



THE SUPREME COURT OF MINNESOTA
MINNESOTA JUDICIAL CENTER
25 REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. BLVD.
SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA 55155

CHAMBERS OF
LORIE S. GILDEA
CHIEF JUSTICE

(651) 296-3380

July 27, 2021

Dear Members of the Frontline Worker Pay Working Group:

Thank you for your service on the Frontline Worker Pay Working Group. Please accept this letter as my written testimony on behalf of the Minnesota Judicial Branch.

The Working Group faces difficult decisions in connection with its task of providing additional compensation to frontline workers in Minnesota. In the event that the Working Group determines to provide such compensation to employees working outside Minnesota's health care system and our nursing homes, I urge you to also provide frontline worker pay to the court staff who bravely and admirably provided essential in-person court operations during the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On March 13, 2020, Governor Walz declared a peacetime emergency in Minnesota. On that same day, the Minnesota Judicial Branch suspended most in-person courthouse operations across the state. This limited state of courthouse activity continued through May 18, 2020. During those two months, the Judicial Branch implemented new technologies to allow our courts to hear more cases using remote hearing technology and worked with the Minnesota Department of Health to develop new health and safety protocols for use in our court facilities. These steps allowed the Judicial Branch to gradually resume more and more in-court operations throughout the spring and summer of 2020.

However, even during those first two months of the pandemic, when the Governor's stay-at-home order was in place and most in-court proceedings were suspended, there remained a limited amount of essential court business that needed to be done inside courthouses. Primarily, this included holding court proceedings that involved a speedy trial demand on the part of a defendant, impacted the liberty of someone involved in the court system, or were vital to ensuring the public's safety.

Conducting these essential and constitutionally-mandated in-person court proceedings required an array of court staff to be present in courthouses and to interact with the public. These staff supported litigants, attorneys, and jurors; processed case files; maintained the court record; and provided assistance to court users and the public, among other important duties. In order to limit potential exposure for individual staff members, courts frequently rotated which staff were working in the courthouse and which staff were working remotely, and staggered staff scheduling to minimize the number of people working in a courthouse at any given time.

In total, the Minnesota Judicial Branch has identified 911 members of court staff from across the state who provided essential, in-person services inside court facilities between March 13, 2020, and May 18, 2020. Providing frontline worker pay to these court staff will recognize the essential nature of their work, and the increased risk of exposure faced by those who ensured the doors to justice remained open in Minnesota during the darkest days of this public health crisis.

At the Working Group's request, we would be happy to provide any additional detail you may need about these employees, their work locations, or the essential duties they performed. I can assure the Working Group that we were careful to specifically identify employees who worked inside court facilities and had direct face-to-face contact with court users and/or members of the public during these two months.

The Minnesota Judicial Branch recognizes that many Minnesotans performed essential duties during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are extremely grateful to everyone who helped our state navigate this historic crisis. As the Working Group decides how to distribute this well-deserved compensation to frontline workers, we encourage you to consider the essential role our courts play in protecting the rights of Minnesotans and ensuring the public's safety, as well as the important work our court staff perform in service of the third branch of government in our state.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Please let us know if we can provide any additional information during your deliberations.

Sincerely,



Lorie S. Gildea

Chief Justice

Minnesota Supreme Court