



**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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[First Judicial District Public Website](#)

The First Judicial District has 36 judges and more than 250 staff that handle over 120,000 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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FALL 2019

## Statewide Hearing eReminders Rolled Out for Eight Major Case Types

Parties to a court case can now enroll in optional eReminders to receive a text and email notification to remind them of an upcoming court date. Notifications are available for parties with an Adult Criminal/Traffic, Juvenile Delinquency, Juvenile Traffic, Juvenile Petty Offense, Domestic Abuse, Family, Eviction, or Juvenile Protection case in Minnesota District (Trial) Court. [Hearing eReminders](#) will notify parties of the date, time, and location of an upcoming hearing.

During an 18-month pilot of hearing eReminders in Hennepin County District Court, bench warrants for failures to appear dropped by 25 percent.

During the same time frame, July 2017 through January 2019, parties who received some form of hearing eReminder were 35 percent more likely to show up to their hearings.

“Hearing eReminders have been shown to improve hearing attendance and reduce the number of bench warrants for failures to appear,” said Minnesota Supreme Court Chief Justice Lorie S. Gildea. “The statewide launch of hearing eReminders is another example of a successful Minnesota Judicial Branch pilot project proving effective for Minnesotans and being improved and

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Hearing eReminders  
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expanded to the full state.”

In most cases, two reminders will be sent: a reminder three days before the hearing, and another one day before the hearing. Reminders are sent only one day before the hearing for



Eviction cases and only three days before the hearing for Adoption cases. Enrollment in eReminders an optional courtesy service to help parties remember to appear for a scheduled hearing, but do not replace an official

notice to appear. Parties will still need to follow instructions from the court for all required appearances.

Additional information regarding eligible case types and access to the enrollment portal can be found at [mncourts.gov/Hearing-eReminders](http://mncourts.gov/Hearing-eReminders).

## Governor Walz Appoints Dannia Edwards to Fill First Judicial District Vacancy



Dannia Edwards

On September 3, 2019, Governor Tim Walz announced the appointment of Dannia Edwards as District Court Judge in Minnesota’s First Judicial District. Ms.

Edwards will be replacing the Honorable Thomas W. Pugh and will be chambered at Hastings in Dakota County.

“I am honored to appoint Dannia Edwards as a District Court Judge in the First Judicial District,” said Governor Walz. “Her legal career has included a range of experiences in public service, civil rights, and education - all of which demonstrate her remarkable qualities that will serve the people of the First Judicial District well.”

“Dannia Edwards demonstrates a deep

commitment to equity and due process,” said Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan. “It is clear that she cares deeply about servant leadership and doing right by the people of Dakota County.”

Ms. Edwards is an Assistant Public Defender for the First Judicial District representing individuals charged with criminal offenses. Previously, Ms. Edwards was an assistant public defender for the Third Judicial District Public Defender’s Office representing individuals in juvenile and CHIPS

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Governor Appoints Danna Edwards  
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matters. She is also a former contract attorney for Milberg, Weiss via Esquire Group, a senior associate for Hassan & Reed, Ltd., a trial attorney for the Legal Rights Center, and an associate for several other law firms. Ms. Edwards serves on the Faculty of the National Institute of Trial Advocacy and as an Adjunct Professor at Mitchell Hamline School of Law. Ms. Edwards has previous experience working in private law firms as well as in a major

accounting firm. Her community involvement includes a deep commitment to Dakota County, service as the State Legal Representative of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, fulfilling multiple roles within the Mt. Olivet M.B. Church, being a Mentor for the Family Improvement Network Mentor Program, and participation in a variety of other organizations.

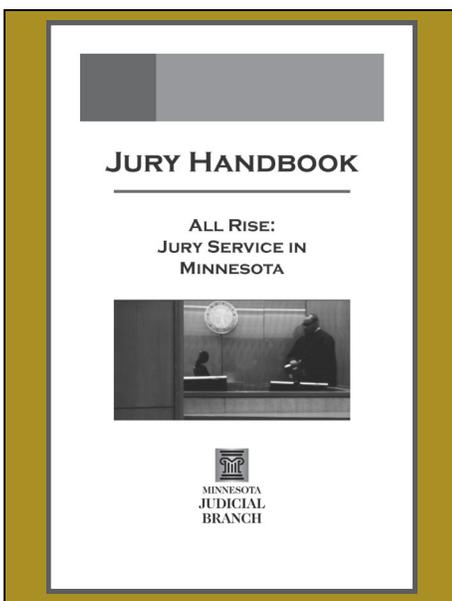
Ms. Edwards received her BA from

Albion College, her MBA from Wayne State University, and her JD from the Ohio State University College of Law.

Minnesota’s First Judicial District consists of Carver, Dakota, Goodhue, Le Sueur, McLeod, Scott and Sibley Counties.

More information on the Commission on Judicial Selection can be found at <https://mn.gov/governor/administration/appointments/commissionjudicialselection/>.

## New Juror Orientation Video and Handbook Released



The Minnesota Judicial Branch has unveiled a new [juror orientation video](#) and supplemental [juror handbook](#) to help potential jurors be prepared for service and have clear expectations about their role and responsibilities. The previous juror orientation video was released in 2003 with a minor update in 2012.

“The juror orientation video and handbook are key tools for jurors and judges as we prepare for our respective roles in the courtroom,” said Second Judicial District

Judge JaPaul Harris. “Courtrooms can be intimidating so it is important that jurors are well prepared for the environments, expectations, and experiences of jury service.”

