Chief Justice Gildea Delivers State of the Judiciary

“The state of the Minnesota judiciary is strong, and together, we are getting even stronger,” said Minnesota Chief Justice Lorie S. Gildea following her delivery of the annual State of the Judiciary speech. This keynote speech was delivered to a packed convention hall of more than 400 attendees on Thursday, June 28 at the Minnesota State Bar Association convention.

“Good afternoon.

Thank you for that warm welcome and for inviting me to speak today.

This speech was billed as a State of the Judiciary address, so let me start there. I am proud to tell the members of Minnesota’s Bar Association that the state of the Minnesota judiciary is strong, and getting stronger. This is due in large part to our shared advocacy and public outreach in support of a robust, independent judiciary.

We have come so far from where we were

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a decade ago, as we struggled to maintain access to justice in the midst of back-to-back recessions and annual budget shortfalls. Our advocacy, combined with a Governor who has championed justice system funding and strong legislative support, has helped bring our courts back from the brink. We’ve brought down our case backlogs in many areas, expanded services for self-represented litigants, and successfully modernized our courts through our transition to electronic case records and eFiling. None of this would have been possible without the support of the bar, and I’m deeply grateful to everyone who has played a part in this remarkable turnaround.

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing our judiciary right now is one that many businesses and large organizations are facing these days—personnel turnover. I’m guessing many of you have noticed the changing faces in our courthouses in recent years—from the judges presiding over your cases, to the court clerks and staff helping you at service counters. When you step back and take a look at this issue from the statewide perspective, it really is astounding.

Since the start of 2012—just over six years ago—135 new judges have joined our district court bench. That means nearly half of current district court judges joined the bench since 2012. We have seen this same level of turnover in our appellate courts. There have been 11 appointments to the 19-member Court of Appeals since 2012. And believe it or not, there have been six appointments to the seven-member Supreme Court since 2012. As Chief Justice during that entire span, I try not to take it personally. I could show you the same type of data about our staff. More than half of our current staff joined the courts after 2012.

I know workforce challenges are not unique—those of you from large law firms could probably share similar stories and data. But I wanted to share with you that our court system has not been immune from the big demographic challenges facing our state and our country, and we’re focusing a lot of time and effort these days on staff development, new judge orientation, peer-to-peer mentoring, and other strategies to prepare this new generation of court leaders.

Despite this high level of turnover, the foundation of the justice system in Minnesota is presently very stable. That stability gives us the opportunity to think strategically, long-term, about how we can make tomorrow’s justice system even better than today’s. In the Judicial Branch, the responsibility for building and monitoring a strategic plan falls to the Judicial Council. For those of you who aren’t familiar, the Judicial Council is comprised of all the chief judges from our 10 judicial districts, plus representatives from both our appellate courts, as well as a handful of other judges and court leaders from across the state. The Council serves as the policy-making authority for our courts—it determines our biennial budget request to the Legislature and our own internal budget, it sets statewide policies for judges and staff, and, perhaps most importantly, every two years it adopts a new strategic plan for our courts. As Chief Justice, I chair the Council.

Our strategic planning process is so critical to the success of our courts. It’s an opportunity for our leaders to step back every two years and assess how we’re doing. We talk about our performance measures: are we getting cases processed in a timely manner? Do we have enough judges and staff to do our work? Then we look for opportunities to address known issues—perhaps a way to leverage new technology to make our courts operate more efficiently. And of course we also focus on our court users—how can we improve our service to attorneys, our justice partners, self-represented litigants, and to the public as a whole?

Yogi Berra once said that ‘if you don’t know where you are going, you’ll end up someplace else.’ That, in a humorous
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State of the Judiciary
(Continued from page 2)

nutshell, sums up why strategic planning is so important. Our courts have an obligation to both provide a fair and accessible system of justice to the people of Minnesota and to be excellent stewards of public resources. Smart, thoughtful strategic planning is how we meet both those benchmarks.

