# Minnesota Tax Court

# FY 2020-21 Biennial Budget Change Item

## Change Item Title: E-filing and Remote Online Access Helpline Employee

| **Fiscal Impact ($000s)** | **FY 2020** | **FY 2021** | **FY 2022** | **FY 2023** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| General Fund |  |  |  |  |
| Expenditures | 125 | 126 | 126 | 126 |
| Revenues | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other Funds |  |  |  |  |
| Expenditures | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Revenues | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Net Fiscal Impact =(Expenditures – Revenues) | 125 | 126 | 126 | 126 |
| **FTEs** | **1** | **1** | **1** | **1** |

## Recommendation:

The Governor recommends $125,000 in FY 2020, and $126,000 annually thereafter, for a new staff person to manage the Tax Court’s new e-filing system. The Tax Court has received funding since FY 2016 for the IT costs of a new case management system. Effective July 1, 2019, a component of that system will, for the first time, allow parties to file court documents electronically and provide parties and the public remote, online access to documents. The Court seeks to create a staff position to oversee these new features and provide dedicated assistance to those using the system. This recommendation represents a 7.5% increase to the Tax Court’s base budget, which totals $3.364 million in FY 2020-21.

## Rationale/Background:

In this technological age, taxpayers increasingly expect to file documents electronically, rather than incur the effort and expense of filing paper documents by U.S. Mail. In addition, taxpayers expect to receive documents electronically (rather than paper copies) and to electronically access documents filed in their court cases.

In July 2017, the Tax Court began using C-Track, an electronic case-management system supplied by Thomson Reuters, which has the capacity to accept electronic filings and to make court documents remotely viewable by the public. MN.IT and Thompson Reuters estimate that the Tax Court can implement e-filing and public access during fiscal year 2020.

Courts with e-filing must maintain competently staffed helplines to assist customers in e-filing and accessing documents. Users commonly need help with setting up accounts; creating and updating usernames and passwords; and accessing and navigating the system. Those attempting to file documents electronically also commonly need help with properly naming documents to be filed; selecting the correct descriptors; and using acceptable document types and file sizes. In addition, courts with remote access to court documents also face questions from users and the general public concerning how to view documents, as well as which documents are viewable and why others are not.

Other courts that have implemented e-filing frequently underestimated the amount of time court staff spend assisting users with e-filing. In addition, before electronic documents can be added to C-Track, they must be reviewed to ensure that they are in proper format, will be filed in the correct case, and have had any confidential information (such as social security numbers and financial account identifiers) redacted. Given the workload of the court’s existing staff (which will continue even after e-filing is implemented), the court lacks the workflow capacity to fulfill these needs. Nor can the court shift work among existing staff to free-up the equivalent of one full-time position.

## Proposal:

The court requests funds of $125,000 in fiscal year 2020 ($126,000 in fiscal year 2021) for the addition of one full-time employee to assist taxpayers with e-filing and citizens with public access. The request is for salary and benefits only; the Court will absorb additional expenses (e.g., for office space and necessary training). The court will fund other costs associated with implementation of e-filing and public access (such as the creation of training materials) from its base appropriation.

## Equity and Inclusion:

The implementation of e-filing will make filing and serving documents easier and less expensive for all taxpayers and other Tax Court customers by eliminating the need to copy paper documents and to mail them to the court and the opposing party. It will especially benefit persons with disabilities, however, who will be able to send documents to, and receive documents from, the court and other parties without leaving their homes, and to receive individualized assistance in e-filing, also without leaving their homes. The addition of electronic access to tax court records will also particularly benefit those with disabilities and those who reside outside the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

## Results:

Using C-Track analytic tools, the Court will be able to track the number of documents that are e-filed annually once e-filing is implemented. In addition, the Court will track the number of e-filer inquiries concerning various filing tasks, with the goal of clarifying its e-filing procedures to reduce such inquiries. Finally, the Court will track citizens’ use of public access.

## Statutory Change(s):

Electronic filing of documents in the Tax Court is authorized by Minn. Stat. § 271.08, subd. 6(b). No statutory change is needed to implement e-filing or remote public access to court documents.