The high-resolution video features two of Minnesota’s newest courthouses, in Washington and Sherburne counties, to show the modern juror experience. Actual court staff and one of Minnesota’s newest judges, Judge Harris, are featured in the video to offer a true-to-life view of how the

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New Jury Orientation Video and Handbook  
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courtroom operates when jurors are present. The new orientation video features clear social media and communication expectations for jurors.

The video and handbook can be viewed on the Minnesota Judicial Branch webpage dedicated to jury information and will be shown in all 105 courthouses to summoned

jurors to prepare them for service. Both are plain-language tools that were developed with expertise from throughout Minnesota.

## Annual Report to the Community is Now Available

The [Minnesota Judicial Branch Annual Report](#) to the Community is now available.

The Report details the significant efforts of the Minnesota Judicial Branch throughout the past year to improve and enhance the delivery of justice in Minnesota.

It summarizes initiatives undertaken in 2018 in support of the [Judicial Branch Strategic Plan](#), and provides annual updates from judicial districts and appellate courts, including case filing statistics.

Much of the Judicial Branch’s work in the past year has focused on ensuring fair and timely access to justice, increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of court operations, and improving outcomes for



those who enter our justice system.

“One of the first promises made in Minnesota’s Constitution is the right for all ‘to obtain justice freely... promptly and without delay’”, said Chief Justice Lorie S.

Gildea. “The judicial officers and staff of the Minnesota Judicial Branch strive every day to make that promise a reality for all while working to enhance the trust and confidence in our state courts.”

In the Report you will find a summary of efforts made in 2018 to ensure fair and timely access to justice, increase the efficiency and effectiveness of court operations, and improve outcomes for those who enter our justicial system.

This includes:



- Growing on the successes of reengineering of our court processes to ensure convenient, consistent, and customer-focused innovations;
- Expanding on nationally-recognized tools offered to support self-represented litigants;
- Increasing the oversight and review of conservator-managed accounts and support services for guardians;
- Updating and making permanent the pilot for cameras in district courtrooms during criminal cases; and
- Increasing electronic tools to make judicial and court administration more efficient.

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Annual Report to the Community  
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The Annual Report provides a few First Judicial District highlights including - First District Domestic Violence Annual Conference, Le Sueur County Treatment Court Visited by Senator Amy Klobuchar, Goodhue County Awarded Federal Grant to Establish Adult Treatment Court, Scott County Plans to Expand Court Facilities,

Dakota County Holds Warrant Resolution Day, and Chief Judge Kathryn Messerich Receives District Judges Association Award.

“There were many achievements made by our employees and judges in 2018. The Minnesota Judicial Branch is committed to our mission to provide

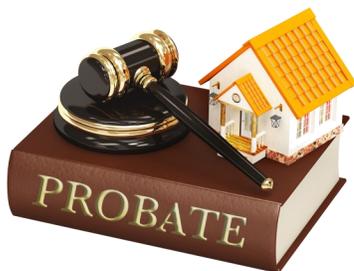
equal access for the timely resolution of cases and controversies,” said Gildea.

You can view the Report in one of two ways: a web-based version of the Report can be found at [www.mncourts.gov/annualreport](http://www.mncourts.gov/annualreport), and a printable PDF version of the Report is available at [www.mncourts.gov/publications](http://www.mncourts.gov/publications).

## New Probate Forms Available on Judicial Branch Website will Simplify Probate Processes

The Minnesota Judicial Branch has published 13 [new probate forms](#) to assist Minnesotans who are entering into informal probate. The forms were developed over the course of a year that drew on expertise from State Court Administration and judicial district staff, and will simplify the probate process by eliminating most locally-derived probate court forms. The new probate forms will create a more consistent and coherent probate process for Minnesotans, no matter what court they visit.

The forms are in plain language and avoid complex legalese, making them a great resource for Minnesotans entering the probate process without a lawyer. The [Probate, Wills, & Estates](#) Help Topic on the



Minnesota Judicial Branch website has been updated to include these new forms and

how the process will be streamlined for court users.

“Probate is one of the most common reasons a Minnesotan enters into the state court system,” said Self-Represented Litigant Program Manager Melissa Kantola. “We know that probate often coincides with the grieving process. We strive to make the court process easy to understand for those who do not have legal representation. These 13 new probate forms will make the informal probate process more consistent and simple for all

Minnesotans.”

Probate is the legal process for distributing the property and resolving debt of a deceased person. The process is typically conducted according to a deceased person’s will, or as prescribed by state law if no will exists. There are two types of probate, Formal and Informal. During an Informal probate process, an informal application can be filed to ask the court to appoint a personal representative, without a hearing in front of a judge, in situations that are less complicated. The Formal probate process involves filing a formal petition to ask the court to appoint a personal representative, with a hearing in front of a judge, in situations that may be more complicated.

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*New Probate Forms*  
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## The 13 new probate forms:

- Instructions – Starting a Case: Informal Probate without a Will
- Application for Informal Appointment of Personal Representative (Without a Will)
- Affidavit of Mailing for Informal Probate (without Will)
- Instructions – Starting a Case: Informal Probate with a Will
- Application for Informal Probate of Will and for Informal Appointment of Personal Representative
- Affidavit of Mailing for Informal Probate (with Will)
- Nomination of Personal Representative and/or Renunciation of Priority for Appointment, and Bond
- Acceptance of Appointment of Personal Representative and Oath by Individual
- Affidavit of Mailing of Notice to the Commissioner of Human Services Regarding Possible Claims
- Notice to Commissioner of Human Services Regarding Possible Claims
- Notice to Spouse and/or Children
- Notice of Intent to File Document After Demand for Notice
- Petition Objecting to Appointment of Personal Representative



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