Today, I want to talk with you a little bit about the successes we achieved, under our strategic plan in the past year, and to preview a couple of items that are coming down the road as part of our current planning process.

Over the past year, much of our strategic focus has been on how we can take the new technologies we built in our eCourt transformation and use them to make our courts work better for the people we serve. We call this process reengineering. One of the biggest benefits of our transition to electronic court records has been the ability to move case processing and other administrative work across the state in the blink of an eye.

This has opened the door for all sorts of new ways of doing business—things we couldn’t have dreamed of doing when we operated in a paper world. Last summer, as part of our strategic plan, we undertook a major reengineering effort aimed at ensuring that we continue to provide access to justice in every corner of the state. At this Conference last year, I spoke about how we were centralizing some of our work—like the process of summoning jurors, for example—and moving that work into 17 of our smallest, most rural counties. This has allowed us to keep courthouses staffed and customer service windows open in those counties.

In recent months, each of our districts have begun using staff specialists to review filed court documents. Rather than, say, having five staff people spending 20 percent of their day reviewing, accepting, and classifying case filings, we have one person doing it full time. In more rural areas, one or two people might be doing this work for several counties. Again, the idea here is that by staff specializing in the work, they become more proficient and efficient.

As part of another reengineering initiative, we are once again strengthening our oversight of court-appointed conservators. Some of you may be aware of our nation-leading Conservator Account Auditing Program. Through this program, which we call CAAP, we use highly trained auditors to review large conservator-managed accounts. This Program has been a remarkable success.

Our current initiative is taking that same model and applying it to smaller conservator accounts. Rather than asking judges and court staff—who likely don’t have much finance or auditing experience—to make sure these accounts are being well-managed, we will now have specialized accounting specialists monitoring all conservator-managed accounts in the state.

We are extremely proud of our efforts on this front. This is such an important topic as our state ages, and as more and more people become reliant on guardianship and conservatorship. We’ve seen so many horror stories from across the country about the devastating harm an unethical guardian or conservator can do. While we know the vast majority of people who serve in these roles do so responsibly, these enhanced safeguards are an important way Minnesota protects its vulnerable citizens.

Another area where technology is opening new doors for us is in the provision of interpreter services. These days, it seems like technology is changing every part of our lives. As part of our strategic plan, we have been pilot-testing new remote interpreting technology.

This technology allows an interpreter to sit in a central location and appear virtually in courtrooms across the state. Using this technology, an interpreter working in a Moorhead office can appear in a courtroom

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in Bemidji in the morning, Willmar before lunch, and Duluth in the afternoon. We recently had a demonstration of this technology at the Judicial Council and came away extremely impressed with how far video technology has come. The judges involved in the pilot report that it is now working seamlessly in their courtrooms. Based on the success of this pilot, we’re now in the process of determining how best to expand the use of this technology in the future.

Obviously, having an interpreter in the courtroom is preferable and is still going to be the standard for trials and lengthy hearings. But in situations where someone may need a rare language translated for a five-minute hearing, or there is a short hearing in a remote location, and we’re struggling to find an interpreter who can get there in a timely manner, this new remote technology can be a real asset for everyone involved in the process.

Another way we’re using technology as part of our strategic plan is in how we support those who come into our court system without the benefit of an attorney—self-represented litigants. As you’re no doubt aware, this is an issue that has exploded in recent years. By one measure, more than half of civil cases heard in our district courts have, at some point, at least one party that is self-represented. I know this is an issue of importance to the bar, and it’s an issue we take seriously in our courts, too. First and foremost, it’s an access to justice issue, as we strive to make sure that everyone who comes into our courts has an equal chance to be heard and their cases fairly resolved. But it’s also an issue that affects our processing of cases, and our efforts to get cases heard and decided in a timely manner. Simply put, cases move faster and get resolved sooner when attorneys, or litigants who understand court processes, are involved. Our goal in the court system is to make sure that self-represented litigants have the tools they need to bring their issues to court and an understanding of how court processes work, so that they meet their deadlines and are ready for hearings.

