



The Minnesota District Judges Association (MDJA) membership includes dues-paying voting members of virtually all active district courts judges in the State of Minnesota, plus the majority Court of Appeals judges and Supreme Court Justices, as well as retired senior judges. MDJA's legislative focus centers on the state's biennial budget and inclusion of appropriate judicial pay increases, sufficient authorization and funding for needed judgeships, and judicial election and pension issues.

### MDJA's 2021 Legislative Session Priorities

**1) Pandemic Case Overload Relief - Backlog Management: to assist Minnesotans secure access to justice and timely resolution of their cases and preserve and maintain judicial health and wellness through necessary attention to pandemic related workload needs.**

- Electronic hearings are more complicated and often take longer to conduct than in-person hearings. Sitting trial court judges cannot reduce the mounting backlog of cases without additional resources;
- In the last half of 2020, the MN Judicial Branch's estimate of judge hours needed to address the Pandemic case backlog increased from about 30,000 judge hours to about 40,570 judge hours<sup>1</sup>; and
- The Judicial Branch's Hiring Freeze implemented in April 2020 complicates the ability to get work done when trial court judges lose confidential staff and is causing hardships in districts. As stress and workload increase, the likelihood of early retirement of colleagues paired with delay in filling judicial seats and intensive process of training of new judges will compound stresses on sitting district court judges.

**2) Maintain Pension Stability: to ensure pension contributions are available in retirement during economically challenging times and to preserve judicial pension health through measured benefit reductions.**

- Support MSRS to pursue pension stability changes to bring pension more in-line with other State pension funds and make progress against current fund deficiency, including reducing COLA increases from 1.75% to 1.5% and eliminating COLA increases previously set when pension fund reaches 70% and 90% funded;
- There may be increased number of early retirements from increased stress of isolation and increased workloads. Early retirements will stress funding levels for the Judges Pension Fund; and
- Support for the annual \$6 million contribution to the retirement fund in the base budget.

**3) Judicial Compensation and Judicial Retention: to prioritize and support retention of judicial officers to ensure the judiciary continues to function effectively and efficiently.**

- University of St. Kate's Economist's 2020 Report indicates that judicial salaries have increased little since 2002 when adjusted for inflation and that judicial compensation in Minnesota continues to be lower than about half of the States (2019 ranking of 26; 2017 ranking of 24);
- The Economist's 2020 Report recommends a 5.05% pay increase for judges in each year of the coming biennium in order to keep pace with inflation and allow for a 3% real pay increase; and
- Support the current 3% raise in the second year of the biennium requested by the Judicial Council.

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<sup>1</sup> In June 2020, the MN Judicial Branch estimated approximately 100 work hours for each of the 295 district judges in the state. In January 2021, the MN Judicial Branch estimated approximately 137 work hours for each of the 295 district judges in the state.