



**MINNESOTA  
JUDICIAL  
BRANCH**

**First Judicial District**

**Mission:** To provide justice through a system that assures equal access for the fair and timely resolution of cases and controversies.

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The First Judicial District has 36 judges and more than 250 staff that handle nearly 200,000 cases annually in the counties of Carver, Dakota, Goodhue, Le Sueur, McLeod, Scott and Sibley.

# The First Edition

A Newsletter about the First Judicial District of the State of Minnesota

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JANUARY 2013

## Dakota County District Court Launched eFiling and eService for Civil, Family, and Criminal Cases on December 3, 2012

Dakota County District Court is now offering attorneys the opportunity to participate in eFiling and eService with civil, family and criminal cases, effective December 3, 2012. In the first quarter of 2013, Dakota County will implement this opportunity for probate and juvenile cases, although exact go live dates have not been determined.

eFiling is the use of an online application, which requires no special hardware or software, to electronically file cases through the Judicial Branch case management system. The system accepts documents formatted in Word, WordPerfect, PDF, TIF, and Rich Text. The benefits of eFiling include not having to go to a courthouse to file, 24/7 access to eFiling, and no more faxing. The time savings over traditional filing methods far outweighs the minimal cost. All that is required is Internet access.

eService provides the opportunity to electronically serve registered parties and eliminate U.S. mail costs.

Not only will eFiling and eService benefit attorneys, it will also allow judges and court staff to view and work with the most up-to-date case documents from anywhere, even when someone else is viewing the case file.

eFiling and eService are two components of eCourtMN, a statewide initiative being implemented to streamline the court operating environment using new technologies and processes to eliminate paper-based case records.

For more information, please visit [www.mncourts.gov](http://www.mncourts.gov).

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## New Centralized Support Center Offers Assistance to eFilers

Attorneys, legal administrators, and government agencies seeking to eFile case documents in district courts or serve parties electronically can now get help over the phone or via eMail through the new, centralized MN eFile Support Center. Electronic filing of cases, or eFiling, is available for a number of Minnesota courts, including those in Cass, Clay, Dakota, Faribault, Hennepin, Morrison, Ramsey, and Washington counties, with more courts expected to be added in 2013 and 2014. While Support Center staff cannot provide

legal advice, advise callers on their rights, interpret law, or comment regarding court rulings, they can assist attorneys and law firm and government agency staff in the use of the Judicial Branch's electronic filing tool.

The Support Center is staffed 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding government holidays. Business support is available by phone at 651-227-2002 (if calling from area codes 612, 651, 763, or 952) or 1-855-291-8246 (if calling from all other area codes) or by eMail through the Judicial Branch Website

(<http://www.mncourts.gov/efilesupport>).

Technical support is available by calling 1-800-297-5377 or sending an eMail to [efiling.support@tylertech.com](mailto:efiling.support@tylertech.com).

"Creation of a centralized Support Center is an important step in our move to an electronic records environment that will help us streamline court operations and enhance service to litigants," said Jeffrey Shorba, State Court Administrator.

For more information, please visit [www.mncourts.gov](http://www.mncourts.gov).

## Governor Dayton Appoints Michael D. Wentzell to Fill First Judicial District Vacancy

On December 12, 2012, Governor Mark Dayton announced the appointment of Mr. Michael D. Wentzell as District Court Judge in Minnesota's First Judicial District. Mr. Wentzell will be replacing the Honorable Philip T. Kanning, who



retired in early 2012. The judgeship will be chambered at Chaska in Carver County.

"Michael Wentzell is an accomplished attorney and an exemplary public servant," said Governor Mark Dayton. "Mr. Wentzell's commitment to

justice, ethics, and service make him the ideal candidate to serve the

First District. I am confident he will carry out the responsibilities of this new role with honor and distinction."

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Mr. Wentzell serves as Chief Deputy Carver



Michael D. Wentzell

County Attorney, where he oversees office operations in relation to directing criminal, civil, and juvenile legal services. He previously worked as an Assistant Carver County Attorney and as an Associate Attorney with the law firm of Collins, Buckley, Sauntry, & Haugh, where he engaged in the general practice of law, including extensive work in family law. Mr. Wentzell received his B.A. with highest honors from Concordia College in Moorhead, MN, and received his J.D. with honors from the University of Minnesota Law School.

Additionally, Mr. Wentzell is actively involved with the Sexual Assault Interagency Council, Carver County Justice Advisory Council, Chaska Rotary Club, and is a former Professional Responsibility Ethics Investigator.

More information on the Commission on Judicial Selection, as well as vacancies it is currently considering, can be found at <http://mn.gov/governor/appointments/judicial-appointments/>.

## Implementation and Centralization of Electronic Transmission of Court Files to the Appellate Courts

By Gena Jones, Court Operations Manager, Dakota County

In April 2012, Dakota County District Court became the first state court to pilot the electronic transmission of files to our appellate courts (Minnesota Supreme Court and Court of Appeals) as part of the eCourtMN initiative. This initiative is an effort to move the state courts from a framework of paper files to an electronic information environment.



Additional local implementations of the electronic appeals process followed in Ramsey County on August 1 and Clay and Morrison counties on December 10.

This process has resulted in numerous savings for judges and court staff at both the district court and appellate levels. The district court eliminates time and physical

requirements spent retrieving a paper file, preparing the documents that are necessary for the appellate process, costs associated with delivering the file and exhibits to the appellate courts, and time spent ensuring the entire file was returned. The appellate courts have quicker access to the file and it can be easily reviewed by

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multiple judges and law clerks at the same time.