All in all, Minnesota has been doing a pretty good job of this. In fact, we’ve been rated among the top states in the nation in providing assistance to those who can’t afford an attorney—an accomplishment that both the bench and bar can celebrate. From our statewide Self-Help Center to the work of volunteer attorneys across the state, this is a real success in Minnesota.

But we are trying to build on this success by using technology to better serve these customers. Earlier this year, we updated all the court forms we offer on our website to fillable smart forms. These smart forms have built-in intelligence that make it faster and easier for self-represented litigants to accurately create and file necessary forms.

In 2018, we’re working to launch Guide & File—an online tool that uses web-based ‘interviews’ to help people create court forms. Much like TurboTax or similar software, Guide & File asks users simple questions and then uses the answers to those questions to produce a court form that can be printed or filed electronically with the court.

Another place where we are working to provide more self-help tools comes from the Justice for All project, and I want to thank the MSBA members who have been part of the Justice for All grant project team over the past year. Minnesota was one of just seven states selected in 2016 to receive funding through the National Center for State Court’s Justice for All project. Our state’s project team spent all of 2017 drafting a project plan for that grant and recently secured a second round of funding to begin implementation.

This funding is going towards developing a ‘one-stop shop’ approach to serving Minnesotans with civil legal needs. By next year, Minnesotans needing civil legal assistance will be able to visit LawHelpMN.org and, by answering a few questions, be directed to the best resources for their needs.

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simple questions about their legal issues, be
directed to a tailored set of the most relevant
self-help materials, including videos,
booklets, and guided form tools. By
answering a few more questions about their
location, status, and income, users will also
be able to connect with free and low-cost
legal services. This tool will be supported by
existing civil legal aid organizations and—as
developed through this project—an expanded roster of attorneys prepared to
offer reduced-fee legal assistance to
qualifying individuals.

This is really an outstanding opportunity for
Minnesota, and I’m proud of the partnership
we’ve built within the justice community to
make this project a success. And we can all
celebrate the fact that a year from now we’ll
have this incredible new resource available
for Minnesotans in need of legal help.

There is one more thing to cover on the
access to justice topic because I want to
share with you an item that I, as Chief
Justice, am personally pushing to have
included in the Judicial Branch’s strategic
plan for the next biennium. That plan is still
going through the approval process, but I
want to preview this topic with all of you,
because it comes directly out of work done
through the MSBA.

As I’m certain many of you will remember, a
few short years ago the MSBA engaged in a
really robust discussion about how to tackle
Minnesota’s lingering civil justice gap—the
large share of people who can’t afford an
attorney but who don’t qualify for civil legal
aid services. I was so encouraged by the
MSBA’s willingness to take on this difficult
issue and was heartened by the formation of
the bar’s Alternative Legal Models Task
Force. The Task Force focused its work on
how to bring new resources to serve low and
modest income clients. In so doing, the Task
Force recognized the challenges facing
practicing lawyers in reaching those potential
clients. The options considered by the Task
Force reflect a need to supplement the
existing system in which lawyers exclusively
can provide legal advice.

After many months of research, discussion,
and debate, the Task Force ultimately
recommended that the MSBA work toward
implementation of two proposals. The first
proposal was designed after a model
employed in British Columbia that allows a
paraprofessional to become a Legal
Practitioner, and provide legal advice, and, in
some circumstances, represent a client in
court and administrative proceedings under
the direct supervision of an attorney. Utah is
currently examining this model.

The second proposal was modeled after the
State of Washington’s Limited License Legal
Technicians model—or the Triple LT model.
The Triple LT model allows licensed
paralegals or administrative assistants to
acquire a certain level of education and
experience to qualify for licensing through the
passage of an exam. Once licensed, the
Legal Technician would be able to practice
law in a specific area and in limited scope.

