Minnesota

- In 2025, the Minnesota Judicial Branch conducted a statewide **Judicial Weighted Caseload Study**
 - Every district court judge in the state tracked their time spent on case-related and non-case-related work over six weeks.
- Study found that district court judges are managing increasingly complex and demanding workloads:
 - **Minnesota needs approximately 40 additional district court judges** to effectively manage current caseload
- Minnesota Judicial Branch will begin talking to the Legislature about how to address this need during 2027 Legislative Session
- **Competitive salaries will be key to attracting qualified attorneys to the bench** to help the state's courts meet this increasing workload and ensure timely access to justice.

Judicial Council Request for Judicial Compensation

- The Minnesota Judicial Council is currently developing MJB's FY28/29 biennial budget request.
- As part of that request, the Judicial Council will ask the Legislature to increase judicial officer compensation by:
 - 10% in FY2028
 - 4% in FY2029

The Judicial Council believes these increases will help:

- Make judicial salaries competitive with experienced attorneys in the public and private sector.
- Address cost-of-living increases.
- Attract qualified attorneys to the bench.
- Ensure the Judicial Branch has the judges it needs to deliver timely and effective access to justice for the people of Minnesota.