One purpose of a pilot is to make recommendations for changes and overall improvements to a rollout process. During Dakota's pilot, it was realized that many efficiencies could be gained by centralizing the process of creating the appellate record. Since the remaining counties of the First Judicial District (Carver, Goodhue, Le Sueur, McLeod, Scott and Sibley) are currently imaging and storing all court documents electronically, court administration felt it could increase consistency, accuracy and quality if the

process was centralized. Many smaller counties have fewer appealed cases and could benefit by having fewer staff prepare the electronic appeal record, consisting of case filings, exhibits and transcripts.

With seven counties and approximately 180 cases appealed annually, the district decided to take a west end and an east end approach to our centralization. Beginning November 19, 2012, McLeod County began handling all electronic appeals for the counties in the west end of the district (Carver, Le Sueur, McLeod, Scott and Sibley) and Goodhue County is taking care of the east end (Goodhue and Dakota). Fewer staff are required to be

trained to compile the electronic appeal and will more quickly become process experts.

This centralized model is being piloted to determine the feasibility of rolling out a centralized process or variations throughout the rest of the state courts. As the state court implements eFiling statewide, electronically submitting appealed cases will eliminate the need to print documents that are only being maintained electronically. It is anticipated that the Fourth Judicial District will implement a centralized appellate process in February 2013.

## Judicial Branch FY14-15 Biennial Budget Request By Janet Marshall, Inter-Governmental Relations Liaison

The 2013 Legislative Session kicked off on January 8. One of the top priorities for the Legislature will be the passage of the State's FY14-15 biennial budget. The Judicial Branch's FY14-15 biennial budget request, as shown below, reflects our priority of the ability to deliver prompt justice for the people

we serve. The Judicial Branch prides itself on efforts to provide efficient, effective, and cost beneficial services to the citizens of this state. Any reduction to the Branch budget will, however, undermine our ability to provide the prompt justice Minnesotans expect and deserve, and erode the public's

confidence in the fairness and competence of their government to deliver justice.

Moreover, in order to take full advantage of the technological advances we are implementing, it is crucial that the Judicial Branch be able to hire and retain qualified,

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MINNESOTA JUDICIAL BRANCH FY 14—15 Biennial Budget Request			
Request	FY14 Costs	FY15 Costs	TOTAL COSTS
Insurance Increases <sup>1</sup>	\$3,488,000.	\$7,479,000.	\$10,967,000.
Employee Compensation	4,614,000.	9,367,000.	13,981,000.
Judge Compensation	2,085,000.	4,254,000.	6,339,000.
MSRS—Judges 2% <sup>2</sup>	855,000.	888,000.	1,743,000.
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$11,042,000.</b>	<b>\$21,988,000.</b>	<b>\$33,030,000.</b>

<sup>1</sup> The Minnesota Management and Budget Office is estimating insurance increases of 9% on 1/1/2013 and 9.9% on 1.1.2014 and 1/1/2015. The Branch does not negotiate its own insurance agreements—it participates in the general state plan with benefits negotiated by MN Management and Budget. The Branch cannot absorb these costs.

<sup>2</sup> Per Minnesota District Judges Association recommendation

skilled, and motivated workers. This is why the Branch’s budget priority is to seek compensation increases for staff and judges. Judicial Branch employees have not received on-going, permanent across the board compensation increases since FY08 (July 1, 2009). During this same period other parts of state government and local jurisdictions have received raises. Our employees, therefore, continue to fall behind other public sector employees who have received pay increases. For example, Executive Branch employees received step increases in FY11

and FY12. Our budget request seeks additional funding so that we may recognize the on-going efforts of our staff. The salaries of our judges have similarly been frozen for four years. As a result, Minnesota judges now rank near the bottom third nationally in judicial pay.

The budget request also recognizes that the Judge Pension Fund is currently underfunded. Based on input from the Minnesota State Retirement System, legislation will be introduced to address the deficit. One of the components of the

proposal is to increase the employer contribution to the Plan by 2 percent. This budget request includes funding to pay for the increased employer contribution.



## Scott County Court Administrator Appointed



Heather Kendall

Judge Edward Lynch, Chief Judge of the First Judicial District, signed an Order on November 9, 2012, appointing Heather Kendall as Court Administrator for Scott County, Minnesota to serve at the pleasure of a majority of the District Judges of the First Judicial District.

Prior to working with the courts, Ms. Kendall

was a practicing attorney. In 2000 Ms. Kendall started her career with the courts as a Law Clerk in Hennepin County. She came to the First Judicial District as the manager of the District Central Assignment Office. After five years in that position she became a Court Operations Manager in Dakota County District Court. Subsequently, Ms. Kendall served as the Court Administrative Manager of Dakota County District Court, a position she held for approximately 6 years.

During her tenure in Dakota County Ms. Kendall managed all areas of district court and served as the lead for many major court innovation projects. Ms. Kendall has been very involved in numerous local, district and state committees including the First District Equal Justice Committee, Dakota County and First District Calendaring and Assignment System Study (CASS)

Committees, Adjunct Judicial Officer Committee and the State eCourtMN Rollout Committee.

Scott County is located in the southwest corner of the Twin Cities metropolitan area, 23 miles from Minneapolis, on the Minnesota River. Scott County is one of the fastest-growing counties in both Minnesota and the United States. It has 6 chambered judges and 30 court administration staff.

Ms. Kendall's tenure as Scott County Court Administrator began on December 3, 2012.



Scott County Courthouse

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