Now, I know this is a complex issue, and one
that the MSBA has discussed and debated at
length in recent years. Of course, I also know
that the bar, after much discussion, ultimately
decided to endorse either of the
recommendations. And with that, the work of
the Alternative Legal Models Task Force has
been seemingly sitting on the shelf for the
past year.

What I’m proposing to my fellow judges as
part of our strategic planning process is that
we take that Task Force’s report off the shelf,
blow off the dust, and give it another look.
I’ve read the report and am impressed by the
tremendous work that went into it. I am
convinced that there is real value in those
recommendations and a real path forward for
finally shrinking Minnesota’s civil justice gap.

The Task Force’s report concludes by stating
that failing to act on these ideas will mean
people of low and moderate incomes will
continue to face barriers to justice in our

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state. I think that is exactly the right message, which is why I want the Judicial Branch to work with you, our partners in the bar, and the broader civil justice community, to give these recommendations another look, and see if we can’t find a way to expand access to justice in our state.

Finally today, I want to talk about one other topic that I know is of great importance to all of you and this organization. And I can tell you that it’s of equal importance to my colleagues on the bench. Last August, the ABA released a report on lawyer well-being, based on important research conducted in 2016 that showed stunning levels of alcohol abuse, depression, and other serious health issues within the legal profession. A second survey showed similarly concerning data among law students throughout the country. As the report states: these devastating levels of mental and chemical health issues do not support ‘a profession dedicated to client service and dependent on the public trust.’

I know this report was a wakeup call for many of us, myself included, who didn’t grasp the full extent of these issues within our profession. And now that we’ve been shown the full extent, we have a responsibility—as members of the bench and bar—to be part of a robust effort to reverse these trends. I want to applaud the MSBA for its work on this issue, helping to raise awareness and provide practical training to attorneys around the state. And, of course, I want to once again commend the work of Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers and remind you that free help is just a phone call or e-mail away.

Most of all, I want all of you to know that the bench also takes this issue extremely seriously. We, too, try to raise awareness and support among judges and court staff on these issues. And next year, the Supreme Court, through the leadership of Justice David Lillehaug, will be convening a ‘call to action’ education conference on this very important topic. We hope this is a clear signal from our Court that we are committed to engaging on this issue today, tomorrow, and for however long it takes to improve the health and well-being of those in the legal profession.

As easy as it is for others to make light of or disparage our profession, attorneys, judges, and others in the legal community play a crucial role in upholding the rights and freedoms of citizens, growing our economy, and ensuring safe neighborhoods and livable communities. This is a profession to be proud of, and one in which you have a real opportunity to make a difference in people’s lives. We need to do everything we can to make it a profession that people take pride in, find joy in, and can be part of a balanced, healthy lifestyle.

Minnesota has one of the strongest, most accessible court systems in the country, due largely to the contributions of the women and men who make up our state’s Bar Association. It’s a partnership that I, my colleagues on the Supreme Court, and the entire Judicial Branch deeply value.

As I close today, besides offering you my thanks for inviting me here today and for your continued partnership, I will leave you with some homework. The success of our justice system in recent years has been supported by a renewed investment from the legislative and executive branches, after several years of disinvestment and budget cuts.

Throughout this summer and fall, many of you will have the chance to speak to those seeking office in the other branches. There is no better time to talk to elected officials and candidates about the importance of our justice system then when they are asking for your vote.

While times have been good lately, we all can remember too well when our justice system was pushed to the brink. When we had to turn customers away from courthouse windows. When people charged with crimes

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were being released because we couldn’t meet their speedy trial demands. I would urge all of you to raise the profile of our justice system during this important election season and make sure that candidates across the state know that the bench and bar are united behind a high-functioning, accessible, independent, and adequately funded justice system for the people of Minnesota. By doing so, you will help safeguard the constitutional promise that is our justice system.

Thank you again for having me. Thank you for listening and thank you for all you have done and all I know that you will do for the cause of justice in this state.”


