

## Court Adds Nine Referees to Hear Small Claims Cases

**For immediate release**  
**June 13, 2024**

**Minneapolis, Minn.** – Nine new Conciliation Court referees took the oath of office Tuesday and joined 16 existing referees handling a large volume of small claims cases in Hennepin County District Court.

Conciliation Court referees presided over 7,700 hearings in 2023 and fewer than three percent of cases were appealed to a District Court judge. Conciliation cases involve money and personal property claims of \$15,000 or less (the threshold increases to \$20,000 on July 1) or \$4,000 or less if consumer credit. Common conciliation claims include defective goods or services, home repair claims, damage to property, unpaid security deposits or wages, and unpaid debts. Conciliation case filing fees are significantly lower than standard filing fees and the cases are resolved more quickly than a major civil case. A party may file documents, submit exhibits electronically, and appear at the hearing remotely, resolving the dispute without ever having to come to a courthouse.

“People are entitled to the same level of attention, speed and fairness in court regardless of the size of the case and the dollars at stake,” said Civil Division Presiding Judge Christian Sande. “The 16 Hennepin County Civil Court judges simply could not take on all of the Conciliation Court cases in addition to our current caseload of major civil cases.” Of the 87 counties in Minnesota, Hennepin County heard one quarter of all major civil cases in the state in 2023. Not having Conciliation Court referees would at least double the caseload for each Civil judge. “The bottom line is that we need the people who are willing to serve as Conciliation Court Referees,” Judge Sande said.

Referees are attorneys who take an oath and volunteer their time to hear and resolve Conciliation Court cases. For their services, they earn either a small per diem stipend or parking reimbursement. Some referees have served for decades. Many do so because they feel a sense of civic duty and enjoy an opportunity to serve.

The nine referees being sworn in are:

- |               |                          |                  |
|---------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| -Kevin Curry  | -Erika Donner            | -Matthew Kezhaya |
| -Mark Labine  | -Cary Miller-Dolan       | -Sonja Nyberg    |
| -Curtis Smith | -Heather Taylor DuCharme | -Andy Tweeten    |

The nine new referees join the following Conciliation Court referees:

-Steven Antolak	-Walter Bauch	-Jeff Brown	-Alex Brusilovsky
-Kim Chapman	-Christine DeMoss	-Robert Fine	-Walter Hodynsky
-Joel Lavintman	-Ellen Longfellow	-Barb Nevin	-Darren Schwiebert
-Perry Smith	-Eric Steeves	-Anthony Thompson	-Gerald Yost

*About Minnesota's Fourth Judicial District*

The Fourth Judicial District consists solely of Hennepin County. Seventy-five full-time judicial officers serve the district, which is the largest of Minnesota's 10 judicial districts. For more information, visit the Web site at [www.mncourts.gov/district/4/](http://www.mncourts.gov/district/4/).

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