

Compensation Council Meeting

July 16, 2026

Dear Members of the Compensation Council:

Thank you for the opportunity to once again address this council and share the perspective of the Commission on Judicial Selection. I am appearing here today and providing this statement solely in my capacity as chair of the commission. The views I express are my own and are based on my service in that role.

2025 was another busy year for judicial appointments, where the Governor made a total of 21 appointments to the Judicial Branch: 19 district court and 2 Court of Appeals. For district court vacancies, the commission reviewed 173 judicial applications, interviewed 97 candidates, and forwarded 51 finalists to the Governor. In addition, the at-large members served on a merit selection panel for two vacancies on the Court of Appeals, where the panel reviewed 28 applications, interviewed 11 candidates, and forwarded 4 finalists to the Governor.

In 2025, the commission received and considered applications for vacancies in all 10 of Minnesota's judicial districts. On average the number of applicants per round of applications for each judicial district in 2025 is as follows: First - 13, Second - 19, Third - 9, Fourth - 35, Fifth - 6, Sixth - 9, Seventh - 8, Eighth - 5, Ninth - 6, and Tenth - 15.¹ For metro² vacancies in 2025, the commission received on average 21 applications, compared to 7 for Greater Minnesota³ vacancies. Historically, during the Walz Administration, the commission has received on average 20 applications for metro vacancies and 9 applications for vacancies in Greater Minnesota.

Over the last few years, Minnesota's judicial salaries have dropped when ranked nationally. Last year, Minnesota's judicial salaries, depending on the level of court, ranked from twenty-third to twenty-seventh in the nation. This year, Minnesota's judicial salaries range from twenty-eighth to thirty-second in the nation.⁴

¹ Rounds of applications may include a single vacancy or multiple vacancies depending on how many vacancies are certified by the Supreme Court at the same time. A candidate may submit one application to be considered for multiple vacancies.

² Metro judicial districts include the First, Second, Fourth, and Tenth Judicial Districts.

³ Greater Minnesota judicial districts include the Third, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth districts.

⁴ <https://www.ncsc.org/resources-courts/state-state-tracking-judicial-salaries>

Currently in Minnesota, judicial salaries range from \$190,117 for district court judges to \$236,429 for the chief justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court.⁵ These salary levels have remained unchanged over the past two years⁶, resulting in Minnesota judicial salaries falling between \$2,918 and \$7,995 below the national average (see attached). To address this, I once again propose the following salary increases, at a minimum, to remain consistent with the national average and ensure we are able to recruit attorneys from all backgrounds to the bench:

- **District Court Judge:** \$200,000
- **Court of Appeals Judge:** \$225,000
- **Supreme Court Associate Justice:** \$250,000
- **Supreme Court Chief Justice:** \$277,000

With this proposed increase, Minnesota's Judicial Branch salaries would be commensurate with states across the nation and more in line with federal judicial salaries and the local legal market.

While it is difficult to quantify how many qualified attorneys decide not to pursue the bench because of the significant salary reduction that comes with a judgeship, it is consistently cited by prospective applicants as one of the primary reasons for not seeking a judicial position. Looking at legal market salary trends in Minnesota, starting salaries for first-year associates at large metropolitan law firms range from \$190,000 to \$225,000 per year and increase significantly over the course of their careers. On average, judges appointed by Governor Walz to the metro districts had over 15 years of practice experience prior to their appointment, meaning that many appointees had to take a substantial pay cut to pursue the bench. While the Commission on Judicial Selection strives to advance candidates that come from a variety of backgrounds, the financial compensation for state court judges compared to what someone can earn elsewhere has made it challenging to recruit interested applicants.

I have attached additional information regarding practice backgrounds of judicial applicants and Minnesota's judicial salaries. Please let me know if I can provide any additional information regarding the judicial selection process or the work of the commission.

⁵ <https://www.mncourts.gov/about-the-courts.aspx#:~:text=Supreme%20Court%20Associate%20Justice%20%2D%20%24214%2C935,District%20Court%20Chief%20Judge%20%2D%20%24199%2C622>

⁶ Judges in Minnesota's Judicial Branch have not received a salary increase since 2024.

Sincerely,

Erin Sindberg Porter
Chair, Commission on Judicial
Selection

Supplemental Information and Charts

MN Judicial Salaries vs National Salaries

Position	Minnesota Court Salaries	Average State Court Salaries	Lowest State Court Salaries	Highest State Court Salaries	Federal Court Salaries
District Court	\$190,117	\$194,251	\$138,600 (WV)	\$246,099 (IL)	\$249,900
Court of Appeals	\$202,528	\$210,523	\$142,500 (WV)	\$281,331 (IL)	\$264,900
Supreme Court Associate Justice	\$214,935	\$ 217,853	\$149,600 (WV)	\$298,910 (IL)	\$306,600
Supreme Court Chief Justice	\$236,429	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$320,700

District Court Judge Salary Ranking	District Court Salary	Ranking After Adjustment for Cost of Living
Colorado (25)	\$203,768	23
Georgia (26)	\$201,060	8
Florida (27)	\$200,836	17
Arizona (28)	\$200,000	18
Texas (29)	\$192,500	16
Minnesota (30)	\$190,117	21
New Hampshire (31)	\$189,365	47
Michigan (32)	\$186,164	13
Kansas (33)	\$185,550	20
North Dakota (34)	\$184,366	38

South Dakota (35)	\$183,694	22
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Practice Backgrounds of District Court Applicants (2019 – Current):

Public v. Private- All District Court Applicants

- Public – 64%
- Private – 36%

Public v. Private – Applicants in Greater Minnesota (outside of the First, Second, Fourth and Tenth Judicial Districts)

- Public – 75%
- Private – 25%

Practice Backgrounds:

Below are statistics regarding the practice background categories of applicants for district court vacancies since the Governor took office in 2019:

Overall:

- Private Practice: 34%
- Prosecutor: 30%
- Public Defender: 12%
- GOV – In House:⁷ 3%
- Public – Civil:⁸ 8%
- Other:⁹ 13%

Metro Applicants (First, Second, Fourth, and Tenth judicial districts):

- Private Practice: 37%
- Prosecutor: 26%
- Public Defender: 12%
- GOV – In House: 3%
- Public – Civil: 8%
- Other: 14%

Greater Minnesota Applicants (Third, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth judicial districts)

- Private Practice: 24%
- Prosecutor: 45%

⁷ GOV – In House includes judges who served as legal counsel for federal, state, or local government entities.

⁸ Public – Civil includes judges who worked in a state or local public law office in a non-prosecutorial position.

⁹ Other includes judges who served as judicial officers, professors, elected officials, etc.

- Public Defender: 16%
- GOV – In House: 1%
- Public – Civil: 6%
- Other: 8%

Minnesota judicial salaries compared to average national judicial salary