McLeod County Courthouse Safer Upstairs and Downstairs

Tuesday, April 17th was a big day at the McLeod County Courthouse, and a group of local students were there to check it out.

As part of Student Government Day, students from McLeod County schools sat in on the County Board meeting in the morning. Then they were invited to sit down with county staff and elected officials - such as McLeod County Attorney Michael Junge - and learn about public service.

In the afternoon, the students were invited to the newly renovated Courtroom 3 on the second floor of the courthouse, where they heard from First District Judges Jody Winters and Jessica Maher about the improvements, and public service.

“(The courtroom) is now safer, more secure and handicap accessible,” Winters said.

Then, after speaking about his own career, Associate Justice G. Barry Anderson, formerly of Hutchinson, offered the county a dedication on behalf of the state in thanks for the courtroom improvements.

Anderson told students that most people interact with the court system in county courthouses like the one in Glencoe, despite media attention often following high profile cases and higher
courts. He said many involved in the courts are called to volunteerism as part of public service, which includes time spent in service groups, and serving as public defenders.

“We redid the jury box, the entire bench, the counsel tables, and we also added a door that leads over into the jail,” said Court Administrator Karen Messner. “As part of the jail addition, a hallway came over so we could keep the prisoner secure, and make it more secure for everyone in the courtroom as well, versus walking a prisoner down the hallway.”

The work was done during a nearly complete $7.54 million expansion to the McLeod County Courthouse and Jail. In addition to adding more space to the jail, new features for visitation, and a new lobby, the project increased security in the courthouse with features such as electronic locks.

McLeod County Sheriff Scott Rehmann said the biggest benefit is the ability to “house our inmates here, versus housing them outside, and the logistics and cost that entails.”

He said there are plans to add a screening area to the lobby.

“That will be added security for people working here, or coming in,” he said.

“We also (now) have presentation capabilities, which can speed up trials,” Messner said. “What we used to do is, if we had a picture, we would pass it from juror to juror. Now what we can do is the attorney can put it on (digital) display. They can all see it. They are seeing the same thing at the same time.”

Work was also done to reorganize offices and judge chambers.

Following the dedication, the County Board offered a separate dedication to the Tudhope Family via a plaque in the new lobby entrance. The late Annamarie Tudhope, a newspaper publisher, gave more than $3.9 million to improve the jail, which was included in the $7.54 million project.

Students who attended Student Government Day have been invited to participate in an essay contest reflecting on their experience, and focusing on how McLeod County serves the underserved. The Hutchinson Leader, McLeod County Chronicle and McLeod County have offered prizes for the contest.

* This article is a revised version of an article by Jeremy Jones that appeared in the Hutchinson Leader on April 21, 2018.

Equal Justice Committee Hosts Community Listening Session in Shakopee

On Tuesday, May 22, 2018, the First Judicial District Equal Justice Committee, in partnership with local court and community partners, hosted a Community Listening Session at the Shakopee Community Center. The event was held to provide area residents with an opportunity to share ideas, concerns, and other feedback related to access and fairness within Minnesota’s court system.

The event was open to the public and no preregistration was needed to attend.

During the event, attendees met in small groups and shared their ideas and concerns. The session was facilitated by the First Judicial District Equal Justice Committee and was an important opportunity for community members to engage with the court system and provide input on how it can better serve the needs of the community.

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groups with judges and court administration, and had the opportunity to provide face-to-face input about why they came to the session, what they would like the court representatives to know, and what changes or improvement they think are needed in the justice system. The session was moderated by Vicky Carlson, Scott County Court Administrator. First District Judge Ann Offermann, who is also a member of the Equal Justice Committee, provided an overview of the Minnesota Judicial Branch. Additionally, several other First Judicial District judges and administrative staff participated in the listening session.

