The Three Branches of Minnesota State Government

Legislative Branch: The Lawmakers

Bicameral Legislature: Minnesota House of Representatives and Minnesota Senate.

House of Representatives and Senate

Members:
134 representatives, one from each House district; 67 senators, one from each Senate district (there are two House districts within each Senate district)

Terms: two years for House members; four years for senators (in years ending in “0,” senators are elected to a two-year term)

Requirements:
• qualified to vote in Minnesota
• at least 21 years old
• Minnesota resident — one year
• district resident — six months before election

Responsibilities:
Legislative
• introduce and study ideas (bills) for laws (all revenue-raising bills begin in the House)
• serve on standing committees
• pass state laws (all bills must pass both the House and the Senate)
• pass the state’s biennial (two-year) budget
• can override governor’s veto (requires two-thirds vote in both House and Senate)

Judicial
• judge election qualification of members
• can expel members
• House can impeach members of the executive and judicial branches
• Senate can convict and remove members of the executive and judicial branches after House impeachment

Other
• respond to the needs and concerns of constituents
• elect regents to the University of Minnesota
• Senate confirms governor’s agency head appointments

Organization:
Each body
• begins regular session every odd-numbered year in January and meets beginning usually in February each even-numbered year
• may meet for up to 120 legislative days during the biennium, but not after the first Monday following the third Saturday in May
• organizes on the basis of majority and minority caucuses
• elects a member as presiding officer (speaker of the House; president of the Senate)

Executive Branch: The Administrators

Five Constitutional Officers: Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, State Auditor, Attorney General.

Governor
Term: four years

Requirements:
• qualified to vote in Minnesota
• at least 25 years old
• Minnesota resident — one year

Responsibilities:
Executive
• administer laws and affairs of the state
• appoint heads of departments and agencies
• act as commander-in-chief of state military forces

Judicial
• appoint judges to fill vacancies in district, appellate and supreme courts
• can issue pardons and reprieves, restore civil rights to felons

Speaker of the House; Chair of Senate Rules and Administration Committee
• designates number, function, chairs and members of committees
• designates number of committee members the minority appoints

Standing committees
• study and research bills
• hear public testimony on bills
• make recommendations to the full House and the full Senate

Conference committees
• resolve differences when the House and Senate pass different versions of a bill
• consist of three or five members of each body
**Lieutenant Governor**

**Term:** four years (voters elect as team with governor)

**Requirements:**
- qualified to vote in Minnesota
- at least 25 years old
- Minnesota resident — one year

**Responsibilities:**
- represent governor
- assume governor’s responsibilities in governor’s absence or if a vacancy occurs
- assume duties governor assigns

**Secretary of State**

**Term:** four years

**Requirements:**
- qualified to vote in Minnesota
- at least 21 years old

**Responsibilities:**
- act as chief election official
- certify official documents, governor’s executive orders, laws the Legislature passes
- regulate Minnesota businesses
- act as custodian of official records

**State Auditor**

**Term:** four years

**Requirements:**
- qualified to vote in Minnesota
- at least 21 years old

**Responsibilities:**
- collect, check and standardize financial information from local units of government
- investigate audit reports

**Attorney General**

**Term:** four years

**Requirements:**
- licensed to practice law in Minnesota
- qualified to vote in Minnesota
- at least 21 years old

**Responsibilities:**
- provide legal services to state government
- represent the state in court cases
- enforce laws concerning charitable organizations
- protect public rights

**State Departments and Agencies**

**Departments**
- 24 executive departments
- governor appoints the head (commissioner) of each department

**Agencies**
- independent, separate from departments
- governor appoints portions of membership
- example: Minnesota Zoological Garden

**Semi-State Agencies**
- separate from departments and agencies
- not under direct appointive control of the governor

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**Judicial Branch: The Judges**

*Three Levels of Courts: Supreme Court, Court of Appeals, District Court.*

**Supreme Court**

**Members:**
One chief justice and six associate justices (total seven judges)

**Term:** six years

**Requirements:**
- licensed to practice law in Minnesota
- qualified to vote in Minnesota
- at least 21 years old

**Responsibilities:**
- hear appeals on decisions from the Court of Appeals, Workers’ Compensation Court of Appeals, Tax Court and persons convicted of first-degree murder
- hear constitutionality cases
- interpret the law and constitution
- regulate all courts in the state
- recommend improvements of the judicial system
- oversee law practice and judicial planning

**District Court**

**Members:**
Ten judicial districts, each with several judges (293 judges total across the state)

**Term:** six years

**Requirements:**
- licensed to practice law in Minnesota
- qualified to vote in Minnesota
- at least 21 years old

**Responsibilities:**
- hear only civil claims of damages up to $15,000 (except for disputes over consumer credit transactions, which must be less than $4,000 to be heard in conciliation court)

**Conciliation Court**

**Members:**
One conciliation court in each county — District Court judges serve as conciliation court judges except in Hennepin and Ramsey counties where assigned attorneys serve as referees

**Responsibilities:**
- hear appeals on decisions from lower courts
- hear appeals from administrative agencies
- hear appeals from commissioner of Employment and Economic Development

**District Court**

**Members:**
Each judicial district has a District Court member

**Term:** six years

**Requirements:**
- licensed to practice law in Minnesota
- qualified to vote in Minnesota
- at least 21 years old

**Responsibilities:**
- hear criminal cases
- hear public policy issues, civil cases
- hear juvenile, family, probate and traffic cases

**Conciliation Court**

**Members:**
One conciliation court in each county — District Court judges serve as conciliation court judges except in Hennepin and Ramsey counties where assigned attorneys serve as referees

**Responsibilities:**
- hear only civil claims of damages up to $15,000 (except for disputes over consumer credit transactions, which must be less than $4,000 to be heard in conciliation court)

**Judicial Boards and Advisory Committees**

- Supreme Court and/or governor appoints members
- advise courts
- consists of lawyers, administrators, legislators, judges, lay members

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