This dialog allowed for many issues to be discussed, which ranged from improving our subpoena resources, listening more to litigants, juror call-in process, safety of litigants, and providing additional resources for individuals before going to court. A full report that will list the concerns raised and changes to be implemented as a result of this listening session will be available for viewing online on or before August 22, 2018 at [http://www.mncourts.gov/MinnesotaJudicialCouncil/CEJ.aspx](http://www.mncourts.gov/MinnesotaJudicialCouncil/CEJ.aspx).

The Minnesota Judicial Branch created the Committee for Equality and Justice whose mission is to work collaboratively across the Judicial Branch to advance the efforts of eliminate bias from court operations, promoting equal access to the court, and inspiring a high level of trust and public confidence in the Minnesota Judicial Branch. Since 2010, this was the third community listening session held by the First Judicial District Equal Justice Committee. Previous listening sessions were held in Chaska and Apple Valley.
On May 11, 2018, the First Judicial District awarded its eighth annual Amicus Curiae Award to Molly Trieschman and Fredrikson & Byron, P.A. The Amicus Curiae Award, meaning Friend of the Court, is an annual recognition of persons who have provided exceptional service, leadership or other contributions to assist the courts in the First Judicial District discharge their constitutional responsibility for the administration of justice.

Molly Trieschman joined the Le Sueur County Drug Court in 2016 as a Recovery Specialist, where she assists participants with housing, employment, and insurance concerns, as well as making sure they are following the program’s requirements. Molly describes her role by saying she’s “not out to get them in trouble, but to help find a proper solution if they do.”

In June 2017, the Le Sueur County Drug Court Coordinator left her position leaving a gap in the administration of the drug court. When asked by the drug court team, Molly undertook the role of Coordinator, which included all of the administrative and financial duties of running the Le Sueur County Drug Court. Molly took on the duties of this position while maintaining her position as the Recovery Specialist.

Molly continued to be both the Recovery Specialist and the Coordinator for eight months, until a new coordinator was hired in February 2018. During this extensive period, both the judicial team and the participants relied on Molly’s dedication to keep the program going, with one participant stating, “She shows by her actions and how she treats us that she cares and has faith in us. She helps us do the right thing.”

Judge Mark Vandelist, the First District Court Judge chambered in Le Sueur County, says “without Molly taking on this duel role and working two completely different full time jobs, I don’t think our drug court would have survived.” The Le Sueur County Drug Court has nine graduates and currently has ten active

(L-R) Chief Judge Kathryn Messerich, Molly Trieschman, and Judge Mark Vandelist

(L-R) Judge Caroline Lennon; Fredrikson & Byron Representatives Greg Karpenko, Joe Cassioppi, Pam Wandzel, Joe Dixon; Chief Judge Kathryn Messerich

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participants. Molly’s work has had an effect on over 50 children of graduates and participants, as well as countless others by helping assist in their recovery efforts.

The law firm of Fredrikson & Byron was recognized for providing volunteer attorneys from their firm to serve as conciliation court referees in the First Judicial District. Eight experienced civil litigators from Fredrikson & Byron are now covering 4 half-day conciliation court calendars each month in Scott County. The program has freed up the local judges for other assignments and has helped relieve the chronic need for additional judicial resources in the First District. These referees have allowed the local judges to concentrate on efforts to start a treatment court and devote additional judges to the growing child protection caseload.

The referees currently serving are Joe Cassioppi, Joe Dixon, Leah Janus, Greg Karpenko, Dave Marshall, Jeff Post, Rick Snyder, and Mark Vyvyan. They have been supported by staff at the firm reviewing the files and assisting in preparation each week. Those support staff are Jan Stahura, Deb Synowczynski, Cathy Haugen, Cindy Thomas, Julie Ciesynski, Mary Peterman, and Linda McCormick. Pam Wandzel, the firm's pro bono and community service director, has been instrumental in scheduling and training.

“The generous contribution by Fredrikson & Byron assists the First Judicial District in providing prompt, quality service to the people of our communities and demonstrates once again how important volunteer attorneys are to the overall administration of justice”, said Chief Judge Kathy Messerich when presenting the awards.

Past recipients of the Amicus Curiae Award are: Liz Reppe, Dana McKenzie, Merlyn Meinerts, Mary Freyberg, the law firm of Lindquist & Vennum, Sharon Freiling, Karissa Richardson, Dan Beeson, Wayne Jagow, Lloyd Moosbrugger, Bob Morris, Jerome Wickert, Mary Stapleton, Chuck Brill, and Manual Roman.

Minnesota Judicial Branch Launches New Online Training for Guardians, Conservators

The Minnesota Judicial Branch has launched a new online training for individuals who have been appointed by a court to serve as a guardian or conservator. The interactive, self-paced training module aims to help new guardians and conservators understand their roles and responsibilities, including the statutes and policies in place to protect vulnerable individuals. The training may also be used as a refresher course by experienced guardians or conservators, or to answer specific questions about their duties.

(Continued on page 12)
The online conservatorship and guardianship training module was developed through grant funding from the State Justice Institute and in partnership with the National Center for State Courts.

Enhancing the training of court-appointed guardians and conservators is just the latest step the Minnesota Judicial Branch has taken to better protect vulnerable individuals from abuse and financial mismanagement. In 2012, the Minnesota Judicial Branch launched the Conservator Account Auditing Program, which has modernized and improved the way the state oversees the work of conservators. Conservators appointed in Minnesota now submit finance reports through MyMNConservator, an online application that contains built-in “red flag” logic that automatically reviews filed accounts and alerts auditors to possible errors, inconsistencies, or transactions that require further review. In addition, a team of trained experts working as part of a centralized conservator account auditing center now conduct compliance audits on conservator accounts from across the state.

The Conservator Account Auditing Program has been lauded nationally as an example of state government innovation and as a model for better protecting vulnerable individuals in need of conservatorship or guardianship. The Minnesota Judicial Branch is currently developing MyMinnesotaGuardian, which aims to make it faster and easier for guardians to submit their well-being reports to the court, and simpler for the court to review and track these reports and identify any concerns.

New Online Training
(Continued from page 11)

The online conservatorship and guardianship training module can be found at


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Highlights of the new training module include:

- A detailed, step-by-step explanation of the guardianship and conservatorship processes, from the legal process by which a conservator or guardian is approved, to the powers granted to a court-appointed guardian or conservator, to the specific reporting requirements that guardians and conservators must meet.
- Extensive information on the legal rights of individuals who need a guardianship or a conservatorship.
- A glossary of key legal terms conservators and guardians may encounter in their duties.
- Links to other helpful guardianship and conservatorship resources, including relevant court forms and the Minnesota Judicial Branch’s Guardianship and Conservatorship Manual.
Goodhue County Sponsors Children and the Law Day

Nothing brightens up the courtroom like a rambunctious group of fifth grade children eager to learn the ins and outs of the court system.

For as long as local historians can recall, Goodhue County has hosted local groups of students for a day that has become known as Children and the Law. This type of event allows Goodhue County to embody the vision of the Judicial Branch by highlighting for the general public and those who use the court system that we are accessible, fair, consistent, responsive, free of discrimination, independent, and well-managed.

The day starts with providing students an overview of the judicial system and educating them about jury duty. A deputy sheriff is brought in to show the kids what they use in their daily work, and to teach them how important safety is in the courthouse. The students get a tour of the entire building and individual courtrooms where the highlights typically include talking candidly to a judge, meeting attorneys, and if they are lucky, sitting in on live court. Some typical questions include “have you ever sent someone to jail?” and “how much money do you make?”

The day ends with a mock trial where local attorneys volunteer their time in a case involving whether or not a student has stolen a candy bar from the town grocery store. Jurors, judge, attorneys and court staff are chosen and all play roles in what has become a very interesting and humorous affair.

Children and the Law Day is an opportunity to connect with young children, educate them on one of the three branches of government, and perhaps even inspire them to consider a career in the justice system.